

Methods of Alleviation Drug Abuse: A Comparison Between Substance Abuse Clinics and Incarceration

Matthew Ryder

ABSTRACT (48-point type)

The United States is facing one of its worst opioid epidemics in its history. From street heroin to prescription drugs, many Americans are addicted to opiates. There are two common ways for attacking illicit drug use: 1) incarceration and 2) substance abuse treatment. This SIP sets to find which of the two has the better impact both economically and personally on those affected by drug abuse. This answer is found by looking at various policies implemented by countries, interviews with drug users, and a cost-benefit analysis.

INTRODUCTION

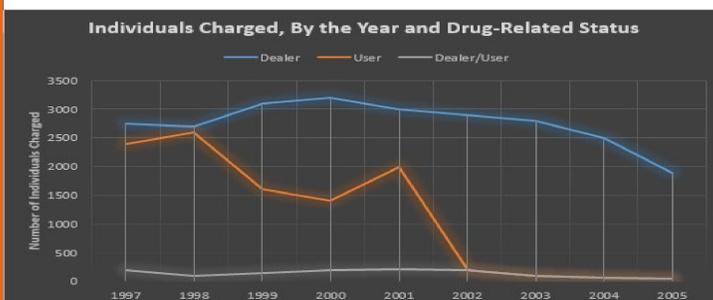
Countries combat drug abuse in many different ways. Since, the United States is having major issues concerning drugs, it is ideal to change policy. Looking at other countries gives a sense of what may work to defeat this epidemic; some countries implement restrictive policies and some decriminalize drugs. A cost-benefit analysis essentially shows which option brings more welfare to society per dollar.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Information regarding data for this study was found by empirical research. The goal was to study various countries and different policies.

Interviews were conducted with drug users who have experienced incarceration and substance abuse treatment.

A cost-benefit analysis was conducted to show the trade-off between either using prisons or substance abuse clinics.

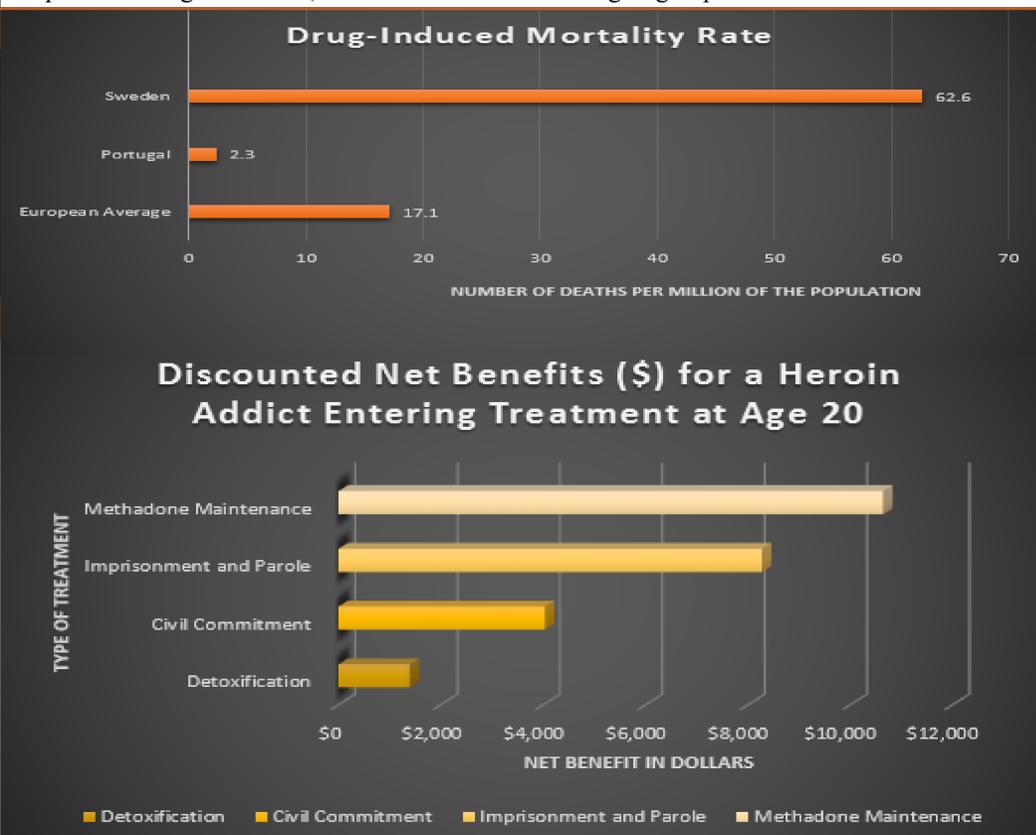


RESULTS

The two major paradigms for comparing decriminalization and restriction policies are Portugal and Sweden. Portugal is located along a major drug trafficking route, and Sweden is not. The chart below shows their drug-induced mortality rate. Despite Sweden not being along a major drug trafficking route, they have a higher mortality rate; in fact, Sweden's mortality rate has increased since the implementation of new restrictive laws.

The interviewees discussed their experiences in both substance abuse clinics and prisons. Many of them said that the most substantial part of the prison system was that their parole officer eventually led them to treatment. Despite being incarcerated for drug-related reasons, they were able to get their hands on drugs in prison. When the 8 interviewees were asked which form of treatment was better for alleviating drug use, one said prisons, one said both, and the rest said substance abuse clinics.

The cost-benefit analysis below suggests that a form of substance abuse treatment, methadone maintenance, is more cost-beneficial than incarceration. Methadone is an alternative drug that helps relieve the symptoms of withdrawal from heroin, which in turn, helps drug abusers become functioning members of society. Many consider prison to be counter-intuitive because the country is spending lots of tax dollars to incarcerate drug offenders, yet they still do drugs in prison or relapse shortly after they are released. Substance abuse treatment is more popular in decriminalized countries, while incarceration is more popular in restrictive countries. In decriminalized countries, drug dealers still get imprisoned; this makes drug dealing less attractive in a decriminalized market because the prices of drugs are lower, and dealers run the risk of going to prison.



CONCLUSIONS

All interviewees stated that substance abuse treatment has had a more positive impact on their life than prison. The cost benefit analysis above shows that it is better economically as well. Therefore, it is best to use substance abuse treatment to not only solve drug issues, but to also better the lives of those affected. Although the purpose of prison is to reform and rehabilitate people, it seems as if its purpose ceases to exist there. People leave prison just as bad if not worse than before. If a person is incarcerated for a drug-related offense, they will most likely relapse shortly after being released. The only case out of the interviewees that shows some reform from prisons is when one was lead to substance abuse treatment.

If there is increased law enforcement, it causes citizens to adopt malicious practices; these practices crime such as theft or murder and unsafe drug using methods. Some say that increased law enforcement will increase the prices of street drugs which is supposed to lower consumption; however, people are willing to pay high prices since they are addicted to these drugs. The increased prices will provide an incentive for people to start drug dealing. However, there should still be a focus to convict those who are drug dealing; the combination of large punishment and low prices of drugs may incentivize people to stop drug dealing. On the other hand, substance abuse clinics often do a better job of rehabilitating people. The United States would benefit more if legislation passed policies that encouraged use of substance abuse clinics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to Dr. Apps for being the best SIP advisor anyone could have asked for. I would also like to thank the Economics department for helping me fund my research. Also, thank you to all of my family, friends, and colleagues for giving me the support to finish this project. Also, I would like to give a shout out to my friend and colleague, Josh Vance, for working with me and giving me great suggestions for our peer review session.