



Stigma and Criminalisation of People Who Use Drugs

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Stigma and Criminalisation

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Context

- 50 years plus of prohibition but there are more drugs available and there are a wide range of escalating drug-related harms.
- Between 80-90% of people who use drugs don't experience harms, they use for pleasure and leisure purposes (WHO, 2022).
- People experiencing problematic use of alcohol and other drugs most likely to encounter the criminal justice system and experience the most drug-related harms.
 - Experience more stigma and marginalisation due to existing social, economic and health inequalities.
 - Experience high levels of criminalization due to their drug use, associated crimes and they are often the most vulnerable to police detection due to their visibility.
 - Often experienced high levels of trauma, dual diagnosis and other co-morbidities.
 - Lack of investment in evidence-based approaches towards dealing with substance dependency.

External and Internal Stigma

- **External stigma:**
 - Media, politicians, the public, health and social care professionals
 - Social, economic and health inequalities
 - Criminalisation
 - Does not reduce drug use
 - Undermines life chances and opportunities
 - Can increase health harms
 - Creates obstacles to using services
 - Can increase reoffending across a range of offences
 - Uses excessive policing, court and prison resources which could be more effectively used elsewhere.
- **Internal stigma:**
 - Impacts of external stigma
 - Feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment

~~ADDICT~~
~~JUNKIE~~
~~DRUGGIE~~
~~LIAR~~
~~FAILURE~~
~~CRIMINAL~~
~~CHOICE~~

HOW ABOUT:

HUMAN



Alternatives to Stigma and Criminalisation

- Evidence-based approaches to drugs education and prevention.
- Increase diversionary activities for young people who use drugs and at risk of problematic use.
- Invest in accessible, evidence-based drug and mental health treatment, support and harm reduction services.
- Adopt a trauma-informed, strength-based, person-centred approach to treatment and support provision.
- Increase use of diversionary schemes away from the CJS for minor drug-related offences:
 - Reduces reoffending
 - Reduces costs
 - Improves physical and mental health
 - Improves future social and employment opportunities
 - Reduces some drug use
- Invest in wider policies tackling social, economic and health inequalities.
- Consider alternative drug policy approaches which reduce harm.