

One in 10 Muscovites Has Used Drugs

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The top addictions official weighed in on rising drug use and the failure of measures to control it Friday.
Maxim Stulov

Every 10th person in Moscow has taken illegal drugs at least once in their lives, a troubling statistic in what is part of a growing drug epidemic, the country's top addictions doctor said Friday.

"The number of Muscovites who have consumed drugs at least once in their life is about 1 million, or 10 percent of the city's population," said Yevgeny Bryun of the Health and Social Development Ministry, Interfax reported.

And the number is on the rise growing 1 percent to 2 percent every year, he said.

"In 2000 there were 23,000 [habitual drug users], and in 2012 there are 32,000," he said, adding that about 15 to 30 percent of Moscow university students use drugs.

Bryun's figures reflect officially registered drug users, while experts say the true number is closer to 80,000.

Bryun put the total number of addicts throughout the country at 550,000, and casual drug users at about 5 million.

He criticized the laws in place that criminalize drugs, saying such laws take the wrong approach and do not help the problem.

"What do I do with these 5 million? It's impossible to jail all of them, and as soon as they know about their criminal liability, they will disappear and we won't even be able to identify them," he said.

Bryun's figures for alcoholism were even more grim. He said 30 to 40 percent of the population abuses alcohol — a "colossal figure" concentrated mostly outside big cities like Moscow. He suggested that employers take a more constructive approach toward intoxicated employees rather than just firing them.

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