

Letter to the Editor

On behalf of Association for a Drug Free Portugal (APLD), I respond to the article in *the Drug and Alcohol Review (January 2012)* by Professors Hughes & Stevens - "A resounding success or a disastrous failure: Re-examining the interpretation of evidence on the Portuguese decriminalization of illicit drugs", I am writing to correct a serious matter of misinformation in the published article and in so doing, clarify the research available. This is to uphold the principle of avoiding "misinterpretation of evidence that may support and contribute to the uptake of misconceptions and erroneous accounts" related, in this case to the support for decriminalization of illicit drugs, using the example of Portugal's so-called "resounding success". I specifically take issue with the following statement on page 111:

"One purported example of evidence dismissal comes from the US Office for National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) (59). While this report does not appear on the ONDCP website and the only source that we could find is Dr Pinto Coelho himself, the central conclusions about the Portuguese reform are instructive."

We would like to draw the authors attention to the following link to the Office ONDCP website. It demonstrates in a report entitled: **DRUG DECRIMINALIZATION IN PORTUGAL: CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS-** www.whitehouse.gov/.../portugal_fact_sheet_8-25-10.pdf | quote:

'Limitations in Current Research

1. *Supporting Analysis Not Definitive: The Cato Institute report does not discuss the statistical significance of the data shifts it highlights, sometimes focusing on prevalence rate changes as small as 0.8 percent.*
2. *Fails to Recognize Other Factors: The report attributes favourable trends as a direct result of decriminalization without acknowledging, for example, the decline in drug-related deaths that began prior to decriminalization*
3. *Adverse Data Trends Not Reported : Evidence that may reflect Law 30/2000's adverse social effects – such as the increase in drug-related deaths in Portugal between 2004 and 2006 – is sometimes ignored, downplayed, or not given equal recognition.*
4. *Core Drug-Use Reduction Claims Not Conclusive: As "proof" of drug legalization's success, the report trumpets a decline in the rate of illicit drug usage among 15- to 19-year-olds from 2001 to 2007, while ignoring increased rates in the 15-24 age group and an even greater increase in the 20-24 population over the same period.⁴ In a similar vein, the report emphasizes decreases in lifetime prevalence rates for the 13-18 age group from 2001 to 2006 and for heroin use in the 16-18 age group from 1999 to 2005. But, once again, it downplays increases in the lifetime prevalence rates for the 15-24 age group between 2001 and 2006, and for the 16-18 age group between 1999 and 2005.⁵*
5. *Methodologically Limited: Cato's analysis relies heavily on lifetime prevalence data, which can be problematic when analysing the impact of policy changes over time periods as short as the 5-6 years captured in most of the studies cited in the report.*

Misinformation has led to misconception, that Portugal has a successful drug policy. In fact, the Portuguese decriminalization is not "a successful reform" but a disastrous failure, as APLD tirelessly stresses.

With my best compliments

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