

CRIMINALISATION OF DRUG USE: VOICES FROM PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS

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Background:

France is often presented as a model of harm reduction, thanks to its high accessibility to opioid substitutive treatments (OST). Nevertheless, France has one of the more repressive Law towards drug use in Europe. The advocacy for recognizing health and political rights to People Who Inject Drugs (PWIDs) is difficult to be heard by politicians, when it is only based on numbers from public health framings.

Methods:

A collaboration between a research team and Médecins du Monde has been developed to implement community-based research to describe the effects of drug use criminalization on PWID's daily lives and their access to health services. A mixed-method research project has been implemented in 3 cities (Paris, Marseille and Lille), using semi-structured interviews with PWIDs (N=25) and stakeholders (N=25) including caregivers, harm reduction professionals, activists, and politicians. A photo-voice methodology involving PWIDs as active partners in the research project has also been developed.

Results:

Our research shows that the criminalization of drug use goes beyond police action and permeates society as a whole. Society's view of drugs determines how PWIDs are treated by their families, institutions and the medical profession. This moralistic view of PWIDs prevents them from accessing care, puts them at risk and marginalizes them. Feeling systematically judged and rejected, people prefer to hide and not talk about their use, which keeps them away from care and health services. Some professionals still refused to deliver sterile syringes or OST and justified their practices by prohibition. PWIDs and harm reduction providers have also reported a lack of responsiveness on the part of the police to intervene in the facilities when they request it in cases of violence against people.

Conclusion:

Reintroducing the voices of PWIDs on the debate highlights the negative impacts of the war on drugs on access to health.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

All authors have no conflict of interest to declare.