

Understanding Portugal's Drug Decriminalization
Policy: Public Awareness and Perceptions of Law
30/2000

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Outline

Introduction

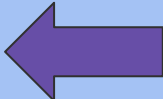
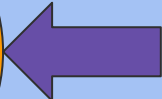
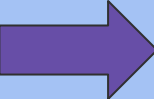
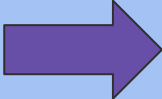
Aim

Methodology

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Findings and Discussion

Conclusion



Introduction

Portugal experienced a major drug crisis in the 1990s. Some theories that this drug crisis was a result of soldiers maintaining Portuguese colonisation bringing back these drugs, however this is not necessarily true, and is unconfirmed speculation.

As a result, the Portuguese government imposed a groundbreaking policy, known as the 30/2000 law. Earlier policies such as the those introduced in 1963 did emphasise the need for treatment of drug abuse however were not effective. This policy was one of the first worldwide that allowed citizens to use drugs. Essentially, drug users were no longer criminals, and at most were treated as patients in need of recovery or care. This paper aims to understand the effectiveness of the 30/2000 policy while incorporating the perspective of the Portuguese citizenry.

Provisions of this policy include the following:

1. Allowing citizens to hold on to a certain amount of drugs for up to 10 days
2. The creation of Commissions for the Disuasion of Drugs, groups of medical workers, social workers, and more that would review cases of drug users to determine what sort of treatment or consequence drug users would receive based on the extent of their drug use.

The 30/2000 law was accompanied by other campaigns - most famously, the **Needle Exchange Program**.

This program allowed citizens to exchange needles they used for drugs for new ones. This proved effective in reducing the reuse or sharing of needles, resulting in significantly lower cases of HIV and AIDS in Portugal.

Aim

1. Understand the perception, understanding, and awareness of this policy, in order to gain a perspective of the effectiveness of this policy.
2. Understand the potential of replicating this policy in other nations, including India.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach using **semi structured interviews** and **open-ended questionnaires** administered online.

A snowball sampling technique was used to select participants to take part in the face to face interviews.

Informed consent was taken from all respondents.

Participants were selected and brought to a separate room for questions. All interviews were conducted in June 2024.

A translator was not required as all participants in the interviews spoke English in full working proficiency. 6 interviews and 16 responses were collected for the questionnaire.

Methodology; nature of sample

- Participants were of young age (of about 20-35 years of age).
- All were office workers with stable jobs.
- They were native to Portugal.
- 6 interviewees, 16 respondents for questionnaire

For the questionnaire survey, participants were residents of Portugal, however since no characteristics were collected regarding the participants online for the purposes of privacy, not much else can be assumed.

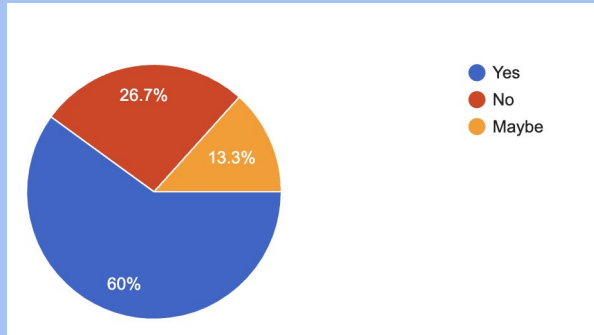
Major Findings

There were two notable findings arising from the study.

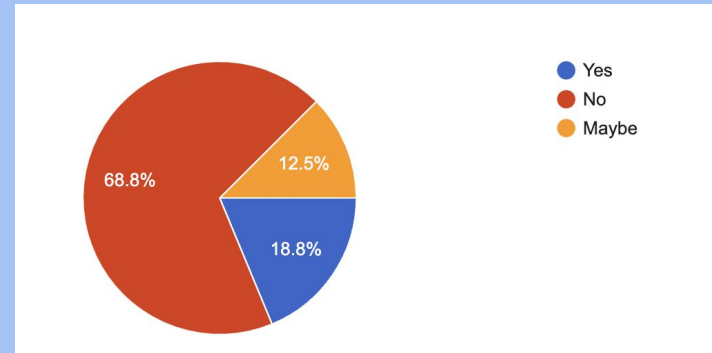
Firstly, a majority of participants were unaware of the existence of the policies put in place to reduce harmful drug use.

Secondly, most participants believed their city had drug problems.

Responses to “Do you think there is a drug problem in your city?”



Responses to “Have you heard of the 30/2000 law?”



Major Findings

Awareness:

A majority of participants were unaware of the policy, its major provisions, including the Commissions of Dissuasion of Drug Addiction. This would indicate a failure in communication on the part of the Portuguese government. When left to speculate, participants came up with broad generalisations.

Perceptions of the policy:

Largely, participants believed this policy would be misused for criminal purposes (~66%)*. The attitude of the sample strongly oppose the idea of increased drug use.

Major Findings

Perceptions of drug use in general:

Despite the presence of what is considered a groundbreaking policy, most participants (~60%) believed there is a drug problem in their city, even citing personal anecdotes which were corroborated by multiple interviewees.

Specifically, the demolishing of a slum caused “other neighborhoods [to be] flooded with criminals and drug addicts.” This brings to mind the failure of the government to:

- a. Aid drug addicts in slums like this
- b. Also, questions the effectiveness of the policy/government in reducing underlying factors that can contribute to drug use, such as their housing crisis (this link and its validity has not been explore in this paper)
- c. Prevent harm to unaffected third parties, perhaps due to weak law enforcement.

Major findings

Increased involvement of community members, for example through community meetings, could be used to make this policy more effective. This could be done by leveraging the pre existing Commissions for Dissuasion of Drug Addiction present in all states of the country, by extending their role to also collect information.

Discussion

These findings serve to question the effectiveness of Portuguese drug law

The lack of awareness of the policy implies poor communication on the part of the government, which would lead to the policy not having as much impact as it could.

Very few respondents were aware of the policy or of initiatives like the needle exchange programs, for example, due to lack of awareness.

Additionally, since participants believe disruptive drug related activities still exist, this policy should be revised to involve more citizens or more community representatives who would be able to voice such concerns.

Conclusion

In contrast to existing research which suggests that the law 30/2000 has had a substantial impact in reducing harm to citizens, this study finds that drug related disruption still exists in Portugal.

Although there has been a reduction in the number of deaths and disease caused by drugs and related activity, drug use still exists to a level which is noticeable to citizens, with a potential to disrupt a normal state of affairs.

Limitations include a small sample size, alongside a potential language barrier. This paper addresses the true effectiveness of the 30/2000 policy based on ground level reports based on the feedback from participants.

References

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