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## A Comparative Analysis of Drug Use Policies: A Global Guide to Prevention and Treatment

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# A Comparative Analysis of Drug Use Policies: A Global Guide to Prevention and Treatment

By: Elliot Thronson, Lauren Hawker, Patience Kies, Logan Green

## Abstract

In recent years, drug usage has increased on a global scale, and with this has come an array of responses from various countries suffering the effects. This study will compare and contrast the approaches of Norway, The Philippines, and the United States. The Norwegian approach focuses on harm reduction, preventative measures, and accessible treatment. The Philippines declared an all-out war on drugs, creating human rights violations and a lethal environment for those suffering from addiction. The United States varies by state in their responses, with many aiming to dismantle harmful federal policy from the 1970s "War On Drugs." Through these comparisons, this study will identify best practice to ensure quality treatment and prevention measures around the world.

## Introduction

- Drug abuse is a global epidemic that calls for an immediate response from social workers, government officials, and the general public.
- The United States, The Philippines, and Norway serve as three points of comparison for different approaches to drug policy.
- This study works to identify those policies and advise best social work practice.

## Methods: Comparative Analysis

- United States
  - Treatment and Criminalization
- Philippines
  - Criminalization and Punishment
- Norway
  - Prevention and Treatment

## Literature Review of the Philippines

- Major issues involving the Philippines' drug policy arose in 2016 when Rodrigo Duterte started his presidency and declared a war on drugs (Adan et al., 2023, p. 345).
  - Focus on the criminalization and punishment
- Issues involved extrajudicial killings until October of 2017, operations of mass arrest, and numerous human rights violations (Simbulan et al., 2019, para. 4-5).
- The University of the Philippines in Manila hosted the conference for the Association of Pacific Rim Universities global health program which included a workshop on drug abuse in the Philippines.
  - The Manila Declaration on the Drug Problem in the Philippines expressed the widespread concern for human life and called for drug policy that supports evidence-based, rights-based approaches (Simbulan et al., 2019, para. 10-16).

## Literature Review of the United States' Punitive Focus

- One of the major consequences of the War on Drugs has been a sharp increase in mass incarceration within the US Penal System.
  - All without dealing with a lack of access to mental health resources within underserved communities (Humphreys and Rappaport, 1993)(Patten, 2016).
- Despite the US touting itself as an egalitarian country that doesn't see race, racial disparities within the criminal justice system persist to this day (Witt, 2018).



Figure 1. From "Prison Policy Initiative" by Wendy Sawyer, 2020, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/graphs/raceinc.html>

## Comparative Analysis

International responses to drug use exists upon a spectrum, with countries like the United States of America and the Philippines focusing on punishment oriented responses to drug usage and addiction. From these policies come a vast amount of human rights abuses occurring in the name of controlling drug usage in these countries. On the opposite side of the spectrum are countries, like Norway, that are implementing evidence based approaches, with a focus on harm reduction and rehabilitation. Many parts of the United States are beginning to adopt evidence based solutions to reduce drug abuse and are moving away from criminalization. As a result of changing drug policies, a reduction in the number of low level drug convictions as well a reduced number of reported infections caused by reusing needles has been observed.

## Literature Review of Norway

- In early 2021, Norway improved their drug policy to an evidence-based model that focuses on providing healthcare to drug users (Henrick Tham, 2021).
- "The Action Plan to Combat Drug Scenes 2003-2005" was put in place to make sure that police officers were more focused on caring for people's wellbeing by connecting them with resources to help stop drug usage, instead of punishing them (Hilgunn Olsen, 2017).
- On December 19th, 2019 the report, *Drug-reform – from punishment to help* was published. From then on, Norway's goal has been to use evidence-based treatment and prevention policies, and leave criminalization in the past (Henrick Tham, 2021).

## Literature Review of the United States' Treatment Focus

- Drug abuse treatment in the United States consists mostly of traditional outpatient, inpatient, and residential services. However, many barriers prevent reliable access to this treatment, disproportionately affecting minoritized groups, those suffering from mental illness (Priester et al., 2015), and rural citizens.
  - Lack of insurance, underinsurance, and socioeconomic status also present acute barriers (Priester et al., 2015).
- In some areas of the country, harm reduction is becoming popularized as an evidence-based approach to mitigating problems created by the opioid epidemic in the United States.
  - This type of treatment can include methadone, needle exchanges, naloxone provision, and supervised usage centers.
  - These treatments have been proven to be effective in reducing overdoses, as well as bloodborne illness transmission.

## Implications for Best Social Work Practice

- Advocate to legislators for funding to increase harm reduction and evidence-based treatment practices.
- Continue education on the most recent evidence regarding drug policy and treatment.
- Educate the public, as well as government figures, on how to support rehabilitation and advocacy efforts.

## Citations

