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Drug Addiction and Overdose

Importance

For decades the United States has struggled with drug addiction, and in recent years the number has skyrocketed not just in use, but in overdose deaths. Drugs containing opioids are currently on the rise in the United States, other drugs have risen, but none as significantly as opioids. From 2002-2015 the number of opioid related deaths doubled(Abuse, National Institute on Drug). In the United States alone 43,982 people die each year from opioid related overdoses, which is 120 people per day. This large number counts for one fourth of drug related deaths worldwide (Xia, Cindy Q., et al). Recently the number of drug related deaths passed the number of traffic related deaths each year (Warner, Margaret, et al). The drug problem in the United States has continued to be an issue not just in the accumulation of deaths, but also in the concern of possible HIV outbreaks and how the drugs have been circulating into the country (Pressly, Linda). The drug issue in the United States is a long standing issue and one that the government has been trying to fight since the War on Drugs began in the Nixon administration.

Background

In 1971 President Nixon first addressed the War on Drugs and created the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) in hopes to stop this epidemic in the US. The drug problem persisted in the US, and in the 1980’s President Reagan hoped to crack down on the problem with stricter laws to stop drug cartels and street gangs. The policy at the time put offenders in jail and offered them no form of rehab. However, this did not fix the drug problem and by 1994 around one million people were incarcerated for drug related offenses, most of who were nonviolent offenders. The stricter laws put
people in jail and did not give them to a rehab program. Due to this many users continued abuse after getting out of jail. Many people are now comparing the drug problem in the US to prohibition due to the large rise in deaths and organized crime because of drug rings (“Drug Policy & History.”). The drug problem just got worse with the increase of Fentanyl use in the US. This drug is so potent that even touching it could cause a reaction. Law enforcement is especially having problems with this when handing perpetrators, and are concerned not only for their safety but the safety of the K9 units because of the dogs being exposed to the drug (Pressly, Linda). Most policy to help combat the growing drug problem in the United States has not stopped the problem as many politicians had hoped when it was put into action because of three core underlying issues.

**Underlying Causes**

The drug problem in the US has many underlying causes but the main three reasons are world travel and shipping, the internet, and the war in Afghanistan. World travel allows an easy flow of drugs from around the world since it is hard to keep track or check every box or shipping container. Many drugs are smuggled into the United States by container ships. These ships contain tons of boxes so the ability to check each container for drugs is impossible. While government agencies like the DEA try to crack down and find shipments it’s often is hard for them to get each shipment (Hamilton, Keegan). The internet has also helped the rise in drug use. The main offenders of buying drugs off the internet tend to be teens and the elderly. Both use this outlet because of the cheapness of the products. However, many times these pills or substances that they are procuring are not pure and buyers often do not actually know what they are getting or consuming. The drugs from the internet are usually shipped from anywhere in the world to the buyers (“Drug Policy & History.”). Lastly, the war in Afghanistan has had a large impact on drug circulation.

Afghanistan has some of the richest poppy fields in the world. However, when the Taliban came to power they made it illegal to sell, grow or distribute poppy. Since the Taliban controls most of the
smuggling routes in the area they allow people to smuggle it out of the country for a price (usually money or weapons) in return these sellers have access to smuggling routes (Hamilton, Keegan). This smuggling concept in the region allows the Taliban to gain a steady income and found their many terrorist cells (Hamilton, Keegan). It’s estimated that the Taliban gets around $3 Billion each year from poppy production. This is also the best time for them to find new recruits to replace the men they lost during the fighting since poppy season is when there is usually a big break from combat (Mashal, Taimoor Shah and Mujib). While poppy comes from many other countries like Mexico and Myanmar, Afghanistan supplies almost 90% of the total poppy supply (Mashal, Taimoor Shah and Mujib). Since poppy is a main ingredient in opioids containing the poppy coming out of Afghanistan would not only reduce the opioids in circulation but also cut off a large amount of the Taliban’s main income.

Policy Options

There are many different possibilities for the drug and overdose problem in The United States. The first is to focus on the rehab of drug offenders, instead of sending them to jail, the US should convert some jails into drug specific rehabs. This way those incarcerated do not relapse when they get out. By doing this it would reduce the drug market significantly because the demand would go down. Another option would be to crack down on shipping routes in and out of the US. Stronger borders and checkpoints would hopefully reduce the smuggling into the country. A complete override of the shipping system, especially shipping containers and the way they are tracked would also help. The last possible way to attack this drug problem would be through to specifically target the poppy production in Afghanistan. Since the main drug problem is because of opioids it would be the best target. The goal would be to destroy the poppy crops in Afghanistan. This would not only cut of a substantial amount of the poppy circulation but it would also stop a large portion of the Taliban’s income.

Solution
The policy to help reduce the drug problem in the United States needs to be focused on Afghanistan and cutting off the poppy production. With the current amount of troops in Afghanistan increasing, gathering intel on where the poppy crops are located should not be an issue. In addition, most of the NATO allies are also involved in the Afghanistan war and many of them are sending more troops or contributing to the fight in someway. With this abundance of resources finding the poppy production and destroying it could be just as important as the fire power. Not only will it destroy more the half of the poppy being produced and shipped worldwide, but it would also cut off a large amount of the Taliban’s revenue. The NATO countries and US would have to come up with an alternative crop for farmers to grow in the region so that they can continue to support their families. This policy focusing on the destruction of the poppy crop in Afghanistan gives the NATO countries and the US positive steps not only to the war on drugs, but also the war on Terrorism. By killing two birds with one stone the number of opioids coming into the US and other countries should drop, and it should also help with the fight on terror in the Middle East and especially in Afghanistan.

Works Cited


