

Illicit drugs assignment

Law



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This assignment will attempt to outline the difference between illicit drug and alcohol use of which there are many, this essay will focus on factors affecting the legalities, crime, long-term effects, society's views on these substances, overdose and death rates. Alcohol contributes to a high percentage of crime rates and offences. Crimes committed while under the influence of Alcohol are generally more violent than the majority of crimes committed by those using illicit substances, as they are less likely to be of a violent nature.

Hoaken et al's (2003) crime studies looked at the relationship between certain drugs of abuse and violent behaviour. They found evidence of alcohol intoxication as one of the most significant factors in the contribution to aggressive behaviour. A study by Murdoch et al (1990) showed that in a survey exceeding 9300 criminal case from 11 countries, 62% of acts of a violent nature were perpetrated either at the time or prior to consuming alcohol. Crimes of a violent nature while under the influence of alcohol include sectarianism, assaults, sexual assaults, date rape and domestic violence.

There is a lot of evidence to support alcohol having a direct impact on reported domestic violence incidents. A few include Thompson et al (2006) who found that alcohol can in fact increase the " severity" of the violence and Humphreys et al (2005) found research to show 1/3 of all domestic violence incidents recorded involved alcohol. This in comparison with illicit substances is extremely high as in 2003 according to the British crime survey 44% of those charged with domestic violence were reported to be

under influence of alcohol in comparison with a small 12% of those who at the time were under the influence of illicit drugs (Budd 2003).

Illicit substances like Cannabis and Heroin are less likely to have violent crimes associated with them as opposed to alcohol. There is little evidence to support that Cannabis use contributes to violent behaviour or aggression. Hoaken et al (2003) found that there is a reduced probability of violence while under the influence of Cannabis. In the case of Heroin, although many offences are related to opiate use, offences are committed in aid of supporting a habit and are carried out in a less violent manner.

Under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971", it is an offence to possess or supply illicit substances and if found in possession this offence can carry a 7-14 years sentence and a fine" (Shapiro, 2007: 12). This bares a big difference to alcohol as due to the legality of alcohol and its use there are minimal sentences for the buying and selling, only ones related to the selling to those underage. Most alcohol offences are due to the intoxication of, as opposed to possession and sale. Crimes through Heroin use include shoplifting, house breaking and car theft and are not always done while intoxicated.

In relation to long-term effects of drug and alcohol use Jack Hennigfield (1994) of NIDA looked at the levels of severity of six different substances and found that the effects of Cannabis were less severe than that of alcohol, this study looked at Dependence, Withdrawal, Tolerance, Reinforcement and Intoxication. Martin et al (2003) looked at rates of Thiamine deficiency in alcohol related brain disorders and stated that some individuals will develop brain disease such as Wernicke encephalitis with severe symptoms

associated with poor mobility and coordination, nerve damage and confusion.

Korsakoff is a longer lasting condition and individuals diagnosed at this stage will display poor memory, frustration and psychosis. It seems that due to alcohol having been around for many years and its legality there are clearer cut studies on the long-term effects of alcohol in comparison with illicit substances where there are still grey areas to what specific damage long term use can cause. By looking at alcohol death rates on Alcohol statistics Scotland 2011 alongside General Register Office for Scotland (p1), there is a clear difference between the numbers of alcohol related deaths in comparison with heroin related deaths.

In 2010, the number of alcohol related deaths increased from 1, 282 in 2009 to 1, 318 in 2010 compared with 322 Heroin related deaths in Scotland in 2009 falling to 254 in 2010. Due to the legality of Alcohol and its common use as a means of socializing, alcohol is socially acceptable and therefore has fewer stigmas attached with its use. Alcohol is more readily available and affordable in comparison with illicit substances, as all illicit substances carry a penalty along with the possession and sale of them. There is also a moral issue as people do not see it as wrong therefore alcohol is more accepted.

Certain forms of alcohol addiction are over looked in comparison with illicit drug use for example the upper class middle aged wine drinker who is more socially accepted than the lower class unemployed binge drinker. In addition, " Previous research found almost two-thirds of employers would not employ

a former heroin or crack user, even if they were fit for the job, and people in our study reported having offers of employment withdrawn when their history of drug use became known", (UK Drug Policy Commission, 2010).

Heroin users are ostracised within society, mainly because their substance misuse is generally funded through crime, considered morally unethical and associated with high-risk behaviours. This leads to prejudice, stigmatisation and social exclusion. Even amongst alcohol and illicit substance users there is an obvious divide to which those with alcohol problems see themselves on a different level from the common drug user (UK Drug Policy Commission, 2010).

There are issues surrounding the measurements of toxicity of illicit substances in comparison with alcohol levels. Due to the legality of alcohol, it has a specific unit measurement unlike illicit drugs that can vary greatly on toxicity levels. Due to alcohol being legal, professionals have been able to research the impact of alcohol on society whereas most studies on illicit substance are generated by people self-reporting them, thus most information is gathered from individuals, hospital and pathology records.

In conclusion, in outlining the difference between illicit drug and alcohol use it is evident that although criminal offences are committed through both alcohol and illicit drug use, alcohol related offences are more of a violent nature than that of illicit drug use. However, the negative consequences of both drug and alcohol misuse impacts on both society and health. Despite this, societies views are more distorted when it comes to illicit drug misuse

and deem such users as deviants due to the nature of their habit.

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