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There is much controversy concerning the best way to reduce drug use and abuse in the United States today. The two main approaches are supply reduction and demand reduction with the former garnering much more popular and governmental support than the latter. The purpose of this paper is to make a case for demand reduction based on the problems inherent in the supply reduction strategy and on the possible advantages and positive outcomes of demand reduction. Although the paper will primarily discuss cocaine, it will by necessity focus on other drugs as well.

Historically the United States has employed a supply reduction approach with three components: 1) arresting and incarcerating the users and pushers, 2) attempting to stop the drugs coming into the country at the border, and 3) attempting to directly or indirectly prevent drugs from being smuggled out of the country where they had been grown or manufactured. To date, none of these approaches has had much positive impact. Although it seems reasonable to simply arrest and jail those individuals who use or sell illegal substances, this simply is not an effective strategy for reducing the flow of drugs. While it is true that many users and low level drug pushers have been arrested, and formerly crime ridden neighborhoods made more livable (due to pushers relocating), the impact on the availability of drugs has been minimal. (Nadelmann, 1988).

As well as having an insignificant impact on drug availability, the arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of drug law violators is having a very negative effect on the functioning of courts and jails, and is deleteriously altering law enforcement priorities. During 1987, according to the Greater Washington Research Center (cited in Nadelmann, 1989), in New York city and Washington D.C., drug law violations accounted for more than 40% and 52% respectively of all felony indictments. Drug law violators now make up 10 percent of local and state prisons populations, and more than one third of federal prison inmates. Estimates are that in fifteen years drug law violators will make up fifty percent of the federal prison population. (Nadelmann, 1988)

As well as filling the jails and overwhelming the courts the emphasis we have placed on supply reduction has also had a less obvious but perhaps more important effect on day to day law enforcement priorities. If the police forces around the country are expected to constantly cope with the ever present drug problem, as they are, we cannot expect them to be able to attend to other problems such as violence and property crimes as diligently as we might prefer. There are only so many officers, resources and monies available and we have chosen how they are to be used.

International supply reduction strategies have also experienced limited success because of several very challenging problems. First, as stated by Senator D.P. Moynihan (cited in Nadelmann, 1989) cocaine can be grown on approximately 2,500,000 square miles in South America. It has been estimated that less than 1,000 square miles is currently being used
for coca bush cultivation. Second, even if attempts at preventing pushers from one of the cocaine exporting countries from smuggling cocaine to the United States were successful, another group of entrepreneurs would step in. The high profits involved in the drug trade guarantee a large reservoir of drug suppliers. (Kaplan, 1988).

Stopping the flow of drugs right at the border has been another popular approach into which we have poured a great deal of effort and money. This strategy has also not been a great success (Reuter, 1988). It is extremely difficult to stop the flow of cocaine across the border due to the fact that the drug is so compact that it can be smuggled in anything from flowers to condoms partially filled with the drug and swallowed. The only real success that interdiction can claim is that of marijuana, presumably because of its bulk. This success may be partially responsible for the fact that the United States is now considered one of the world’s leading growers of “high quality” marijuana. (Nadelmann, 1989).

The tragedy in all of this is that while we have been increasing the drug enforcement budgets appropriated to agencies such as the F.B.I., the U.S. Attorney, U.S. Customs and the Bureau of Prisons by between 100 and 1,000 percent, coca growing areas have expanded, the price of cocaine has remained constant, the purity has gone from 12 to 60 percent and the supply has remained virtually unchanged in most parts of the country. (Nadelmann, 1988).

Although the present paper’s main focus is demand reduction in schools as it exists today, it has been used for years - mostly unsuccessfully. In the 1960’s when there was a tremendous increase in illicit drug use, scare tactics which exaggerated the frequency or seriousness of negative effects were used as an attempt to prevent usage. While scaring people worked for a short time in some cases, over the long term this technique’s primary effect was to erode confidence in those individual’s or agencies who used this strategy.

Another common strategy has been to bring in a recovering addict to speak of the evils of abuse, and through recounting what was usually a tragic story attempt to show that drug use was not an appropriate behavior to undertake or continue. One problem with this approach was that students often felt that if they did become involved in drug abuse that they would be able to get off drugs just as the recovering individual had. Others simply felt that they would not have problems with drugs because they had stronger wills than the addict. Common to all these presentations was the fact that they usually tended to be single efforts with no program development or follow up.

In the 70’s educators began to use the drug information approach believing that if students knew the facts about drugs they would not use them. Problems arose because often times the information aroused curiosity and interest and actually increased usage rates. Most of the time this type of campaign had no effect on behavior.

In the late seventies and early eighties researchers began to broaden their approaches in their attempts to decrease drug use among young people. Perry (1980) and her colleagues in their attempt to decrease the prevalence of cigarette smoking, trained teams of high school students to work with junior high school students. During this program the junior high students: 1) learned about the negative effects of smoking, 2) committed publicly to not becoming regular cigarette smokers, 3) heard testimonials from those students who experimented with cigarettes and got hooked, 4) identified pressures to smoke, 5) rehearsed
methods to resist those pressures, and 6) role played situations in which they resisted the pressures to smoke. Results showed that there were significantly fewer cigarette smokers in the treatment schools, as compared to the controls, one year after the program was carried out.

Another study carried out by Botvin and Eng (1982) focused on the acquisition of life skills by seventh graders as a means of preventing cigarette smoking. The program was conducted by trained peer leaders from the 11th and 12th grades. The components of the program were 1) smoking information, 2) decision making, 3) advertising techniques, 4) coping with anxiety, 5) communication skills, 6) assertiveness, and 7) social skills. Overall, this program resulted in reducing the incidence of new smoking by about fifty eight percent.

In 1983 Schinke and Gilchrist reported a study in which they worked with pre-junior high school students. Their program consisted of information, problem solving, decision making, persuasive communication and role playing difficult drug situations while peers and leaders offered feedback. Half way through the seventh grade while 37.5% of the control group had smoked in the previous month, only 8% of the experimental group had.

In a study reported by C. Anderson Johnson (1983) resistance skills were strongly emphasized. Seventh grade students were taught various methods of learning how to reject engaging in drug behaviors they really did not want to perform. This skill was taught by means of role modeling, rehearsal and reinforcement. After two years the group who had participated in the program were smoking 50% less than those who had not participated.

In a study which focused on alcohol misuse in elementary school, Dielman, Shope, Leech and Butchart (1989) emphasized social skills and peer pressure resistance. These researchers found that although none of the treatment main effects reached the .05 level of significance (p = .06 in one case) the control group students tended to report higher levels of alcohol use and misuse than students in the treatment group.

In an evaluation report carried out by Earle (1989) an innovative program headed up by Gerald Edwards was discussed. Uniquely Edwards and his colleagues have school district and community members trained, away from home, to analyze their school and/or community, and design new drug and alcohol prevention/intervention programs. The specific purposes of the training are to: 1) provide an understanding of drugs and their abuse, 2) identify model prevention and intervention programs, 3) identify local and regional resources, 4) through the use of a problem solving model develop action plans, 5) develop policies and procedures, and 6) devise strategies to mobilize the efforts of parents and other community members. Once the teams have been trained and return home, technical assistance and support are provided by Edwards and his colleagues to assist the groups in carrying out their individual prevention/demand reduction programs.

The findings of the Earle (1989) evaluation were quite positive. The assessment of the program, carried out in 25 high schools and 41 junior high schools, revealed that alcohol, cocaine, heroin, marijuana and cigarette use decreased anywhere from 10% to 33% (p < .05) over a two year period.

After considering both supply and demand reduction strategies, as superficially presented in this paper, one needs to ask why more effort and money isn’t put into demand reduction in the schools. The authors feel there are at least three reasons for the continued high level of support for supply reduction and the concurrent minuscule commitment
to demand reduction. First, we are very accustomed to turning to the police and courts to solve many of our problems. The United States is after all one of the most litigious countries in the world. Second is the fact that the legal, supply reduction strategy is one that is easy to understand and elicit support for. Chasing, arresting and locking up users and dealers seems reasonable and also results in many tangible results to show voters and other concerned citizens - videotape of confiscated drugs, busted pushers, and agents destroying coca shrubs. Another more subtle reason for our heavy involvement in the supply reduction approach is that we are allowed the luxury of not having to look at our own drug behaviors. Those presently in power seem to still think that the drug problem is caused primarily by pushers and third world entrepreneurs that want to make a lot of money. There seems to be little recognition that in the area of drug abuse we are definitely our own worst enemy. Demand reduction strategies would bring us more closely in contact with that reality and perhaps help the country cope with the problem.
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