

L. Drug policy enforcement

Reference

B. De Ruyver, 'Drug policy and target groups: the limits of keeping up the balances', in E. Broekaert, W. Vanderplasschen and V. Soyez (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Substance Abuse Treatment and Special Target Groups, 'Community as a method'*, Department of Orthopedagogics, Ghent University, p. 51 – 56.

Commentary

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This contribution gives a general overview of the dimensions of the drug phenomenon and the implications and limitations hereof in drug policy enforcement.

In this respect, the two following articles can serve as additional literature, because they go into detail on some of the topics highlighted in the paper of professor De Ruyver.

The first article examines the effects of liberal or repressive policies on the *prevalence of drug use*. Based on three case studies, the author concludes that the type of drug policy (liberal or repressive) is not the determining factor for an increase in drug use. The general socio-economic situation (unemployment, economic conditions, the authority pattern at state level, living conditions, attitudes towards drugs in the population) does have an important bearing on prevalence.

See: K.H. Reuband, 'Drug policies and drug prevalence: the role of demand and supply', in *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*, 1998, 6, p. 321 – 336.

The second article studies the *unwelcome side effects* of traditional drug law enforcement, amongst others geographical, social, substance and temporal displacement and a deterioration of relations between police and ethnic minorities.

See: L. Maher and D. Dixon, 'Policing and public health, Law enforcement and harm minimization in a street-level drug market', in *British Journal of Criminology*, 1999, 39, 4, p. 488 – 452.

Abstract

The basic idea of this paper is that, as the drug phenomenon has so many aspects, the development of a drug policy on a multitude of levels is obligatory. At the same time, this restricts the scope for action for all the elements of an extensive and – necessarily – integrated drug policy.

In view of the multiple dimensions of the drug phenomenon, a drug policy can only be successful when it covers as many policy fields as possible.

In this respect, a balanced policy must be developed if one does not want to generate negative side effects. E.g. a one-sided repressive approach of drug related crime and drug nuisance will inevitably result in drugs users going into hiding, in fewer contacts with health and social services, and in increasing risk behaviour, among others regarding infectious diseases.

In drug policy enforcement, cultural differences as well as the particular identity and evolution of social systems should be taken into account. Thus, it is for instance problematic to transfer certain policy options that are more and more applied in the European Union, such as harm reduction strategies, to the United States, because the social preconditions for this do not exist in the US social system.