

Family Drug Support

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Submission 97

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6 September 2002

Inquiry into Crime in the Community: Victims, Offenders and fear of Crime

By the House of Representatives Standing Committee on legal and Constitutional Affairs

Submission by Family Drug Support

Family Drug Support (FDS) welcomes your committee's invitation for submission into the impact of crime in the Australian community and is pleased to respond with a brief written submission. The submission is brief due to the fact that we have only just become aware of your committee taking submissions,

The main points we wish to raise are surrounding the relationship between the illicit drug trade and crimes that flow on from the drug trade.

We first submit the following facts:

- a) Over two thirds of all prisoners have either committed their crime whilst under the influences of drugs or to obtain money to purchase drugs.
- b) One dollar spent on drug treatment saves seven dollars in prison costs according to a study by the Rand Corporation in the USA.
- c) Increasing prison populations due to drug related crime means there is an ongoing need for more prison construction.
- d) Whilst there is a 'fear' factor operating in the community, which is demanding longer sentences, the fact is that most prisoners serve sentences of 12 months or less.
- e) International studies show that comprehensive drug treatment programs reduce recidivism by over 30%.
- f) Recent increases in the availability of amphetamines have meant an increase in violent crime.
- g) Families not only face the ongoing crises and traumas associated with drug abuse but also have the constant pressure and fears about criminal justice interventions in their lives.
- h) There is a disproportional imbalance between the allocation of funding to fight the drugs problem i.e. Most of the funds go to supply reduction or crime fighting leaving treatment, education and support under resourced.

- i) All Royal Commissions and enquires into illicit drugs or police in Australia have found a direct correlation between corrupt police and the drug trade. Recent revelations at the NSW Police Integrity Commission indicated that this continues.
- j) Countries that have taken steps to decriminalise drugs or introduce prescription heroin have reported significant drops in crime participation by participants – Switzerland (94%), Portugal, Netherlands and Germany.

FDS does not condone criminal behaviour. We believe in harsh sentences for major drug importation, dealing, manufacture and distribution. We do believe however that there is a need to remove crimes of minor possession, use and self-administration from the courts.

We believe it is also more productive to direct minor criminals in drug related crime to treatment rather than prison.

Recommendations

1. We would like to see an approach, which treats drug use as a health and social issue rather than a crime issue. We believe an approach such as we have regarding suicide and mental illness would be more compassionate and pragmatic.
2. We would like to see the National Crime Authority retained as a truly independent crime fighting body free from political agendas.
3. We believe that the Federal Government should cease to interfere in the rights of States or Territories to conduct treatment trials (i.e. the ACT heroin trial).
4. We believe the Federal Government should truly adopt a harm minimisation policy towards drugs and balance resources equally amongst supply, demand and harm reduction measures.
5. We believe the Federal Government should address the immediate problems of binge alcohol use and amphetamine use explosion as a matter of urgency.

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