# Harm Reduction strategy in Addiction treatment Concepts and Practice

A review

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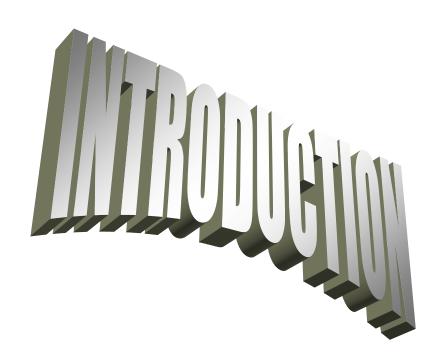
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All over the world as well as in Egypt, alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse place an enormous burden on the health care systems. The problem of addiction represents a contemporary worldwide challenging problem. With different etiology and motives all countries do suffer from the problem regardless of their state of development. (*El-Rakhawy et al.*, 1996)

Among treatment strategies in addiction, harm reduction has emergenced in the last two decades. A primary catalyst for this surge of interest in harm reduction has been the emergence of AIDS, hepatitis C, hepatitis B and drug resistant tuberculosis linked to drug use through sharing of injection equipment. Many countries now take the perspective that the dangers of the spread of AIDS among drug users and from drug users into the general population pose a greater threat to health than the dangers of drug use itself. (*Garfein et al.*, 1996)

Harm Reduction is a very broad term. Virtually all drug policies and programs including criminalization of users and abstinence oriented programs have a goal of harm reduction but harm reduction as a specific strategy has a clear definition: "Harm Reduction can be illustrated as an attempt to reduce the adverse health, social, and economic

consequences of drug use without necessarily reducing the drug use." (*Ryder, et al., 2001*)

Also it can be defined as: "A set of practical strategies that reduce the negative consequences of drug use incorporating a spectrum of strategies from safer use, to managed use to abstinence. Harm reduction strategies meet drug users "where they are at," addressing conditions of use along with the use itself". (**Single** *et al.*, *1996*)

There are many examples of harm reduction programs and strategies which include syringe exchange and availability, methadone programs, drug education, sex education, outreach programs, law enforcement policies, and establishment of tolerance areas and even prescribing of drugs. These strategies place first priority on reducing the negative consequences of drug use for the individual, the community and society.

Though harm reduction focuses on reducing the adverse consequences among persons who cannot be expected to cease their use of drugs at the present time, but it can be compatible with an eventual goal of abstention. (Single et al., 1996) (Zickler, 2002)

This approach has been the focus of both heightened interest and considerable controversy over recent years. While more conventional approaches increasingly have appeared ineffective, expensive and counterproductive over the last decade, harm reduction has become a subject of growing discussion and debate within the addictions community and, increasingly, by the media and the general public (*Nadelmann*, 1989)( *Relely*, 1996).



This study aims to present in a critical appraisal the literature concerning harm reduction in addiction treatment

This literature will be discussed in an attempt to make:

- 1- Definition of harm reduction concept.
- 2- Applications of harm reduction in different societies.
- 3- Strategies of harm reduction.
- 4- Comparing results of harm reduction with other programs in treatment of addiction.
  - 5- Debate around the issue.
- 6- Application of harm reduction strategies in Egypt regarding religious and cultural conflicts.



Total drug abstinence is not possible, it is even doubtful that it is desirable. Any national policy which has as its goal the abolition of drug use is doomed to failure even before it has begun ... If drug abstinence is not an option, then the national task is to determine the conditions under which drugs are used, and to devise realistic policies relating to their supply, to the extent of the demand for them, and towards reducing their adverse effects. (Brown et al. 1996)