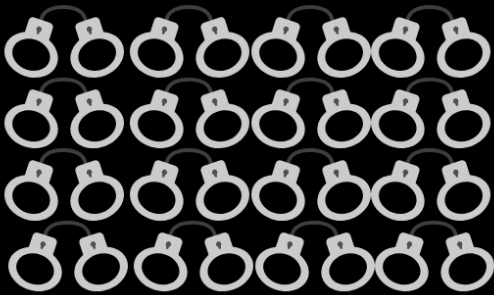


DRUG OFFENDER RECIDIVISM IN THE U.S.

Keshav Javvadi

Millions of Americans are incarcerated every year for drug offenses, but even after release from prison, rates of drug use and return to prison remain high



The U.S. made 1.6 million arrests in 2017 for drug related offenses (3)...

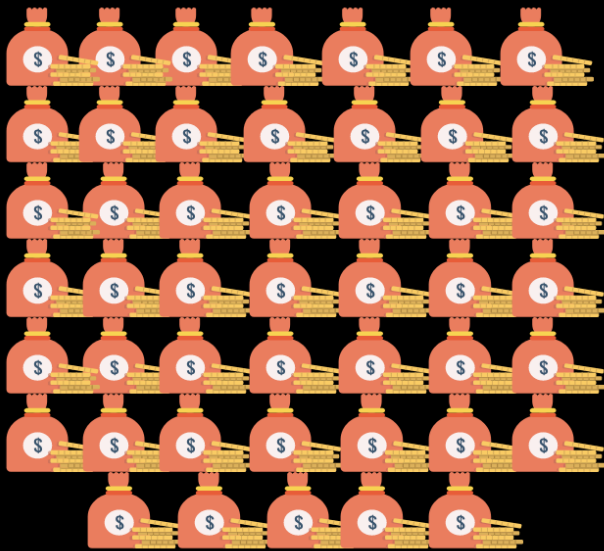
...1 in every 5 incarcerated people are in for a drug related offense (3)...



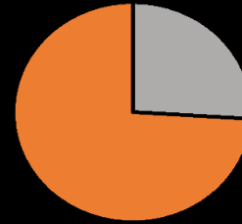
With such high recidivism and drug abuse rates despite astronomical anti-drug spending, it's clear America's approach to solving the drug problem is inefficient and ineffective.

The Problem

...and the U.S. spends more than \$47 billion a year to fight the war on drugs (3)



Those incarcerated for non-dangerous drugs such as marijuana unnecessarily face great difficulty finding employment after release, making their only option turning back to drugs. More serious users don't get the rehabilitation they need and end up back in jail.

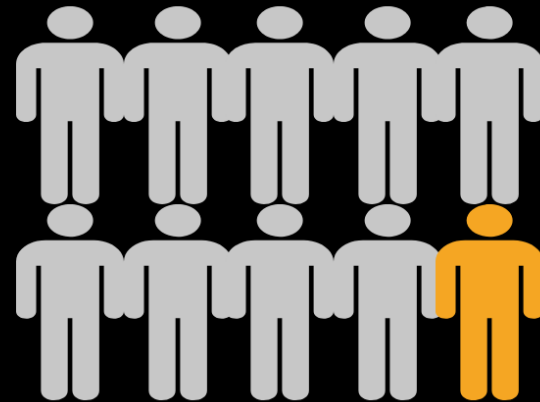


Despite 74% of released prisoners actively searching for jobs within 8 months of release (10)...

...Only 45% find employment within 8 months, with a median wage of \$8.95 (10)



In fact, only 3 out of 5 employers surveyed are willing to hire an ex-offender (6)



But even though billions of dollars are spent to lock away drug offenders to deter people from drug use and lock up offenders...

...50% of those released after incarcerated return to jail for a drug related offense within eight years (12)



America's rates of drug abuse further prove the deterrent of jail doesn't work - 27 million Americans 12 and older reported using an illicit drug in the last month. That's one in every ten people that age. (5)

America should be putting its money and efforts to better use - towards decriminalization and rehabilitation



Myths and Misconceptions



Drugs were criminalized because people who use drugs are terrible people and a threat to society.



Addiction is a failure in the morals and choices of an individual.



Prison is an effective punishment for drug offenders to ensure they learn from their mistakes.



The criminalization of drugs primarily aimed to oppress political opponents and racial minorities (4). Despite only representing 12.5% of illicit drug users, black people account for 29% of those arrested and 33% of those incarcerated for drug offenses. (2)



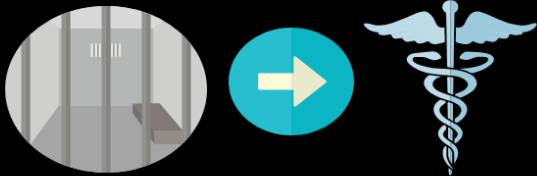
50% of incarcerated drug offenders are re-arrested within 8 years of release, showing that prison is not an effective rehab. (12)



The National Institute of Health has long dismissed the notion that addiction is a choice. 40%-60% of addiction can be attributed to biological factors. (9)

Potential Solutions

Public Rehabilitation



For serious, heavy drug users, quitting after release from prison is an incredibly difficult task. No one wants to back to jail, but addictions are hard to shake, and drug use after release is very common (1). Multiple studies have shown that rehabilitation programs have significant effects on drug abusers and reduce their use. A study conducted in Australia found very high improvement in patients that participated in a maintenance to abstinence rehabilitation program (8). The legal system also acknowledges that public opinion is shifting in favor of the rehabilitation rather than incarceration of drug offenders (11). Multiple highly successful rehabilitation facilities currently exist in the U.S. such as the Hazelden Betty Ford Center, The Caron Foundation, and the Benchmark Recovery Center. However, all these centers are privately run and are often expensive. If such treatment was offered by the government, it would be more accessible to the general public and would be a better use of taxpayer money than mass incarceration.

Decriminalization



For unharmed drugs such as marijuana (controversially classified as a Schedule 1 drug), rehabilitation is unnecessary - the drug is not addictive. The criminalization of marijuana and other minor drug offenses disproportionately and purposefully targets racial minorities and oppresses them, when in reality these drugs are doing little to no harm to American society. If illicit drugs were taxed at the same rates as alcohol and tobacco, the U.S. would generate \$58 billion every year - that's \$11 billion more than we spend on fighting drugs every year (3). The decriminalization would also allow minorities to get employment at places that normally screen ex-offenders, helping ex-offenders come out of poverty and start a new life.

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