

# Consequences of Drug Prohibition

Mark Haden – November 2004

## Social consequences of the “war on drugs”

- Propaganda - difficult to get accurate information.
- Canadian citizens become enemies (civil war?).
- Promotes violence (police violence <sup>1,2,3</sup> gang violence. <sup>4,5,6</sup>)
- Promotes crime.
  - The majority of property crime is committed to support a habit<sup>7</sup>.
  - \$2000 worth of stolen goods + \$200 cash to buy \$20 worth of drugs.
  - In the first year of Prohibition crime leaped 24% in USA major cities. <sup>8</sup>
  - Vancouver had 3 pawn shops in the Downtown Eastside in 1980's now there are 45.
  - The Criminal Intelligence Service Canada report states that “Illicit drugs continue to be the major source of criminal profit for organized crime groups.”<sup>9, 10</sup>
  - The CCSA report observes: “alcohol dependent federal inmates were much more likely to have committed a violent crime than were drug-dependent inmates, while drug dependent inmates were more likely to have committed a gainful crime.” <sup>11</sup>
- Restricts religious practices. It took many years of litigation before the US allowed the Native American Church to use peyote legally, in accordance with their historical traditions.
- Racist (The USA has the highest incarceration rate in the world with 468 of every 100,000 being in jail. The next two countries South Africa = 333 and Soviet Union = 268. In the USA Caucasians = 197 and black Americans = 1,534. (In Texas and Oklahoma it exceeds 2000 per 100,000). Canada is 143 per 100,000. <sup>12,13</sup> One in four black man in the USA in either in jail, on probation or parole. <sup>14</sup>
- Prohibits beneficial use of some drugs (i.e. hemp paper, clothes, medicine).
- Biases research and data collection. <sup>15</sup> “Out of the box” research is not supported. This prevents our exploration of possible beneficial uses of currently illegal drugs and does not allow us to fully understand drug using behavior in our society. We have difficulty distinguishing between drug use, abuse and addiction. Research is also misinterpreted. <sup>16,17</sup>
- Observed wide spread violation of the law, weakens general respect for law and order. 72% of all drug offences are for marijuana. The majority of these 47,000 offences (in 1996) were for simple possession. <sup>18</sup> Erickson’s study showed the cannabis possession charges did not result in decreased drug use but did result in a decreased respect for the law<sup>19</sup> Historically drug laws have been based on racism.
- Goes against free and democratic society.
- Illegal marijuana grow operations create property damage, increase conflict between neighbors and damage landlord/tenant relationships.

## Individual consequences of the “war on drugs”

- Seizure of property in USA (profits go to police departments). Suspicion is enough to enact forfeiture. 80% never get charged with a crime they just loose their possessions. <sup>20</sup> Police Departments have requested more asset seizures from their officers due to low departmental budgets. <sup>21,22</sup>
- Criminal acts are encouraged. As enforcement “pressure” goes up, drug smugglers and

large volume dealers insulate themselves by increasing the “organizational levels” between them and the buyer. The larger the organization, the more people are drawn into the criminal lifestyle.<sup>23</sup>

- Goes against concept of personal responsibility.
- Promotes intolerance of others - discrimination/marginalization /disenfranchising.
- Isolates people who could be more connected to others and services.

### **Health consequences of the “war on drugs”**

- Lack of pure drugs and clean needles are a health risk.
- May lead to punitive pain management practices.<sup>24, 25</sup>
- Increases the spread of blood born diseases. IV drug users do not inject safely if they are not in a “health service” context.
- Drug users die. No over-dose death has occurred in a supervised injection site.
- Aerial crop spraying in source countries damages environment and innocent people.<sup>26</sup> (“Plan Columbia” is the USA spraying coca plants)
- Produces more concentrated (more addictive) drugs which are easier to smuggle.

### **Family consequences of the “war on drugs”**

- Children and young teens become criminalized. In the USA the mandatory minimum sentences apply to individuals age 18 and older. This results in adults finding children to deal and transport drugs.<sup>27</sup>
- Children (and families) are victimized. In Vancouver children are apprehended for a few days during a “grow operation” bust.
- Family members become enemies.
- The black market is very attractive to youth as it offers significant economic incentives to participate in the growth, manufacture, distribution and sales of drugs.

### **Consequences of the “war on drugs” on police and health services**

- Takes away police time from pursuing “real” criminals. Drug investigations are time and resource consuming. Our scarce tax dollars would be better spent dealing with crimes of force, fraud and public safety.
- Is abusive to the police. To require the police to treat addicts as criminals creates job stress. Can be a corrupting force within this service, which tarnishes their profession.<sup>28,29,30,31</sup>
- Makes it difficult to provide health services (supervised sites, drugs on Rx).
- Enforcement “pressure” can reduce attendance at services (i.e. needle exchange<sup>32</sup>)
- Intentional misrepresentation of research findings which support harm reduction services<sup>33</sup>

### **Economic consequences of the “war on drugs”**

- Escalates price of drugs (so black market is well paid but price is not high enough to make unavailable).
- It is very costly to enforce prohibition (police, courts, jails).
- Average jail time in U.S.A.: manslaughter = 12 months: drugs = 60 months. (More than kidnapping, robbery, arson, extortion, assault).
- It costs more to send a man to jail than it does to send him to college (room, board, tuition and transportation). Prison bed cost \$50,000 to \$70,000 to build and \$20,000 to \$35,000

- per year to fill. The per pupil cost at a well equipped American school is \$15,000.<sup>34</sup>
- Canada spends \$1 Billion per year to address illicit drugs<sup>35</sup>. Canada spends \$95 on enforcement for every \$5 it spends on health services in response to the problem of illegal drugs.<sup>36</sup> (Federal perspective)
  - Black market does not pay taxes. Various estimates for the black market range from \$600 billion<sup>37</sup> to \$100 billion.<sup>38</sup> The most commonly estimated size is \$400 billion.<sup>39,40</sup> Canadian Federal Government collected \$121 billion in taxes last year. Vancouver drug trade estimated to be \$400,000 to \$800,000 per day or approx 200 million per year (Werner Schneider, Illegal Drug Use conference Sept 2000).
  - Drug money destabilizes world markets.<sup>41,42</sup> the Economist has recommended drug legalization for this reason.<sup>43</sup>
  - Legitimate businesses are “scared away” from some neighborhoods.
  - There are direct and indirect costs from crime. The direct costs are the emotional and financial burden on the victims, and the societal costs of maintaining the justice system. The indirect costs are the increases in retail prices (to factor in shoplifting) and increased car and house insurance prices.
  - The value of real-estate near open drug scenes is devalued.

### **Political consequences of the “war on drugs”**

- People become suspicious of government. Many books have been written suggesting various conspiracy theories regarding the government’s involvement in drug dealing.<sup>44,45,46</sup>
- The drug war supports terrorism. Terrorists rely on “hidden” laundered money to operate which often comes from drug dollars.
- Drug money destabilizes governments.<sup>47,48,49,50,51</sup> For example, Pablo Escobar killed many government officials in Columbia.<sup>52</sup> There are more guns in the drug armies in Burma than the government army<sup>53</sup>. Smugglers who have money and need protection join forces with guerilla armies who need money and have weapons. Joining forces = government instability<sup>54</sup>.
- The assumption of the war on drugs is that drug addicts (or drug users) are bad and need punishment and segregation from society (prisons).<sup>55</sup>

### **Drug availability consequences of the war on drugs**

- Drug prohibition produces a black market which is very effective at distributing drugs.
- Youth report that drugs are easier to access than alcohol
- As spending on the war on drugs has gone up, heroin, cocaine and marijuana have become cheaper and more available

Do we have the “war on drugs” in Canada? Two reports have explored this question. Eric Single concludes Canadians spend \$4. on enforcement for every \$1. that is spent on treatment.<sup>56</sup> The Federal Auditor General concludes that Canada spends \$95.00 on enforcement for every \$5.00 which are spent on treatment and prevention.<sup>57</sup>

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