

CDUHR FACT SHEET

Repressive Criminal Justice Efforts are Ineffective in Reducing Injection Drug Use

Background and Purpose of this Study

- Some drug policies are based on the belief that punishment can deter drug use.
- This study investigated whether higher rates of hard drug-related arrests predicted lower rates of injection drug use.
- A prior study (2006) found that repressive criminal justice measures (such as hard drug-related arrests and police/corrections expenditures) were not associated with reductions in injection drug use and were related to increased HIV prevalence among injectors. The current study (2011), going one step further, used longitudinal data to determine if changes in drug-related arrests would lead to reductions in injection drug use.

How was the Study Conducted?

- Data on drug-related arrest rates for 1992-2002 (for opium or cocaine or their derivatives) were obtained for 93 of the largest MSAs (metropolitan statistical areas) in the US from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting Program.
- The prevalence of injection drug use in these same MSAs was obtained by adjusting data from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).
- Statistical tests were used to assess the impact of arrest rates during earlier years on the injection drug use rate in later years.

Major Findings

- Changes in hard drug arrest rates did not predict changes in IDU population rates.
- This agrees with findings from our 2006 study, which found that repressive law enforcement efforts were not related to reductions in injection drug use, and moreover, were associated with higher HIV infection rates among injectors.

Implications

- Deterrence-based approaches to reducing drug use appear not to reduce IDU prevalence. They may actually harm public health, given the prior association found with HIV prevalence (believed due in part to the fear of punishment leading to increases in injecting in hurried and unsafe ways).
- From a public health perspective, alternative approaches, such as harm reduction (which prevent HIV transmission, provide people who use drugs with social support, and increase referrals to drug treatment), may be preferable to repressive law enforcement.

Friedman SR, Pouget ER, Chatterjee S, Cleland CM, Tempalski B, Brady JE, & Cooper HL (2011). Drug arrests and injection drug deterrence. *American Journal of Public Health*, v101, 344-349.

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