

Candidate 1 evidence

Issue: Drug Misuse in Scotland

Introduction:

Scotland has the highest number of drug related deaths in the whole of Europe with 1,172 people dying due to drug misuse in 2023 alone. People often forget this number represents real people and real families and friends who have to deal with the impact left behind. Scotland averaged 277 drug related deaths per million people aged 15-64 in 2023. In comparison, the next highest country was Estonia with 95 deaths per million people. To put this into perspective Glasgow City nicknamed the drug capital had the highest rate of drug misuse death in Scotland with 44.6 deaths per 100,000 people for the period 2019-2023. A huge reason for this growing number is the fact that there is simply not enough help and support to get people out of this cycle even when they want to stop. Often after someone is arrested with a crime linked to drug misuse, they rarely receive the help and support they need to get them back on the right track with 81% of arrestees who used heroin and/ or crack at least once a week saying they had committed a similar crime in the prior 12 months. If people are unable to get the support they need, this cycle only grows stronger with nearly 600 babies being born addicted to a form of drug between 2015- 2019, which leads us to the question, is the Scottish government doing enough to tackle this huge problem the country faces.

Options:

- Drug legalisation
- Education and youth programs
- User support

Option 1: drug legalisation

The way in which the Scottish government can tackle this issue is through the use of safe and legal consumption. This is a recently proposed idea to Scotland as it is following some of the biggest European countries in doing so. In source A we see that the Scottish government has created 408 legal consumption beds in Scotland and have pledged to invest £20 million over a five year period to create more consumption beds throughout the country. A drug consumption bed is where the user is given a controlled dosage of a certain drug (often class C) to help the user cut down the usage of it especially in unsafe places. This shows us the Scottish government are dedicated to this growing issue as the plan is set to take place over five years and is seen as an investment to try and lower the rates of ongoing drug misuse in Scotland. This idea of legal consumption can also mean that the drug deaths should fall significantly as users are taking the drug in controlled amounts and are being offered the choice to take these substances in a clean and sterile environment cutting the risk of infection and illness and even death. The whole idea of this is that in source B where it is proven that punishing and incarceration can actually cause harm and mental distress instead of supporting and helping the user. As of the start of January this year Glasgow has opened the first legal drug consumption room in the whole of the UK. This is obviously to tackle the fact that Scotland, especially Glasgow has the highest statistics of drug misuse throughout Europe. Many countries across Europe have already been trialling this method

of reducing drug deaths and the spread of infection caused by it with some even permanently keeping these rooms due to the lasting results it's having on the users. However, it is still too early to understand if this act has benefited the country or not. Source F shows Arguments have also been made regarding the potential for legislation to reduce stigma directed against people who use cannabis products and to address any current barriers people may encounter when seeking appropriate treatment or harm reduction measures for problematic cannabis use. But these have only been suggestions as the government is still very reluctant to legalise the use of drugs as the drug room is the first of its kind in the UK.

Option 2: education and youth programs

Another way the Scottish government is trying to deal with this crisis is through the use of school education and youth programs. We know in source D that The education program was released in November 2018, the strategy emphasises prevention and early intervention in young people, and for prioritisation of those most at risk of becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs. This can be a massive way of being able to support this on going issue as it will teach children the health risks associated with this issue and break down the ideas of social class and youth culture. In source E As well as this the community addiction services aims to enable those individuals most at risk of trying and using these substances (wether this is due to social class, parents, mental state etc.) or those whose families are most affected by these matters to take positive steps to recover from abusive or problematic substance use. This can greatly support those families and individuals in need as it can get right to the root cause of the issue and can not only support those who are addicted but also those closed to them on how they can support and live with this problem. The community addiction service also aims to ensure people accessing services with infants (especially primary age children or below) are educated to become more aware of the impact on children growing up and how this affects their mental and even physical well-being and long term effects this can have on the child, and parental substance use. These programs can be affective as early intervention means the child's brain is still adapting and growing so if these ideas about illegal substances and health become drilled in they will be less likely to pursue these habits in the future especially if this idea is reinforced by parents and caregivers. However children do sometimes struggle to take in this information especially if it is what they are used to as everyday life, and some children decide they don't want to listen and comply especially if this is in an environment such as a counselling space with specialist that the child isn't aware of this can be seen as scary and will make the child less likely to take in this knowledge. On top of this, in severe cases if the parent is an active user they might prioritise there own habits over their child's welfare meaning they may just completely ignore the information given to them or not act upon it. Yet again it all comes down to how much the user is wanting to change and the lengths they are willing to go to change their habits.

Option 3: user support

The right drug support and help can positively affect users as it is seen as not something they need to be ashamed of and instead it can help the user break down the way they see the problem in their head. In source C we find that Between April 2019 and March 2020 a total of 17,843 people in Scotland began treatment for a drug-related issue. 94.7% of these

people began treatment within three weeks or less after enquiring. This shows us that a lot of people in Scotland with a drug problem when are offered help, do accept it and are assessed and treated as soon as possible. However after a drug rehabilitation referral, it is possible that the user will not take this seriously especially if they aren't the ones that signed themselves up for the help, and therefore there will not be positive impacts from this intervention. A desire to succeed is the main reason on whether their rehabilitation will be successful and will keep up. At the end of the day, it is down to the user whether or not they truly want to end the cycle for good. For this reason, even if people are referred, they often do not benefit from the help given due to their mindset and negative views and associations on the issue. So although rehabilitation has many different aspects, and is often well received by those in need, it essentially depends if the offender is willing to change their outlook on the situation and accept the help they truly need.

Evaluation of sources:

One of my sources used was a article discussing why drug users should be helped instead of punished (source B), however this article was opinion based with certain statistics meaning that these have been found to support the argument that users should be helped showing that the article could be more bias to this opinion, as well as this the source was uploaded in 2020 and since then drug consumption especially in the uk has increased in the last 5 years meaning that certain aspects and statistics of this article could be un accurate. As well as this another one of my sources (source C) was produced by a website called rehab recovery and the aim of this article is to get people off of drugs this means that the article could be bias in including the most shocking statistics they can find so people come off drugs meaning it could be out dated and therefore might not equally lay out both options in fairness.

Conclusion:

In conclusion my recommendation is that the Scottish government should make rehabilitation beds more accessible for people in need of them and to keep investing and supporting this idea as it can have a huge boost on users mindsets linking to the drug and can help them consume in a safe and nonjudgmental environment meaning that the user will feel comfortable taking this drug in a controlled amount and that this idea will cut down illness and eventually death statistics. I strongly believe that although this solution is expensive it could strongly benefit not just the Scottish economy but those in the country who are in need of it most.

Source A

408 beds in Scotland £20m five years

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-48921696>

Source B

Punishing harm

<https://www.whitneyupdate.com/18622/uncategorized/should-drug-users-be-helped-or-punished/>

Source C

17,843 people Treatment 94.7% three weeks

<https://www.rehab-recovery.co.uk/addiction-guides/drug-addiction-statistics-scotland/#:~:text=Treatment%20for%20drug%2Drelated%20problems%20statistics%20in%20Scotland&text=Between%20April%202019%20and%20March,less%20after%20enquiring%20%5B8%5D>

Source D

Education program released November 2018. most at risk addicted

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/alcohol-and-drugs/drugs-education-and-prevention/>

Source E

The Community Addictions Service steps for substance use. aware of the impact on children of parent substance

<https://westlothianhscp.org.uk/article/29287/Drugs-and-or-Alcohol-How-to-get-HELP#:~:text=The%20Youth%20Action%20Project%20offers,General%20Health%20%26%20Wellbeing>

Source F

reduce stigma directed against people cannabis encounter seeking treatment

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7615739/#S2title>