

# Drug use and social control criminology essay



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Drug use and addiction have been a long time burden for society. Over the years many programs have been developed to help curb illegal activity, however it still continues. While appropriate attempts to control drug abuse have surfaced, there have also been many that have proven counterproductive. There are a number of theories as to why these theories have developed, but one might speculate that it is because drug abuse has such a wide and varied effect on families, society as well as the criminal justice system. This creates many attempts at control and is possibly the biggest reason for the numerous factors that involve drug abuse and society. This paper will examine the reaction of society to drug abuse and the attempts that have been made to control such behavior.

### **The Stigma Of Abuse**

There are many stigmas that surface in society, each ranging in severity and consequence. Society, as a whole is quick to judge others and make rash assumptions about the person, based on their actions or other limited information. Those that abuse illicit drugs are one of the most stigmatized groups in society today. There is a negative connotation at the mere speaking of drug abuse. Children are taught from an early age that drugs are bad and will lead them to a life full of crime and potentially even death. While these speculations are not inaccurate, it does send a message to youth that relays that people, who suffer from addiction, are “ bad and/or criminals” (Ball, 2007). While these assumptions may be correct in some respects, it is inappropriate to generalize groups of people as a whole. There are a number of situations and circumstances that can cause addiction, not only poor personal choices.

A stigma is defined as, “ an attribute that is deeply discrediting, occurs when an individual experiences social disqualification due to a specific attribute or flaw” (Palamar, Kiang & Halkitis, 2012). In lay terms, a stigma is a preconceived notion about an individual based on their actions or perceived actions. While most consider stigmas a negative concept, it appears to be engrained in human nature to engage in this type of behavior. According to Palamar, Kiang and Halkitis, stigmas are also based on the type of drug and method of use as well (2012 ). For example, some consider the harder drugs, such as heroin or amphetamines, to be the worst and those that use them as the worst addicts. The reason for the more negative assumptions may be based on the level of harm that the drug causes. Heroin and methamphetamine are known to cause severe health concerns and commonly lead to illegal behavior that has a negative effect on society. As harm comes to society, individuals’ quickly associate the drug and caused actions, thereby creating animosity and fueling the stigma. In many cases, the stigma might be used as a form of punishment to the user that is hoped to curtail or prevent drug abuse. The theory being that if enough pressure is placed on the individual than they will stop using drugs however is rarely successful. Addiction is a disease and the mere words or negative attitudes of others are not sufficient in stopping the cycle of abuse (Tiger, 2011). Families, commonly put pressure on their loved ones, who are using drugs, possibly even not speaking to them, in hopes that they will “ wake up” and cease their drug use.

Even though stigmas are sometimes used to curb the problem, it oftentimes leads to additional problems. As these individuals attempt to mesh in

society, by getting a job or attempting sobriety they are often frowned upon, which creates more distance. Many employers will not hire them, which facilitates unemployment, and continued drug abuse. Certainly, it is not the fault of the employer, but if the addict is not able to work and sustain a life by paycheck, they may return to stealing to support himself or family.

## **The Criminal Justice System**

Legislation and laws are not new to the criminal justice system. There have been laws regarding illicit drug use for many years. What has changed in recent decades is the way that drug offenses are charged, handled and processed. There are approximately 2.3 billion offenders in jail or prison for drug offenses in the United States (Tiger, 2011). That is a significant increase over the past years and one might speculate that it is because of tougher laws, more enforcement and awareness about drug abuse than in past years. One of the most notable policy changes has come with the establishment of what is known as Drug Court. Originally introduced by the criminal court system, Drug Courts have been put in action to address drug offenses in a more efficient manner (Tiger, 2011). Before these specialty courts were established, an individual convicted of drug offenses, may be punished, fined or incarcerated and then returned to society. In addition to prison and jail overcrowding, society also noted that the system was not efficient and had poor results. Typically these individuals would be back in the court system very soon after their charge, for another drug offense. Not only does this place the individual at harm, it also creates a danger to society. An example of this harm is an individual convicted of driving while intoxicated and then has another accident that takes someone's life. They were not helped by

going to jail or having a court date, their alcoholism was never addressed, which meant that the legal system failed in many respects. In order to address these issues, the 1966 Narcotic Rehabilitation Act was established, which gave each state the right or ability to force an offender into treatment or rehabilitation (Tiger, 2011).

This then gave way to court ordered treatment and thereby the drug court system. Drug court is meant to oversee the offender in many different aspects of their life. In addition to addressing their criminal behavior, they also oversee their addiction treatment while they are on probation per say. The individuals assigned to drug court are generally drug tested every month, required to pay a fine and also report for monthly appointments. By requiring drug treatment the individual is addressing their legal concerns, but also getting help for the root of the problem, which is addiction. Commonly, counseling and other therapeutic services are required of offenders to assist them in changing their life.

## **Coerced Treatment As A Form Of Control**

Understandably, one of the first lines of defenses for families is coerced treatment. In most states there are laws and protections that allow a person, who is in danger of harm to be committed. In many cases, families are frustrated with their loved ones and fearful for their safety so they attempt to convince or force the person into treatment. Unfortunately, when an individual is an adult it is rather difficult to force them into treatment without legal action. This is generally only relevant to a person that is exhibiting suicidal or homicidal ideas and not a person using illicit drugs. Forcing treatment is mistakenly thought to be a line of defense, however rarely

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works because of the user's rights and freedoms (Ball, 2007). While families or other loved ones cannot force their family member into treatment the court system does have the ability to require treatment. Most offenders take the offered help, however there are those that refuse treatment or counseling.

Each individual is given the choice, granted it is either treatment or jail time, but they still have the choice. There are those that are in and out of the prison system, who never engage in treatment or accept help, thereby perpetuating the cycle of abuse.

## **Prevention & The War Against Drugs**

With the increase in the criminalization of drugs in the past 30 years there have also been numerous changes to prevention attempts (Ball, 2007).

Almost every school and community proudly boasts the fact that they offer drug prevention and awareness education. There have been a number of programs that have been created based on educating the community about drugs, harms and fads that are present. The increased amount of drugs and detriment has caused an increase in media coverage and allowed people to become more aware of the prevalence of drug use. With that also came a demand for an increase in Federal funding for prevention measures, treatment and assistance for those of lower socio-economic status.

One of the major themes of prevention is an attempt to learn more about the causes and risk factors of addiction. There has been a great deal of controversy over the years regarding the causes of addiction. The nature versus nurture argument suggests that individuals become who they are or

engage in particular behavior based on either their genetics or influence of environment (Zimic & Jukic, 2012). Some argue that individuals are born with the propensity to use drugs based on hereditary and genetic factors. This would mean that regardless of the type of parents or environment that a child grew up with that they would be genetically predisposed to use drugs. On the flip side of the argument, individuals are said to be shaped by their experiences throughout their lives. These experiences shape who they are and what types of behavior that

they engage in. For example, a child that grows up in a home where drug abuse is prevalent would be more likely to follow in the same footsteps as their parents. Both theories make excellent points, and many choose to believe that individuals are influence by both genetics and their environment.

Other factors that place individuals at a higher risk of drug abuse is lower socio-economic status, family problems, academic trouble, mental illness as well as a host of other factors (Zimic & Jukic, 2012). In light of these factors being noted, programs have been established to combat the negative effects. Programs such as the girls and boys clubs and mentor groups are put into place to assist children that might be from broken homes, have poor parental support or be associating with the wrong crowd. These programs are aimed at prevention and cessation as a measure to reduce the amount of drug use as well as criminal behavior. These intervention programs are meant to assist parents in a better understanding of the needs of their children, the warning signs of drug abuse as well as the importance of the family role. For the child, the programs are meant for education, but also <https://assignbuster.com/drug-use-and-social-control-criminology-essay/>

guidance and to learn improved coping skills or manners by which to deal with the stress or problems that are placing them at the greatest risk of abuse.

## **Harm Reduction Theory**

The harm reduction theory is considered a method of control for both drug addicts and society in general. This thought process is based on the belief that certain types of treatment or prevention are less harmful than drug use or risky behavior (Ball, 2007). One of the best examples of this belief system is Methadone Maintenance Treatment.

Methadone is a synthetic opiate that is used to keep heroin addicts from using illicit drugs (Zimic & Jukic, 2012). Methadone blocks the opioid receptors in the brain, thereby preventing the addicts ability to “ get high” from continued heroin abuse. Some suggest that the introduction of methadone is simply another drug, because it is addictive and the individual becomes physically dependent. Those that promote methadone treatment suggest that these individuals, even though they are addicted to methadone, can functionally normally within society. Rather than engaging in criminal activities for drug money, the individuals can work, engage in family activities and receive psychological counseling. Other forms of harm reduction programs and theories are centered on providing condoms or even clean needles for IV drug users. The theory behind this controversial practice is the hopes that there will be a decrease or reduction in the amount of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and tuberculosis (Ball, 2007).



Society and families have long stood against illegal drug use. There are a number of programs and prevention attempts that are currently used. While this assistance is used as a manner of control the negative stigma about drug users is still very prevalent in today's society. Drug users are frowned upon and typically have a difficult time in society because of their choices and actions. It is important that society continue educating about drugs, harms and how perceived attitudes can further the problems. Education and continued address are the best lines of defense for prevention. Additional research into addiction and better therapy or treatment could also assist society in gaining better control of the problems at hand.