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Review

The public health and social impacts of drug market enforcement: A review of the evidence

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Abstract

The primary response to the harms associated with illicit injection drug use in most settings has involved intensifying law enforcement in an effort to limit the supply and use of drugs. Policing approaches have been increasingly applied within illicit drug markets since the 1980s despite limited scientific confirmation of their efficacy. On the contrary, a growing body of research indicates that these approaches have substantial potential to produce harmful health and social impacts, including disrupting the provision of health care to injection drug users (IDU), increasing risk behaviour associated with infectious disease transmission and overdose, and exposing previously unaffected communities to the harms associated illicit with drug use. There are, however, alternatives to traditional targeted enforcement approaches that may have substantially

less potential for negative health and social consequences and greater potential for net community benefit. Some of these approaches involve modifying policing practices, fostering partnerships between policing and public health agencies, and developing systems to monitor policing practices. Other alternatives involve the provision of harm reduction services, such as safer injecting facilities, that help to minimize drug-related harms, and addiction treatment services which ultimately help to reduce the demand for illicit drugs.



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Keywords

Policing; Illicit drugs; Public health; Drug markets

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