

ABSTRACT

Author: Jason Crowell

Title: A DESCRIPTION OF ANTECEDENT SOCIAL REACTIVITY TO SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS: A COMPARISON OF THE AMERICAN APPROACH TO SUBSTANCE ABUSE TO COUNTRIES EMBRACING POLICIES FOCUSED ON HARM-REDUCTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Thesis Advisor: Diane Michaelsen

Department: Department of Social Work

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This research explores how substance abuse and its treatment has been perceived and approached from a historical perspective in the United States. It examines how policy and enforcement have created and continues to perpetuate numerous barriers to those who suffer from substance use disorders and has created a system that perpetuates the disorder itself. These barriers include discriminatory practices towards those who are poverty impacted and people of color, including the implementation of the largest system of mass incarceration in history, corporate corruption and manipulation of government, and governmental and law enforcement corruption and collusion in violation of its own policy, as well as human rights. Also explored is the devastating economic impact associated with these policies and the reluctance of legislative bodies to enact meaningful changes that reflect evidence-based solutions. This information will be juxtaposed with current progress in treatment approaches being made in other parts of the world that have proven highly effective at reducing the harm faced by individuals and society, and the stigma that is associated with substance use disorders, as well as decreasing the barriers to an alarmingly pervasive and continually growing public health crisis. This research calls for social workers to recognize the scope of this issue and the importance of rising to the challenge of advocating for the major changes that must take place on local, state, and federal levels. It calls for a re-examination of policy and practice and encourages the implementation of scientifically based policy that focuses on a public health crisis over criminality and punitive response. Finally, it calls for social workers to re-examine their own perceptions of substance use disorders and how they are approached in the various settings in which social workers have direct contact with those affected.