# Drug Use: Public Health Issue or Criminal Justice Matter?

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The “war on drugs” is a dismal failure. That’s the conclusion reached by the International Centre for Science in Drug Policy—the largest global network of researchers committed to informing drug policies around the world—when it looked at the problem of illegal drug use; its findings were published in the British Medical Journal Open and reported by BBC News.

After reviewing data from seven government-funded drug surveillance systems, researchers found that the street prices in most countries for cannabis (a.k.a. pot), cocaine and opiates (such as heroin) have all fallen since 1990, despite being chemically more pure and potent than at any time during the past 20 years.

Interestingly, in most parts of the world, the amount of illegal drugs seized by law enforcement agencies has substantially increased. This means that not only are there cheaper and better illegal drugs available, but that dealers are selling a bigger volume of the contraband substances.

To address the problem, some scientists believe that governments should implement drug policies that make community health and safety a priority. “[We should] consider drug use as a public health issue rather than a criminal justice issue,” said Evan Wood, MD, PhD, the scientific chairman of the International Centre and a study coauthor.

Experts said that today, most national drug control policies focus on using law enforcement to stop the supply of drugs, rather than exploring decriminalization and strict legal regulation of illegal substances to both curb and monitor their demand.

In response to these new findings, a number of advocates in the United Kingdom are pushing for the international decriminalization of Class A substances and a shift in funding for the global war on drugs to substance abuse treatment and prevention programs around the world.

Global commissions also argue that repressive, tough-on-drugs policies help fuel and spread the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Click here for more information.

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