A public health approach as a base for Drugs Policy: the Portuguese case

Side Event, 20 April 2016, New York

João Goulão

General-Director for Intervention on Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies
National Coordinator on Drugs, Drug Addiction and the Harmful Use of Alcohol

Ministry of Health, PORTUGAL
PORTUGUESE POLICY

Coordinated Public Health-oriented Approach Based On 5 Pillars:

- Treatment
- Prevention
- Dissuasion
- Harm Reduction
- Reintegration
Decriminalisation Law:

consumption, acquisition and possession for own consumption of plants, substances or preparations constitute an administrative offence and can not exceed the quantity previewed for individual use for a 10 days period.

**Exceeding this quantity, criminal procedures take place.**

- The drug addict is considered a sick person in need of health care;
- The dissuasion intervention provides an opportunity for an early, specific and integrated interface with drug users;
- The dissuasion intervention is aimed and targeted to the drug users’ characteristics and individual needs.
15 years after

SOME RESULTS
Small increase reported in illicit drug use amongst adults;
Reduced illicit drug use among adolescents, at least since 2003;
Reduced burden of drug offenders on the criminal justice system;
Reduction in the prevalence of injecting drug use;
Reduction in opiate-related deaths and infectious diseases;
Reduced stigmatization of drug users;
Increases in the amounts of seized drugs;
Reductions in the retail prices of drugs;
Increased efficiency of Police and Customs.
Processes and Offenders 2001-2015

Source: SICAD: EMPECO
Intervention in Dissuasion

Referrals 2001-2015

112,567 Processes

50,438 Non-problematic Drug Users

11.877 Problematic Drug Users

98,697 Offenders

13,343 Specialized Support

9,373 7.693 Treatment Teams/Centre of Integrated Responses

Source: SICAD: EMPECO
In your opinion what is the purpose of the Commission?

- Help to quit the use of illicit substances: 71%
- To inform about the problems associated with the use of illicit substances: 67%
- To help change the lifestyle: 63%
- To inform about the law: 43%
- Referral to Health Services: 16%
- To punish/penalise: 9%
- Other function: 5%

Source: SICAD: EMPECO
Globally do you consider that the Commission contributed to change your life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and consequences of use</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induce reflection/awareness</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivate for change</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Style</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life (health focus)</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect about Use</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (+ appreciation family/friends,…)</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SICAD: EMPECO
DRUG USE IN THE GENERAL POPULATION, PORTUGAL
TOTAL (15-64 YEARS) LIFETIME PREVALENCE BY TYPE OF DRUG (%)

Source: Balsa et al., 2014 / SICAD: DMI-DEI
DRUG USE IN THE GENERAL POPULATION, PORTUGAL YOUNG ADULT POPULATION (15-34 YEARS) 
LIFETIME PREVALENCE BY TYPE OF DRUG (%)

Source: Balsa et al., 2014 / SICAD: DMI-DEI
Increase of treatment demand, specially amongst cannabis users

Source: SICAD - DEI
Injection drug Use in the last 12 months

Source: SICAD - DEI
Diagnose of HIV infection by characteristics of sampled population, Portugal 1983-2014

Reduction of drug-related deaths

Source: SICAD - DEI
Nowadays the decriminalisation model was redefined: the priority and the strategic option is the early intervention approach among young cannabis users.

We are taking advantage of the preventive potential of the Commissions, together with the police authorities.

Dissuasion is, now, more than a “second line” for preventive intervention
Scientific consensus that criminal sanctions are ineffective and counter-productive; they do nothing to address drug use consequences.

Nowhere International Drug Conventions require that personal use should be criminalised.

**SOME CONCLUSIONS**

**HEALTH PROTECTION**

**INSTEAD**

**OF PUNISHMENT**

**DRUG POLICIES**

**SHOULD BE BASED ON HEALTH**

**AND NOT ON PUNISHMENT**
Thank you for your attention!

joao.goulao@sicad.min-saude.pt

SICAD
General Directorate on Addictive Behaviours and Dependencies

Avenida da República n.º 61 - do 1º ao 3º e do 7º ao 9º
1050-189 Lisboa - Portugal

T. + 351 211 119 000 - F. + 351 211 112 795
sicad@sicad.min-saude.pt – www.sicad.pt