

Addictions of many different kinds afflict individuals, their companions and families. The Family Working Group prepared a questionnaire and sent it to all member organizations concerning this grave problem. We received wonderful thoughtful responses full of statistics and testimony back from member organizations in:

Argentina  
Australia  
Cameroon  
Canada  
Congo  
France  
Gabon  
Ghana  
The Ivory Coast  
Japan  
Malta  
South Africa  
Spain  
The United Kingdom  
The United States of America  
Zambia

The medical and scientific literature, as well as popular news medias sources, indicate that addictions of all sorts are not limited by national boundaries and their impact on the family life and structure is profound and lasting.

The addictions that were specifically noted in the questionnaire are the following:

Illegal drugs  
Prescription drugs (such as painkillers)  
Alcohol  
Gambling  
Pornography  
Smoking  
Food-based addictions leading to eating disorders or obesity  
Technology

The members of the Family Working Group are so very grateful to all who responded for their careful research and candid answers to our questions. Thank you so much. Following is a summary of the large amount of material and comments provided.

Responses Received:

Question 1: Which of the addictions listed are problems in your country

	ADDICTION							
COUNTRY	Illegal Drugs	Prescription Drugs	Alcohol	Gambling	Pornography	Smoking	Food	Tech.
Argentina	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Australia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cameroon	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Canada	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Congo	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
France	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Gabon	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Ghana	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ivory Coast	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Japan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Malta	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Philippines	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
South Africa	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Spain	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Tanzania	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
UK	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
USA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Zambia	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

Question 2: Are they officially acknowledged as problems in your country?

	ADDICTION							
COUNTRY	Illegal Drugs	Prescription Drugs	Alcohol	Gambling	Pornography	Smoking	Food	Tech.
Argentina	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Australia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cameroon	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Canada	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Congo	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO
France	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YEW
Gabon	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ghana	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ivory Coast	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Japan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Malta	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Philippines	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
South Africa	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Spain	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Tanzania	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
UK	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
USA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Zambia	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

Question 3: What effect does each of the addictions have on the family in your country? The following are quotes from responses received:

#### DRUGS:

- Children who get in trouble with the law
- Illegal drugs a problem starting in very young years (12 years old or so)
- Inability to follow studies or get a job
- Adults who get in trouble with the law
- Nearly 50% of students surveyed admitted they were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug while at school
- Children of addicts are 9 times more likely to develop an addiction
- Many countries reported that illegal drug use was recognized mainly among the youth
- Children used for income
  
- Hugely profitable industry conducted by organized crime, use of brutal gangs
- Homeless are 11 times more likely to die of drug overdose and suicide
- Female addicts are 54% more likely to die prematurely due to drug use
- Drug-related crime is increasing dramatically leading to incarceration
  
- Prescription drug abuse, particularly for painkillers, has led to many ramifications: Turning to illegal cheaper drugs when no longer able to obtain a prescription, theft.
- Prescriptions for opioids have increased 850% in the last 10 years
- National opioid crisis of overdoses and deaths
  
- Family values undermined such as respect, leading to insecurity in the country
- User lies, cheats, steals
- Debt accumulation
- Families are deprived of needed income
- Physical abuse of family members can result as the addict loses control
- Gender-based violence and divorce
- Incarceration leads to loss of income, perpetuating the poverty cycle
- Addict becomes unemployable, as his/her entire waking life is occupied in trying to get sufficient cash for the next "fix."
- There are multiple health and mortality issues associated with drug use.
- Drugs, gambling and alcohol in general are probably the addictions requiring the most money to maintain.

#### ALCOHOL:

- Addiction to alcohol has risen to alarming figures in recent years
- Young (11 years old) children consume alcohol uncontrollably
- Alcohol addiction leads to family breakups, violence, and diseases
- While legal over certain ages, high percentages of persons cannot control their consumption of alcohol
- Often hidden in the family (women at home drink during the day while everyone else is away at work or school)
- Alcohol addiction can lead to social isolation and exclusion from family events
- Occasions where alcohol is served are common, especially for celebrations so this makes it difficult for families of alcoholics

### GAMBLING:

- Used to be between adults but increasingly seen in younger people
  - Compulsive gambling compromises the economic and emotional stability of the person and the family
  - Can lead to depression, suicide, bankruptcy, family breakup, domestic abuse, assault, fraud, and even homelessness.
  - Very hard to detect usually until finances of the family are very precarious due to the facility of the gambler to lie and hide their problem.
  - Can lead to illegal fraud and incarceration
  - Newly available on-line gambling has led to compulsive gamblers losing everything quickly.
- Governments are trying to place limits on maximum stake that can be gambled at any one time.

### PORNOGRAPHY:

- The most often confessed sin
- So much more widely available due to the Internet
- Young people exposed to pornography innocently
- Leads to fantasies that the average marriage cannot possibly sustain or tolerate which causes the breakup of the marriage
- Very low income and vulnerable fall into the net of the criminals who produce pornography, thus linking it to human trafficking
- A hidden addiction that affects work, family, and social interaction
- Can lead to deviant and often violent behavior
- Exposure can lead to loss of employment, fines, shame for the family

### SMOKING:

Along with drugs, alcohol, and gambling, this was seen as one of the most prevalent addictions in every country's response. One country decided to answer the entire questionnaire speaking only of smoking as a problem addiction.

- There is concentrated education about the health risks associated with smoking in the schools
- Children are very critical of parents who smoke
- There are increasing numbers of non-smoking areas in public spaces
- Mortality of indigenous peoples from smoking is generally higher than the rest of the population
- Impoverishment of some families results because cigarettes take a good part of the family budget
- The state must spend a lot of money on the management of diseases of smokers
- The impact of smoking on the entire family's health and finances is severe
- There is increased mortality from lung and heart diseases among smokers than the general population
- There is a continual but slow downward trend of cigarette smoking in developed countries
- The new problem of "vaping" of electronic cigarettes is growing among the young who do not realize that nicotine is added to the candy flavors, getting them "hooked" on smoking. This was after teen smoking had been cut in half.
- The deleterious health effects to the whole family subjected to second hand smoke have been well documented in addition to the very poor example it sets for children

### FOOD ADDICTIONS:

These can range from eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia to overeating.

- Young people fall victim to eating disorders as they strive to attain the "perfect" figure promoted by the media
- Both boys and girls abuse their bodies with bad eating habits that yield serious dangers to their health
- It is hard for the young to find the balance between cute and healthy

- In most developed countries, more than 50% of the population is obese or overweight
- Whether overweight or suffering from eating disorders, severe health problems can result that can impact the family through bad example, disease, or even death.
- Disordered body images, promoted by the media, touch both women and men.
- Many girls as young as 5 years old are aware of dieting
- Anorexia nervosa has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric illness
- There has been a dramatic increase in individuals suffering from eating disorders
- Individuals with eating disorders may often be at increased risk when faced with family events such as death, divorce or a family history of alcoholism, major depression, sexual or physical abuse
- Families of individuals with eating disorders live under great stress often blaming themselves, feel anxious about their loved one, experience worry and tension about the stigma associated with negative social attitudes towards eating disorders.
- Overeating is not seen as a problem in our country as it is desirable to be heavy

#### TECHNOLOGY ADDICTIONS:

- Competition for owning the latest cell phone models has led to a slavery that has plunged us into an incommunicado detention
- There are children who play with and are fascinated by cell phones long before they even walk. This shows in that there is a higher demand for eyeglasses in the first years of life.
- Addiction to the Internet has led to a rise in pornography, human trafficking, and gambling
- Addiction to cell phones, video games, and virtual reality has led to increased isolation of persons and an inability of many to communicate and interact properly in interpersonal relationships
- More than 60% of Internet use in the workplace is of a personal nature leading to a decrease in worker productivity and to an abuse of the worktime.
- Friction in the family can result from expenditure of money on having the latest gadgets. It impacts social interaction in the family
- Online bullying is an increasing problem for young people. Children as young as 10 are suffering depression due to this and suicide rates among young people and schoolchildren are rising

#### GENERAL COMMENTS:

- Addiction creates a different person from what the family was used to
- Neglect of family responsibilities results
- In developing countries, addictions are as prevalent as in developed countries but the impact on the poverty of the area and the family can perhaps be more quickly devastating
- Many addictions lead to lying to the family, dissolution of the family, loss of income, and homelessness.
- Smoking and food addictions lead to increased mortality at a younger age. Technology addiction is adversely affecting social interaction skills within and outside the family.
- Most addictions are not openly seen outside the family and are the cause of major family breakdowns including poverty issues and social withdrawal. A family member with an addiction leaves the family totally weakened economically and leads to a loss in raising children properly leading to juvenile delinquency.
- Addictions put the family into terrible situations because money is being squandered or rehab must be paid for. Stress breaks the family up.
- Untold misery to the user and to concerned significant others: spouses, children, dependents, and siblings.
- Compromised social functioning skills
- The addict has to recognize the problem and want to change. The family must be part of the support system in therapy.

- Too many parents look the other way and do not believe their child could be addicted or are too self-absorbed to recognize that their child is addicted.
- Trust and honesty in the marriage relationship disappear
- Families get caught up in the frightening, complex disorder of their loved one. They do not understand how to help. Many disagree on how to handle the problem which leads to the breakup of the marriage.
- More education is needed on the dangers of the effects of the addictions. More stringent parental control is needed over the young.
- More rehabilitation centers are needed for the addicted and more counseling for the families.

Question 4: Is there help available to persons who suffer from addictions in your country?

	ADDICTION							
COUNTRY	Illegal Drugs	Prescription Drugs	Alcohol	Gambling	Pornography	Smoking	Food	Tech.
Argentina	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Australia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cameroon	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Canada	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Congo	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
France	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Gabon	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ghana	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ivory Coast	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Japan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Malta	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Philippines	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
South Africa	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Spain	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Tanzania	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
UK	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
USA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Zambia	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

Quotes from responses to question 4:

- There are detoxification centers that help the young released from jail to return to society
- Counseling, rehabilitation and social reintegration services are available through public and private partnerships
- There is legal aid, rehabilitation services, detoxification centers, Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, Smoking cessation aids, counseling for drug abuse, for pornography addiction, medical intervention for food addictions, and a growing campaign of awareness of the bad effects of burgeoning technology use to the family. Help is available, but it varies in its expense and accessibility (location).
- Yes, but it is very expensive
- Not through the government but some NGO's and the Church offer groups for certain addictions
- Some addictions are kept within the family due to stigma or the fact that they are not readily apparent
- The addicted person must want help and seek that help

Question 5: Is there help available to families of persons who are addicted?

	ADDICTION							
COUNTRY	Illegal Drugs	Prescription Drugs	Alcohol	Gambling	Pornography	Smoking	Food	Tech.
Argentina	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Australia	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Cameroon	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO
Canada	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Congo	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
France	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Gabon	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ghana	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Ivory Coast	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Japan	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Malta	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Philippines	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
South Africa	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES
Spain	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Tanzania	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
UK	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
USA	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Zambia	YES	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO

SUMMARY:

Some addictions have been well-known throughout the world for many years while others are just beginning to be recognized as problems either because of changing social norms or because they have been introduced relatively recently into use.

The problem of illegal drug use is an ancient one, at times having been encouraged by some nations for economic or dominance benefit. In our time, the effect of illegal drug use has left scars on individuals, families, societies, and nations. The control of illegal drugs by organized crime syndicates has bred fear and violence in some countries leading to desperate emigration, breakup of families, economic hardship, and for the users, destruction of their lives through loss of relationships, jobs, abuse of family members, and such use, if not contained, leads ultimately to death. We have not even mentioned the loss of a relationship with God.

Information from the responses received indicate that illegal drug use is dealt with in different ways in different countries. While legally sanctioned in some, which they feel leads to more control, in many others, such drugs are banned and their use is illegal leading to eventual jail time for repeat users. Those who distribute illegal drugs are considered to be dealers of death and receive stiff sentences, when they are apprehended. The leaders of the cartels that provide the drugs are considered international enemies to be treated as such. But what of the individual who, for whatever unfortunate reason, has turned to drug use? It could be simply to try it due to peer pressure leading in some cases to immediate death or disability and in still more, to addiction. The attraction for repeat users we can presume to be provision of escape from harsh realities of life. One rescued victim of human trafficking noted that you would turn to drugs, too, if you were forced to have sex with 20 or more different

strangers a night. Families fall apart. Parents argue over whether understanding or tough love is needed to deal with addiction in a child. An addicted parent loses touch with reality, ceases to be able to function properly at home or at work and eventually, loses both income and family. Addiction leads to criminal behavior, such as theft, armed robbery, or membership in lawless gangs. The good news is that rehabilitation facilities, private and government-funded, are available in many countries. The success rate, however, is not 100% and failure is nearly guaranteed if the patient falls back into the same environment and peers from where he first became addicted. Intensive counseling is needed for the whole family if success is to be realized. It is an age-old problem but one that has increased in severity and in breadth throughout our world. Our prayer and advocacy efforts are needed to ensure the stability of families that face this terrible test.

A fairly new phenomenon in addiction is that of persons, primarily in developed countries, becoming addicted to pain killers following an operation or some other medically related therapy. It has been shown in some developed countries that doctors have been prescribing as protocol, a large number of prescription narcotics, even in cases where patients may not need a pain killer. Many persons have very quickly become addicted to these opioids and when their prescriptions run out, try going to different doctors to obtain prescriptions for more. In other cases, patients have turned to cheaper narcotics available as illegal street drugs, heroin being the one that is chiefly used. This is occurring at all ages but alarmingly, in the young. In one Midwestern farming state in the US, 16% of high school students admitted to using opioids without a prescription. All the negative attributes listed above of illegal drug use and its effects on the family apply to these addicts who became hooked on legally prescribed narcotics.

The statements following Question 3 concerning the effects of addictions to alcohol and gambling on the family are as heartbreaking as those resulting from addiction to illegal and prescription drugs. Lies, broken trust, altered behavior, an inability to maintain a job, schooling, or normal family life too often result in the dissolution of the family. Dreams of a happy normal family life are shattered, hearts broken, and the family unit dissolved. Children are left bewildered and with poor example from one parent that might not be understood until older and perhaps take even longer to forgive. The chemical alterations in the brain that make it so hard to kick these addictions are better understood now but there is scattered opportunity to seek treatment, when the addicted individual sincerely wishes to do so.

Smoking and eating disorders also adversely affect the family unit. The expense of smoking materials such as cigarettes or electronic cigarettes can be a significant portion of the family budget. The cost of treatment for smoking cessation or for eating disorders can be quite high. The effect of second-hand smoke has been shown to be nearly as serious for family members' health as it is to the smoker. Discord in the family over the cost and health effect of smoking as well as the health effects from eating disorders and obesity result in anxiety, tension, confusion and disagreement over how to approach the issue, and can lead to breakup of the family.

The new and growing issue of addiction to technology is resulting in a population that is losing the knowledge of direct face to face interaction with others. The attendant respect and manners that were common when one meets another are disappearing. Tech shorthand is replacing the written word and the elegance of conversation and correspondence are becoming things of the past. The preference to play a game on line with perfect strangers rather than engage with family and friends is most alarming. Several respondents made the statement that parents need to take things in hand and not allow this distancing from polite social interaction to occur.

Though we looked at several different addictions, there are common threads in their effects on the family:

- A change in the personality of the individual addicted as they focus on their addiction, disregarding pleas from the family to stop and/or seek help
- The appearance of lies in the family, first by the addicted person and then by the family afraid of the stigma attached to the addiction
- A loss of income and support for the family
- A loss of family structure as the addicted person causes a rift among family members
- Confusion, controversy, mistrust, and dissention in the family as they struggle to determine the best course to follow for the addicted and for the family
- A withdrawal from society
- The increased risk of disease and even mortality in the addicted person and in their children
- The painful dissolution of the family unit due to the cost of the habit and of bickering between the addicted and their spouse and/or family members over the addiction

It is not the intent of this report to examine why these addictions exist, but we naturally ask why does an individual crave something that is intrinsically bad for their health and for their standing with those they love most? This was not explored in our questionnaire, but much research and literature exist positing reasons, many of which are intuitive. Stresses, real or perceived, are intense in most societies and this has increased with globalization. We are told that to look beautiful we must look a certain way. Depending on our peers, we are urged that to fit in or be glamorous we should have a drink, or smoke, or try drugs. Gambling is thrilling and fun is the message given in ads for casinos. But whether a person feels compelled by friends, society, media, family example, or a genetic predisposition, it is evident that sometimes that first drink or cigarette or throw of the dice may be all that is needed to trigger a need to feel that artificial “high” over and over until it consumes their life, even at the risk of losing all they have worked for and cherish. Globalization and advances in technology, though they have many benefits, also advance an introduction to some of these addictions world-wide.

As Catholic women committed to upholding the concept of the family as the basic unit of society and with the Holy Family as our guide, we may be called to study to be able to understand addictions and their effects on the family, to resolve to pray and to advocate so that people are trained to be able to cope with stresses without resorting to artificial crutches, and to work so that appropriate treatment programs are accessible and affordable to all. Parents need to regain their place as the premiere educators of their children in morals and respect and parents need to provide a good example and oversee their children and their peers carefully. Certainly, there is a place for our Church in this: In terms of prayer, education, and instilling the certain belief that stresses can be overcome with a proper orientation to prayer and trust in the ability of God to take our burdens, real or perceived, to resolution in His plan for us.

It can be depressing to read of all the terrible effects of addiction on individuals and on their families. But, as Catholic women, we also know that there is always hope. We believe that with God we can indeed effect change in ourselves, our families, our communities, our nations, and our world. These problems are enormous but if we say they are too much for us to tackle, we accomplish nothing. If we take small steps, something possible to do when we are given the opportunity, collectively we can create positive change that will benefit all. May our patroness, Mary Queen of Peace, ask her Divine Son to bless our efforts.

Family Working Group -October 2018

