

Ingo Ilja Michels | Heino Stöver [Eds.]

Drug Treatment, Culture and Social Policy in Central Asia and China



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Introduction: National drug discourses

Ingo Ilja Michels and Heino Stöver

Central Asia (CA) and China are key regions for the international activities tackling illicit drug trafficking and related problems, such as dependence – specifically the problems with illegal opioids, infectious diseases, and increasingly, also synthetic cannabinoids and stimulants (especially methamphetamines in China). The drug phenomena challenge the authorities of state institutions, the social cohesion of the society, the public health and the security of public life. The fact that the "Northern Route" with trafficking heroin, morphine and opium towards Russia and Europe crosses CA has made that region not only vulnerable to drug trafficking, but – increasingly – also to local drug consumption. Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) are experiencing drug related problems, such as a high prevalence of drug dependence and the threat of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis among injecting drug users (with a high prevalence of 4–20 % respectively 60–80 %). The same is true for China. Although both in Central Asia as well as in China the prevalence of consumption of those substances has decreased in the last years, not at least due to effective measures of prevention, treatment and harm reduction. All countries in Central Asia and China are supporting the common view of the UN bodies (UN Drug Convention 1961, Art. 38 and Political Declaration 2009) to implement all practicable measures for “prevention, early identification; treatment, education, after-care and rehabilitation and social reintegration” of drug dependent people. According to the “UNGASS Political Declaration from 1998” all Member States are firmly bound to “respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms, dignity of individuals and equality” and agreed on the general principles of drug policy, such as an “integrated, multidisciplinary, mutually reinforcing and balanced approach; a common and shared responsibility and increased international cooperation”.

Modern and effective approaches to treat drug use disorders, according to the UN/WHO International Treatment Standards, exist in all countries but lack institutionalisation and require further scaling-up and harmonisation. NGOs, an important part of efficient and sustainable drug policies, are weak in all countries and lack the basis of work.

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However, drug dependence is still seen more as a problem of "social deviance" in both Central Asia and the China than as a treatable disease; repressive drug laws, registration systems mean that many of those affected face long prison sentences and that the police and judiciary are not cooperating adequately with health services. This promotes the social exclusion of those affected.

Of increasing importance is the support of the *education of social work* in the Central Asian countries and in China, which in Europe and especially in Germany plays a central role in the prevention and treatment of drug dependence and its health and social consequences. But social work as a means of reducing these problems is still in its infancy in both Central Asia and China, although the positive role of social work is now increasingly recognized on a socio-political level.

The program of the EU "Central Asian Drug Action Program" (CADAP) is about "the establishment of functional and effective treatment and harm reduction programs based on EU and international standards (which) are essential to provide the best and cutting-edge health responses, programs and models to CA countries' populations. This output will focus on strengthening demand reduction models on the basis of best EU and international practices for harm reduction, rehabilitation and social reintegration, and therapeutic communities." (Annual Action Document 2019 for the program in favour of the Central Asia region; July 2019). The Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences had been responsible for the implementation of the focus "Treatment" in the 5th and 6th phase of the program and has decades of expertise in the training of social work in Faculty 4 "Social Work and Health" (Bachelor, also a course "Social Work: transnational" and the Master's course "Addiction Therapy and Social Management in Addiction Help") and in practical research, in particular through numerous research projects of the project manager Prof. Dr. Heino Stöver and the research stay of Dr. Ingo Ilja Michels from 2006 and 2008 in the People's Republic of China to accompany and support the development of an opiate substitution program including social work (especially with a model character in Shanghai).

The *Exceed Program* of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to support Excellence Centres for Exchange and Development was first launched in 2009 with the aim of bringing together the involvement of German higher education institutions and their partners in developing countries and raising its public profile. The initiative also aims to institutionalize research and teaching cooperation between higher education institutions in Germany and in countries of the Global South more accessible to development cooperation.

The program “Social work and strengthening NGOs in development cooperation to treat drug addiction“ (SOLID) of the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences is a jointly developed research program on the influence of social work on the prevention and treatment of drug addiction with the main focus on role of NGOs. The program was developed in cooperation with universities that teach social work/social medicine in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and the People's Republic of China. Central Asia/China is confronted with a growing drug problem. Social work with drug dependents is not offered either in university training or in practice. The well-being of those affected also depends on the psychosocial support offered and the reduction of stigmatization and marginalization, so that social work measures in particular represent an important component in dealing with this. The research project builds on previous research projects of the Institute for Addiction Research (see also CADAP and InBeAIDS; see: Stöver, Michels 2022), which have already produced successful cooperation and important results in cooperation with the participating countries in Central Asia. The research project aims at a professional exchange between German and the Central Asian/Chinese partner universities, and is based on SDG goals (Sustainable Development Goals) in the context of improved development cooperation – in particular Goal 3 Health and well-being ("Health is a goal, a prerequisite and result of sustainable development") and 4 high-quality education ("In post-Soviet Central Asia, as well as in China, high-quality (training) education is an important socio-political concern. However, there are too few specific training opportunities in the field of prevention and treatment of addictions ") and strives to strengthen university cooperation in and between these countries. The participating universities/research institutions will sharpen their professional profile in teaching and research in line with the 2030 Agenda. In the long term, graduates will be qualified to take on positions of responsibility through their studies in practice-oriented and state-of-the-art courses in "Social Work" (or related terms, for example in the health sector).

The Research program is focussed on the following assumptions:

Classical definition of social work in drug treatment work, such as supporting patients and building bridges to families, relatives, employment etc. in order to stabilize patients vs. more critical perspectives on recovery and drug treatment. How is classical social work in addiction treatment reflected in Western and Eastern treatment models? What is the history of drug treatment from medicalization to psycho-social support to harm reduction and individual choice? What are critical perspectives on a neoliberal agenda and its implication in harm reduction, international drug con-

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trol apparatus, the UN and global drug policy? Regarding the organization of detox – how does global drug policy affect the implementation of day-to-day social work practice in each country? What are the consequences of zero-abstinence policies on immediate intervention – detox, and following care i.e. psycho-social support? How are different kinds of drugs addressed in different treatment schemes? What is the purpose of detox in each country? Where are the overlaps and differences in both philosophy of treatment and the implementation? What is the social construction of dependence in the different countries, within cultural contexts, and the perception of the nature of the disease? Where does care come from? Who can help people who are seeking treatment? How do local implementation strategies reflect the global order of drug control as well as local contexts? (Lasco 2022)

The expected results of the research cooperation will contribute to the establishment and expansion of regional networks. At the same time, the expertise within the framework of university responses to the problem of drug addiction/therapy is intended to strengthen the health discussion in these states, including politics and civil society (especially NGOs).

In this edition we present first thoughts on the development of the treatment of drug addicts and the role of social work in it are presented by the scientists of the partner universities, who fill a postdoc position in the SOLID project.

Lasco, Gideon (2022): Decolonizing harm reduction. In: Harm Reduction Journal 19, H. 8

Stöver, H./ Michels, I.I: Development of social work in prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and HCV in Central Asia. In: Drugs, Habits and Social Policy (in press)

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