
The War On Drugs In The USA: The History Of Drugs And Approaches To Overcome Them

An aggravative solution to a vague problem

'All things are poisons, for there is nothing without poisonous qualities. It is only the dose which makes a thing poison', Paracelsus The notion that drugs are bad is mostly true, however there are a lot of debates and fallacies that are perhaps oblivious to most people, and more importantly, the method used to handle issues caused by drugs is not really a fruitful one, if anything, it is creating more complications and is resulting in deteriorous outcomes. despite that, most governments still stick to prohibition and are being extremely strict on the policy of drugs, so what is it exactly about these substances? and what really makes them that infamous?

Drugs are substances that alter brain functioning, sedate, stimulate or cause other direct effects on the nervous system or certain chemicals in the brain, drugs could be natural or chemically synthesised. There are different types, forms and methods in which drugs are used. each drug varies on the impact they have on the user, as some of them when used regularly can cause addiction, dependance, health issues, negative side effects and could even result in death in some cases. while they sound that bad, some things need to be taken in consideration.

Well, people who have little knowledge about drugs in general, must know illegal drugs, whether found in nature or manufactured, were not originally used for parties, escaping problems or just to achieve a euphoric state (recreational use), they were used for medicinal purposes and even in earlier times, they were spirtual catalysts for ancient religious rituals of early tribes like the amazonians, The spirtually used drugs are mostly hallucinogenic types that are found in nature like Ayahuasca and Peyote. Psilocybin which is known as magic mushroom is the most popular of this category.

The most famous and wordwidely used drug that is also found in nature and is often taken in it's pure form is 'Cannabis', more known to public as Marijuana. it is the least harmful of all other illicit drugs. Cannabis is a plant that belongs to a family known as 'Cannabaceae', these are indigenous and it is suggested that it originated in central Asia. While it is not really known about the first time it has ever been used by humans, however, there is hypothasis that around the 3rd millenial B.C Cannabis was known and used as an entheogen as it is suggested that it has been mentioned in one of the earliest Hindu scriptures, The Vedas, as being a ritual plant called 'soma'. marijuana's effects varies depending on different types of strains and does not belong to a certain category of drugs.

There is also what is known as hard drugs and these are drugs like Heroin, Meth and Cocaine, they are the most harmful, addictive and have more potential to fatality in certain cases. while they are ilegal most of the time they're manufactured by people who do not possess much pharmaceutical knowledge and deep understandings about substances and since it is all about selling and and that's what make them dangerous, they are only sold in the black market, and there are no laws that govern the black market, so there is little to no regard to consumer health.

And there comes the most important ones that will be focused on in this essay and those are Psychedelics, they are the same as hallucinogens but a different term, there exists hallucinogens that are synthesised, like LSD,MDMA and PCP, they are much less harmful than hard drugs, they do not cause serious health issues in long term use, are non-addictive and non-fatal in overdosing. they serve as both spiritual and medicinal substances. American psychologist Timothy Leary recognized their therapeutic use and it's beneficial impact on creativity and even suggested them for artists. although psychedelics have been approved by the FDA for treating some types of mental disorders and conditions a couple of years ago Psychedelics are criminalized and considered to be as bad as hard drugs by drug enforcements and public in most of the world.

Precised History About Drugs In the United States

Marijuana

Marijuana was grown by the people of Jamestown who settled there during the 1600s. during the civil war Marijuana furnished the state's wealthiness from it's yielding, at that time the growing of marijuana have massively expanded at the beginning of the 19th century, as It became a medical plant from 1850 to 1937 and was sold without regulations in pharmacies and regular stores. it was favoured and more demanded after alcohol became overly priced in 1920 . after almost 10 years, studies examined the marijuana use by low class citizens and claimed that it causes people to become mad and violent , which then resulted in marijuana being banned in 1937, there were a lot of other myths but they were recognized to be that later , and after that ,laws about marijuana criminalization were always shifting during the years. for example, in 1971 Marijuana was classified as a schedule I drug. but then at the beginning of the 21th century the criminalization dropped slowly when it has been accepted by the FDA for a lot of medical uses, and Today it is legal for recreational use in 9 states in the U.S.

Heroin And Cocaine

In 1806 A.C, a pharmacist named Freidrich Serturner discovered Morphine which is an ingredient found in the opium Poppy flower, The poppy plant itself was widely used far back in ancient times by sumeriyans who cultivated it at first and gave it the name 'hul gil' which means 'the joy plant'. since morphine was the actual ingredient which gives that pain reducing effect in the flower, moprhine was very effective as both a sedative and a pain reliever, it was used a lot during the American Civil War. Times later, morphine's dependance and high addictive nature became a problem and laws started restricting it's use for non-medical settings.

Heroin was discovered when it was synthesised from morphine in 1874, but Heroin had other medical uses different from morphine, it was used in treating headaches,coughs,respiratory infections female premenstrual syndrome and had many other uses, it was considered as a treatment for everything, it used to be sold over the counter in pharmacies and a huge number of people were buying and using it, and that resulted in more than 200,000 people being addicted to Heroin by 1924 in the United States, at that year Heroin was banned and pharmaceutical companies discontinued it's manufacturing and sales in the U.S. and then later on illegal production,distribution and trafficking of of the drug began, Heroin still remains illegal till our day, but it's distribution and sale grew even bigger than it was in the past.

Another plant but that has exact opposite effects of that of the opium poppy, is the coca plant 'Erythroxylum coca', it is the plant in which cocaine is extracted from. while it originated in south america, coca plants were used by the natives there, the leaves of the coca have been known to produce stimulating effects since early times, the coca was mainly grown and cultivated by the Andeans who were using it at that time for medical and spiritual purposes.

Cocaine's first isolation from the coca plant, was in 1860, and at that time it spread widely as a medicinal drug ,it had a variety of uses back then, it was suggested to be helpful in morphine addiction,alcoholism,depression,Asthma and it was also thought to be a good numbing agent in eye surgeries. it was used for race runners for improving physical performance in 1876. one of the most famous people during the early discovery of cocaine, who used it and was fond of it, is the father of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud, as he was a regular cocaine user for over 20 years, he even published a paper about cocaine, stating the huge beneficial effects it has even on healthy individuals.

During the 1880s, some pharmaceutical companies started producing cocaine hydrochloride which is cocaine in powder form as it was sold as an over the counter drug, it was very easy to get. Cocaine grew even more popular throughout culture in 1886, one of which is that it became an ingredient in Coca-Cola soft drinks, when the drink first came out, well, that's where it acquired it's name from. After some time as many people started taking cocaine, the harms and fatal conditions related to cocaine use were reported ,as well as addiction, in 1903 Coca-Cola was forced to remove the drug from it's products in 1905, snorting cocaine became widely popular and this resulted reports of some nasal damage cases of individuals who snort the drug . it was not until 1914 that regulations and control of the drug took over by the states, as well as the coca plant itself . and not before 1970 that cocaine became illegal and was classified as a schedule II drug . cocaine nowadays is still illegal at a worldwide scale, but it has grown even more popular than ever, it is now the hard drug of choice among the majority.

LSD

LSD (Lysergic Acid Diethylamide) is a psychedelic drug, an active ingredient found in ergot fungus, LSD was discovered and synthesised by swiss chemist Albert Hoffman at Sandoz laboratories in Basel,Switzerland 1938 , but for 5 years since the isolation and discovery of the substance, hoping it could be good blood circulation and a respiratory stimulation, while being tested on animals, hadn't shown any promising results, it was not until the chemist tested it on himself by accident, Hoffman at that time never imagined that he would experience a remarkable, unforgivable dreamstate like and unpleasant glaring forms streaming of fantastic pictures of extraordinary shapes, intensely particoloured , he had just found a chemist gem and just after he headed home on a bycle while under effects of LSD, this is famously referred to 'Bicycle Day', attempting to answer just how a just a small drops of as molecule, size of that of the water's, potentially create that powerful experience.

Reports from Hoffman about the experiment brought curiosity and interest to other researchers at Sandoz . They began experimenting on LSD, learning more about it's effect and hoping to know if it could have any use in psychiatric setting. At a time the Lysergic acid was sold and marketed under the commercial name Delysid, at that time it became popular in psychiatric treatments and this drawn attention to the United States, that during the 1950s, medical researches in the U.S began taking place after the realization that LSD can induce similar

effects of psychosis for a short period of time, in an attempt to be used a psychiatric modelling of some conditions.

LSD has been used and was considered effective for treating alcoholism, minor symptoms of personality disorder and impulse control problem. It was thought and believed by some that it boosts creativity by people such as Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary who considered it to be beneficial for enhancing artistic visions and other creative sides, though it was used by a number of artists, musicians and inventors and was halted by some and many others, there is however, no scientific evidence backing that up.

during the 1960s, LSD became massively popular and favored by many from college parties and music festivals, and with the increase of young individuals using LSD, it is hypothesised that it might have been a major influence on the Hippie counterculture movement in the 1960s, as it could have been a cause for changing in perception and beliefs of the individuals, made them question social norms and values, and the government sending young individuals to participate in the Vietnam war and this caused a revolutionary argument, the government prohibited the possession and use of LSD and was classified as a schedule I drug along with all other hallucinogens and researches carried by Sandoz and all other researches on psychedelic drugs have been stalled despite that the drug continued its way through the culture and it is still believed to be a main element that contributed to the biggest change in popular culture.

Drugs In Media

Anyone hearing about famous celebrities dying from a drug overdose, should notice that in often times, news reports are not keen to specify the drugs involved in deaths, what types, are they illicit or prescribed either it does not matter or it is just the media's attempt to show that all drugs are same, they're just drugs, they are extremely harmful substances and over time when one keeps hearing about deaths caused by drugs, it creates this perception subconsciously that drugs equal deaths, it's true that a lot of illegal drugs when overdosed cause deaths in some cases, but they have not really caused more deaths than the legal ones like tobacco and alcohol.

other than the news, there are what is known as anti-drug campaigns they may associate with or belong to a government like the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign in the United States and campaigns like that often have connections with large media corporations and are well funded, that is the reason of there being tons of anti-drug PSAs and educational programs attempted to raise awareness and understandings about drugs and their negative impacts on health, relationships and social life. While this sounds like a decent idea to draw people away from the harmful substances of the black market.

However, in a lot of times they deliver false understandings and misconceptions about certain drugs that do not really negatively affect behavior, overall health or have any serious risks or addiction, drugs like Marijuana, LSD and psilocybin for example are confirmed to be safe and are even approved by the FDA for medical use purposes. but it could be that perhaps ideology in which that, anything as long as it affects brain health or even that which alters brain and affects the conscious state should be avoided. but even the hard drugs like meth and heroin are a bit misrepresented or exaggerated, but it is understood why they do that since their goal is to get people away from drugs in any way possible this is seen in some PSAs like Pill Poppers(1970),

but a lot of times it is even seen in movies where drugs are presented but that has nothing to do with condemning drug use, now this is mostly caused by urban legends and old beliefs that came after the drug propaganda and some of them still survived till our day.

After president Richard Nixon announced 'Drugs are public enemy number one' In 1973, The Drug Enforcement agency was first established to combat drug use, Just a couple of years after, the Partnership for Drug-Free america then was founded , while being a non-governmental organization it served similar purposes, it differs from anti-drug campaigns but had similar methods and tactics, as it mostly relied on using advertisements with marketing strategies through public media broadcast particularly television, at that time most anti-drug PSAs weren't fact checked and some were even myths, and were proven to be later on.

Catastrophes Of Drug Laws

Huge efforts have been utilized by the governments in an attempt to execute a relevant plan that is supposed to demolish the harm and negative social impact influenced by the use of drugs, not only that it is not really effective when it comes to application, but the fact that it is also creating a problematic and devastating repercussion, the reasons for this could be that the plan is not following with the objective, to solve the problem of drug abuse is to destroy the source of the problem which is drug use, so if there is no drug use, there is no drug abuse, to prevent drug use is to prevent the production and distribution of drugs, unfortunately all what this is doing is that it induces fear and discouragement of violating the rule, the same old school law that is applied to everything that is and has ever been forbidden in our communities since the foundation of civilization, but if they would work really well we would have had a utopian society.

The problem with illegalizing drugs is that there is not any convincing idea or a good reason that goes along with cultural morality, norms and standards, so just the law by itself does not give enough justification or much influence to refrain from the action, and that is just for the unsuccessful outcomes that do not meet the desired goal, there also the side effects of this 40 years long battle that ended up in a great loss economically, ideologically and humanly, mass destabilization and decimation of an entire community and what came out of all that, a fueled underground, huge profit market taking over, when something is not obtainable by legal regulations, there is always the corrupted power that responds to the demands of the impotent petitioners, when it does not prove to be working, the way is to exploit terminal force generating an unintended concoction of more detestful aftermath.

Just 6 months ago in Tondo, Manila investigations reported by the ABS-CBN during drug bust operations organized by the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) and the number of people killed in the operation is unbelievably shocking to see our society turning into an extreme dictative system that opposes humanistic values and our empathic instinct.

Alternative Approaches

In the 1990s , Portugal suffered from a heroin crisis in Portugal, where an estimated 1% of the population including bankers, students, socialites were regular heroin users and there was the highest rate of HIV infection all the other European countries. a psychologist and President of Crescer, Américo Nave founded NGO which focused on practices of harm reduction. tracking

progress and results led to the decision that a radical step in all history of drugs. Portugal decriminalized the consumption of all drugs and the first country in 2001.

Portugal made a decision that no country before has ever thought or taken consideration of, while at the same time managed to open rehabilitation centres there, just as many as usual grocery stores in a city without charging patients. Now drug addicts in this situation are more likely to turn for help if they know, they won't be imprisoned. and just a decade later, the number of drug addicts was halved and death from overdoses dramatically dropped to 30 deaths per year. what Portugal proved to be best in than any other country, is that it focusing on treating the problem, not attack the sufferer, what drug addicts need is help and treatment not punishment, how is it that portugal managed to take a healthier and a more effective approach to the matter and all others failed and the price is irredeemable but if we keep on fueling this war what this going to result in is a revolution perhaps the biggest that history would witness. but it is time that we Homo Sapiens make another evolutionary leap towards a more advanced interpersonal communication. and this involves realization of individualistic values and rights, and that when we ever want to come close to being a Utopian society.

References

1. Donya Blaze M, 'Celebs Who Died Of Drug Overdoses'
2. F. William , M. McDonald , 1973, 'Administratively Choosing the Drug Criminal: Police Discretion in the Enforcement of Drug Laws'
3. Farrell, M.M , 1998 , 'Therapeutic Uses of Cannabis, by British Medical Association Marijuana Myths and Marijuana Facts: A Review of the Scientific Evidence, by Lynn Zimmer, John P Morgan'
4. H. Richard , M. Hammer, 1971 , 'Commonly Misused Drugs - The Facts. Journal of Drug Issues'
5. Jarnow, Jesse , (OCTOBER 6, 2016), Rolling stone, 'LSD Now: How the Psychedelic Renaissance Changed Acid '
6. Leary, Timothy , 1955, 'The Theory and Measurement Methodology of Interpersonal Communication'
7. McCabe, Lee M. , 1977 , 'Psychedelic Drug Crises: Toxicity and Therapeutics'
8. M. Steve Heilig , 2002, Ayahuasca: Human Consciousness and the Spirits of Nature Ayahuasca Reader: Encounters with the Amazon's Sacred Vine
9. Novak, Steven J. , 1997, 'LSD before Leary: Sidney Cohen's Critique of 1950s Psychedelic Drug Research'
10. P. Timothy , M. Johnson , 2012, 'Failure of Intervention or Failure of Evaluation: A Meta-Evaluation of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign Evaluation"Failure of Intervention and Evaluation?: A Review of an Anti-Drug Campaign Evaluation'
11. Razam, R.M, 2006 , 'LSD from problem child to wonder drug'
12. Russo, Ethan B. , 2007, 'History of Cannabis and Its Preparations in Saga, Science, and Sobriquet'
13. Tilley, John C., 2016 ,Overdose Fatality Report M, Office of Drug Control Policy, 'Justice & Public Safety Cabinet'
14. BMJ , 1964 , 'Heroin and Cocaine'
15. Casa Palmera, 'The History of Illegal Drugs in America'
16. CBC News, 'How Europe's heroin capital solved its overdose crisis'
17. Drugs and Alcohol Today, 2012, 'Drugs, Insecurity and Failed States: The Problems of

Prohibition'

18. FDA.gov , 'Researching the Potential Medical Benefits and Risks of Marijuana'
19. -Journal of Addiction Research & Therapy, 2013, 'Legality of Cannabis in United States of America and its implication on healthcare: A 6-year retrospective study
20. Newsweek, (23,8,2018) , 'FDA approves magic mushrooms depression drug trial'
21. Scottsdale Pathfinders Recovery Center, ' Heroin's History : From the Birth of Heroin to Today'
22. Scottsdale Recovery Center, 'Celebrities Who Died From Overdoses in 2018'

edubirdie.com