

COMMUNITY PREVENTION AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME (CPAOC)

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Background: Zambia is a low-income country in southern Africa with an estimated population of approximately 19 million people. Although accurate data about drug use in Zambia are unavailable, it is widely recognized that drug misuse is an ongoing and growing problem, especially in poorer communities. Drug use is highly stigmatized in Zambia, punitive laws exist for minor drug-related offences, and drug related crime is high. However, few drug treatment and harm reduction services exist.

Description of model of care/intervention: Decisive Minds (DM) is a service for people who use drugs in Lusaka, Zambia. The organization provides: harm reduction information for people who use drugs; HIV prevention and treatment; drug use and mental health counselling; and advocacy on drug-related issues. We are working in five local communities where drug use and associated violent crimes are high. We engaged with key stakeholders (religious/community leaders) and ran workshops with people who use drugs to educate about drug-use related harms (including blood borne virus (BBV) transmission). We also worked with the police to help find community-led solutions to drug-related crime.

Effectiveness: The program is reducing stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs in the community; some people who use drugs have been reunited with their families as a result. Others are now accessing services to address health needs (including HIV treatment and mental health counselling), and some have accessed skills training to help find employment. Some participants have also reported drug-related crime rates have reduced in their communities.

Conclusion and next steps: Moving forward, DM is continuing to engage with law enforcement officers to advocate for less punitive and more humane responses to drug use (e.g., arbitrary arrests). DM is also planning to extend their work with local media, to address the stigmatizing narratives that are prevalent in the community.

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