



Perceptions of Rehabilitation and Retribution in the Criminal Justice System: A Comparison of Public Opinion and Previous Literature

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Abstract

Lawmakers in the United States are entrusted with the decision of how best to handle perpetrators of nonviolent drug offenses. It has long been maintained that if an elected official is a proponent of rehabilitation, they will be viewed as soft on crime and thus rejected at the polls. A consistent stance supportive of punitive retribution has been the result. This research reveals that rehabilitation efforts are not only more successful and cost-effective, but that the public is strongly in favor of this policy change. Theories of Labeling, Social Control, and Conflict are employed, and social policy implications follow.

Introduction

Public interest in the outcome of criminals is a paramount issue in corrections. The extent to which the public should help criminals is highly debated and controversial. Society wants criminals to pay for their crimes, but little interest is given to the outcome of the criminals after incarceration. This goes to show that the punitive era in corrections is alive and well [1], but what implications does this have on the rehabilitation or criminals? People have preconceived and often misplaced perceptions about the idea of correctional rehabilitation and its effectiveness. Rehabilitation goes directly against the "tough on crime" mantra that was introduced in the 1980's. When thinking of populations that need rehabilitation the most, addicts are often the first group that comes to mind. This population is notoriously difficult to treat, given their high rates of recidivism [2].

This study aims to determine the extent to which the public prefers either the retribution of criminals or the rehabilitation of criminals. Narrowing it down to drug criminals keeps a consistent and succinct control for this research. This study also seeks to gauge how well public perception of retribution versus rehabilitation aligns with professionals in the criminal justice system and with the current policies that are in place - all while simultaneously being compared with previous research about the effectiveness of both of both rehabilitation and retribution. This topic is important because it has the potential

to discover the best way to treat drug crime in today's society. This study also has the potential to provide suggestions as to how social and public policy should change in terms of the rehabilitation of drug criminals. This study will incorporate and integrate numerous criminological theories, but will largely focus on labeling theory, social control theory, and conflict theory [3]. When considering the labeling theory, it is important to remember how people become labeled and what effects the label has on the individual's subsequent deviant behavior. Often times, people engage in crime due to a lack of legal means of monetary gain. Once they have been arrested and released, it becomes even more difficult to achieve legal means because employers typically do not want to hire someone who has been through the legal system [4]. This begs the question: Would correctional rehabilitation even work if society were seemingly unwilling to forgive criminals?

Another major theory that this study will be focusing on is social control theory. This involves a person's bond to society. When a person's bond to society is broken or weakened, it allows for deviance to occur [4,5]. When criminals are incarcerated, that destroys their bond to society. They are cut-off and removed from it. This is a problem, given the core belief of this theory. Those strong social and moral bonds or attachments to society protect individuals from engaging in deviant acts. Another problem is that when corrections systems do not provide

rehabilitation, it suggests to these criminals that the system does not believe that they are capable of changing or worth the effort to help them change, further weakening their already damaged bond to society.

When taking into account the larger problem of this study, that is retribution versus rehabilitation, conflict theory comes into play. Conflict theory is the competition within society of different groups trying to gain majority control of society and its rules. In other words, one group wants to define what deviance and crime actually is. In terms of this study, the two groups are the policies of the criminal justice system and those that implement them versus those who the policies are affecting. It seems as though retribution is far more important to society than rehabilitation is [6] however, this belief is illogical when taking into consideration the cost of incarceration versus the cost of rehabilitation [7,8]. When integrating the above theories and information, a dominant question develops: Does the public opinion of rehabilitation versus retribution align with the opinions of professionals in criminal justice and with the previous research that has been done on this topic? Additionally, what implications does this have for social and public policy?

Literature Review

The rise of the punitive era of punishment in the United States is the result of a multitude of influences. Most notably, the "War on Drugs," which was a solution aimed at reducing the growing crime rates in the 1970's and 1980's [9]. Policy makers enacted a series of laws that supported incarceration much more fervently. These new policies allowed for much harsher and lengthier punishments for the convicted. While many have tried to come up with alternative explanations as to why the punitive era and increased use of punishment occurred during this time, the research is undeniable - it is the result of the policies put in place by state and federal legislatures [9].

Those new policies emphasize retribution and punishment. Retribution focuses on giving the offender what they deserve. Harsh prison sentences are thought to help to deter crime because people do not want to do the time. An example of this is New York's Rockefeller Drug Laws, which impose severe sentences for drug violations to deter people from committing those crimes in an attempt to reduce the number of those types of offenses [10]. Rehabilitation on the other hand, focuses on helping the offender and getting them on the path to a drug-free life. In contrast to retribution, people do not commit crimes if they have been rehabilitated because they are a changed person rather than because the sentence they might receive, will be long. Studies have shown that rehabilitation is actually more effective in reducing recidivism rates than harsh prison sentences are [10]. A common misconception is that people think it is better to lock individuals up and that rehabilitation is expensive and inefficient. However, studies have shown that rehabilitation actually has public health and economic benefits associated with it and it is more effective than incarceration [8].

Currently the tide is turning in favor of a more rehabilitative than retributive approach socially, but not politically. Over 50% of Americans believe that there should be laws in place to prevent workplace discrimination of those who were formerly involved in the criminal justice system. Close to 70%, want policies funded at the federal level to help the formerly incarcerated or otherwise detained, find employment [11]. All of this for good reason, as it has been shown time and again that not only is a more restorative approach better in the long term for recidivism rates, but also its total costs to the taxpayer are exponentially reduced. A study by the Rand Corporation for instance, showed that for every dollar spent treating cocaine addiction, seven and a half dollars are saved down the road [12]. The cost of incarceration in California, a state whose prison population is truly out of control, is about 27,000 dollars a year per person, whereas the cost of yearlong state funded rehab is about 4,500 dollars a year per person [13].

While some naysayers might argue that these stats only apply at the state level, there is ample evidence to indicate federally that this approach is better as well. Research done directly by the United States Department of Justice indicates that three years post release, around two thirds, 67.5% of those let free, will be arrested again, while those who have completed a drug court, or an intensive rehabilitative program while incarcerated, will have a slightly over 40% re-arrest rate [14]. This reduction is a strong indicator that rehabilitation is more effective at reducing recidivism.

Current Policy

Policies that were put into place to "get tough on crime" are still in use today. These policies were enacted to address the national crime "problem." To do this, political campaigns used fear tactics to get people to approve building more prisons, limiting prisoner rights, getting rid of judges that give out lenient sentences, and passing legislation that kept criminals in prison longer, and it worked (Schultz, 2000). U.S. incarceration rates skyrocketed. They are still far higher than those recorded elsewhere. This section will provide a brief overview and explanation of many of those policies. How they relate to this current research will be the ultimate aim. These policies are considered major contributors to the high rates of incarceration seen in the United States for drug crimes [9].

The first of these is mandatory sentencing guidelines and mandatory minimum sentences. Judiciaries have always had discretion when it comes to sentencing the convicted, meaning they have the ability to choose how long someone should be imprisoned. For most of history, they have only been bound by maximum sentencing guidelines, meaning there are sentencing length constraints that a judge cannot exceed. These guidelines were put in place to ensure that punishments were proportionate to the crime committed [15]. This was until The Sentencing Reform Act of 1984 was put in place in order to "further the basic purposes of criminal punishment: deterrence, incapacitation,

just punishment, and rehabilitation” United States Sentencing Commission, 2016. These guidelines provide a range of time to which an offender could be sentenced, and for the first time, this comes with a minimum sentence.

Another policy instigated to increase the prison population and the uses of imprisonment as punishment were Truth-in-Sentencing laws [16]. The federal government promoted these policies by providing grants for states that enacted these laws. Typically, they require that repeat violent offenders serve at least 85% of their prison sentences or that the states prove that they are increasing their prison populations. These laws were expanded in 1996 to include drug offenders as well. By 1999, 29 states had adopted the federal Truth-in-Sentencing laws and received funding. An additional 14 states had Truth-in-Sentencing laws, but they did not meet the federal requirements for funding, and only eight states had no Truth-in-Sentencing laws [16]. Researchers found that when Truth-in-Sentencing laws were enacted along with additional prison sentence reforms, they led to large prison population increases [16].

First introduced in the 1990s to address the problem of repeat offenders, Three Strike Laws have become increasingly controversial over time. In 1994, 74% of Americans supported Three Strike Laws [17,18]. The federal government along with 22 additional states then passed variations of Three Strike Laws because of this support [19]. These laws generally require that a person convicted of three serious felonies be imprisoned for a substantial period of time, often life without parole. Researchers found however, that these laws did not reduce crime by any statistically significant amount. They also found that the Three Strike Laws were used far more often against crimes involving marijuana, not the violent crimes that they were intended to target. In fact, one study found that 85% of the uses of Three Strike Laws were applied to non-violent drug crimes [18,20]. Three Strike Laws have also caused prison populations and costs to increase. Consequently, they are thought of to be unsuccessful [18].

These policies have caused the prison lengths for all crimes, but especially those convicted of drug offenses, to increase dramatically. In turn, it has led the incarceration rates in the United States to climb to an all-time high. The United States has the highest percentage of incarcerated people in the world (Walmsley, 2009). In terms of exact numbers, 7.3 million people are currently under the control of the criminal justice system. Meaning, there are 2.3 million people in jail or prison, 800,000 people on parole, and 4.2 million people on probation. A huge driving force behind these astronomical numbers is the increasing rate at which people convicted of drug crimes are being incarcerated [21]. The problem herein lies that these laws and policies were created for violent criminals, but have been disproportionately applied to non-violent drug crimes [20]. Additionally, there is reason to believe that rehabilitation is a better way to prevent the recidivism of those convicted of drug crimes.

There are several different forms of publicly funded drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs available to abusers. Such types include short and long-term residential treatment, outpatient treatment, and individual and group counseling. A residential treatment program offers care 24 hours a day with a pre-determined length of stay. The outpatient treatment is generally less expensive and suitable for those who are involved with jobs, school, family, etc. Individual counseling utilizes the 12 step program. Finally, group therapy uses social reinforcement to help someone overcome their addiction [22]. Studies have shown that the most used substance that people enter into publicly funded rehabilitation services for is alcohol at 23.1%. Another 18.3% enter rehabilitation abusing alcohol combined with another drug. White people are the most represented within these programs at 59.8%. Participating abusers can be of all ages, but the most common is 20-29, with them comprising 29.2% of all reporting participants [23].

Often times, those convicted of drug crimes are convicted of felony level offenses. Having a felony conviction has severe consequences for an individual once they try to re-enter society. These “collateral consequences” continue to last even after one has been rehabilitated. Because of the enormous amount of laws and restrictions applied to ex-convicts in the U.S., the recidivism rates are enormously high at 67% compared to 35% and 39% in Sweden and Japan, respectively. Some of these restrictions vary by state, but can include not being able to vote, not being able to obtain a driver’s license, or becoming ineligible for food stamps or public housing. These restrictions place many burdens on the individual and can cause them to obtain their needs through alternative means, such as crime. Even after one has successfully completed their sentence, they then become a victim of the criminal justice system and are set up for failure. Even a five-year sentence can turn into a life sentence as a result of collateral consequences [24].

Among the collateral consequences one receives because of a felony conviction is the disadvantage of not getting a job simply because of a conviction. When applying for a job, most employers ask about criminal history or if one has a felony conviction. Many employers also conduct background checks. This leads to a bias based on one’s history while also ignoring his/her qualifications for the job. A criminal conviction reduces the chances of a job offer or even a callback by 50% [25]. As a result, a movement known as the “Ban the Box Campaign” has taken off. Currently, 26 states and over 150 cities and counties have adopted “Ban the Box” or similar policies known as “Fair Chance” policies [26]. This campaign’s platform is the removal of the section that asks if the applicant has been convicted of a crime or felony on job applications. Not only does the box make it more likely that an employer will dismiss an application if the box is checked, but it discourages those who would have to check the box from applying. This does not mean that the employer will not ever ask about the applicant’s criminal record, but rather that the person will stand a chance at getting an in-person interview with the

employer, which will allow the person a better chance at proving their employability. Banning the box is beneficial to both the employer and the convicted, as well as society. It is estimated that our nation suffers a \$78-87 billion loss per year due to those with criminal history not being able to work. If they were able to work, they would have larger tax contributions and would save the taxpayer money by keeping them out of the criminal justice system [25].

To briefly sum up the literature, around 1986, a new era started to form that imposed mandatory minimum sentences on drug crimes. This was the beginning of what is known as the “tough on crime” era. Prior to this time period, Americans believed in rehabilitating offenders. A survey in 1980 found that 32% believed that the purpose of prison was to punish offenders while 53% believed that it was to rehabilitate them. By 1989, this perception started to shift to 38% punish and 48% rehabilitate. In 1993, the views had flipped, with 61% saying that the purpose of prison was to punish and 25% saying that the purpose of prison was to rehabilitate [27]. The dramatic shift from being “soft on crime” to “tough on crime” leads to more arrests and people being incarcerated for longer periods of time, causing the prison population to increase significantly. From 1980-1995, the prison population increased from 329,000 to 1.5 million [27]. Around 2004, the focus shifted to “smart on crime,” which attempts to rehabilitate offenders and help them reenter into society.

Labeling Theory

This research will be integrating and applying three theories to the data and information gathered for this study. The first of these is labeling. Every day, people are assigned with labels, good and bad. It is a simple fact of life that people use labels to place others into categories. When researching labeling in the criminal justice system, one study looked at individuals across their lifetime and placed them into categories based on whether they are in the community or incarcerated. The categories or “states” associated with prison or jail are abuser, abuser in treatment, or abuser not in treatment. The four states associated with being in the community are abuser, non-abuser, aftercare (community-based treatment immediately after release from prison), and non-aftercare community-based treatment [8]. The individuals can move between states, but are confined to one of seven for their lifetime, illustrating the difficulty associated with escaping labels. Unknowingly, these labels have a significant impact on those who label as well as those who are being labeled. When one is labeled as a delinquent, they will often engage in delinquent acts, and those around them will always see them as a troublemaker. The label alone can be seen as a cause for deviance by if it is internalized by the individual being labeled [4].

A label will stick even long after it was assigned and it is very hard to escape such a label [4]. For example, if someone was always in trouble in their younger years, but stays out of trouble as they mature, it is their previous behavior that is remembered.

It can be hard to assign a new label that replaces a preexisting one. When one is convicted of a crime, that person will always be an ex-convict, whether they stay out of trouble or not. This label will impact an individual’s ability to get jobs, find housing, and other factors that make it difficult to function in society [4].

On the other hand, a different label could be assigned to someone that goes through drug treatment as opposed to serving out a prison sentence, especially if this means that they will have a clean criminal record. They could be labeled as clean, successful, motivated, and determined, along with many others. Notice that these are positive labels, while there are few positive labels given to those who serve prison sentences. Thus, a positive label might encourage individuals to fulfill that label and stay clean and not recidivate. The other side of labeling is the perception of the public. When one goes on to get a job, an employer is likely to hire someone who went through a treatment program rather than one who served a prison sentence, even if they were convicted of the same crime [4].

Social Control Theory

There are many forms of social control theory, but this study will focus mainly on Hirschi’s social-control theory [5]. This theory focuses on one’s bonds to society, which consist of four elements: attachment, involvement, commitment, and belief, with attachment being the most important [4]. An individual’s bonds to society are what help them to function according to society’s norms and to not commit deviant acts. When moral and social bonds are broken and/or weakened, this leads to deviance. Being incarcerated does just this; it eliminates just about every bond one has to the world outside of the prison walls. When one is released, they may not have family or friends on the outside to act as a support system. They are unable to get jobs that will provide economic stability. Depending on the length of the sentence served, the world they once knew has changed so much that they may not know how to live in their new world, and they tend to have zero bonds. As a result, they turn to the only thing they know, or the only means they can to achieve what they want or need, which is crime.

This theory states that one’s bond to society consists of four elements works for the presumably innocent and hopeless as well. Many children grow up without parents or other family members to care for them, whether they are incarcerated themselves or for other various reasons. The children too will often fall victim to the system and end up in prison. This is all because of the bonds that they have not yet established with society or because of the illicit bonds that they may have formed because of their parents. This works for children who grow up in a drug home or around peers who use drugs as well. It has been shown that association with delinquent peers who partake in drugs correlates to an increase of one’s own drug use [28].

Weakening any of the four elements will weaken the bond as a whole. While in prison, away from conventional bonds, inmates develop their own bonds. They become more involved

with other inmates and develop beliefs about how they should live their life [10]. These bonds tend to be stronger than the bonds on the outside. This will influence their criminal behavior, keeping them in the continuous cycle of the criminal justice system.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory focuses on various social classes and groups in society and the power each of them has to influence laws and their enforcement [4]. Because white people are the majority and tend to have the most power and influence within society, laws tend to favor whites. Conflict theory says that minority groups will not receive equal treatment and thus do not have access to the same programs that a majority group would [6]. In relation to this research, this theory supports the statistic that very few minorities even have the opportunity to have some form of rehabilitative treatment while incarcerated, with no more than 10% of state inmates receiving any kind of drug abuse treatment [8]. This shows how those who make policies do not make them to benefit the rest of the population, but rather for their own interests. This has profound adverse impacts on those who are not in power in the criminal justice system.

Conflict theory appears to make this issue of retribution versus rehabilitation a social policy issue. As mentioned above, much of the population actually supports retribution. They would rather see someone thrown in prison for some lengthy prison sentence. This is largely due to a misconception regarding cost and that the offender in rehabilitation would not face any type of punitive sentence. Both of these are false assumptions. Rehabilitation may actually prove to have positive benefits to society as well as the criminal justice system and be economically favorable [8]. The criminal justice system also tries to incorporate rehabilitation into a sentence rather than have it as a stand-alone alternative [10]. This study plans to debunk these misconceptions. The public, in turn, can see the benefits of rehabilitation in an accompaniment to retribution type punishment.

Data and Methods

Methods, Analysis and Sampling

The populations under study are those branded as “criminals” or “deviant” and the discrepancies that exist between how they are perceived and treated through the lens of rehabilitation and traditional retribution (prison). For purposes of this study, researchers focused solely on drug crime. The data collected for this study are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. The aim being to collect from as many sources as possible, data regarding perceptions of and treatment of substance abusers, as seen through the eyes of the general populace and via those that work with them first hand. There are three primary sources of information that will be sourced for this work. First and foremost, in person interviews conducted with those who are well connected with the criminal justice system. These include two judges, a police officer, people that work in rehab centers,

reformed addicts, ER nurses, doctors, and emergency response professionals. These people provide the primary support and contact with the population in question and will highlight the much needed first-hand experience with which to formulate and view the information gathered. The second source will be a survey created to assess public perceptions of rehabilitation and retribution of criminals. Lastly, medical and academic sources through journals, peer reviewed articles, and books will make up the final source. The researches gathered from this latter data source include the success rates of both rehabilitation and retribution and the policies in place for drug crimes in the United States.

The data from these sources were analyzed and integrated in order to determine a mutual opinion of the criminal justice system in terms of rehabilitation and retribution. The viewpoints were divided into two sections, the opinion of the general public and the opinions of those who are actually personally involved in the criminal justice system. These opinions were compared and contrasted with each other, with previous research about rehabilitation and retribution, and with current policies in place that emphasize retribution over rehabilitation. The aim of the comparisons of these data sources was to determine the extent to which they coincide with each other and to formulate a way that society can address and come to an agreement about what should be done in order to best help drug addicts and convicts in the system.

Data Collected

The total amount of interviews conducted were nine for an N=9. Interviews were informal and unstructured. Many were conducted without a recording or transcript in order to encourage full disclosure. Their personal identities were kept completely anonymous aside from their occupation or social status. In order to control for the information that would be the most useful for this research, interviews were mainly kept to a simple conversation about rehabilitation and retribution and how those two ideas are viewed in their workplace and in today’s society. Given the target research topics, the interviews were examined using content analysis, defined as “the systematic qualitative and quantitative description of some form of communication... examined for the purpose of discovering patterns and meanings” [29]. The information gathered from the interviews was analyzed and words were coded that related to rehabilitation and retribution ([Appendix 1](#)) and the applicable theories for this research ([Appendix 2](#)).

The survey used for this study was a fixed-response questionnaire, which was sent out to representatives from three universities, two on the west coast of the United States and one in Singapore, with a large population from the United States. The total amount of responses were 94 for an N=94. The survey consisted of 15 questions, which were designed to directly address the respondent’s opinions about rehabilitation in the justice system. They were also loosely structured around the three theories for this study. Potential responses to the

survey questions were “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.” No “neutral” or “I do not know” option was provided. Unfortunately, the survey did not ask for demographic information, but because the survey was sent to three universities, it can be reasonably assumed that the responses came from younger, educated, and more socially liberal individuals.

To analyze the data from the survey, the responses were divided into two sections or categories, one for those that chose “strongly agree,” and “agree,” and another for those that responded with “strongly disagree,” and “disagree.” Whichever category had the majority of the responses (at least 60%) was the one that researchers chose to reflect the general view of the public. Each question in the survey had one category that the large majority of the participants chose, so there was little room for broad interpretation on the part of the researchers. Additionally, the survey website used (surveymonkey.com) creates graphs and charts of the data that depict which response was the most popular. There were no additional variables that required being analyzed using statistical formulas [29]. Graphs of the responses have also been provided ([Appendix 3](#)).

The policies in question for this research, which have been previously defined and explained in terms of retribution in the literature review section, are sentencing guidelines, mandatory minimum sentences, Truth-in-Sentencing laws, Three Strike Laws, lengthy prison sentences, and high incarceration rates in the U.S. These policies have been associated with the retribution and punishment mentality of the criminal justice system. For this research, the survey questions addressed some of these specifically. In all, they were largely generalized to an all-inclusive term of “retribution.”

Data and Theories

With regard to data collection, the three theories will play an important part in not only the questions themselves, but also how the results are interpreted. Labeling, Conflict, and Social Control are the three that are most pertinent to the problem at hand.

Labeling Theory

In order to analyze the data for labeling, the interviews were coded for certain words, such as “convict,” “addict,” and “criminal.” The researchers then determined the person’s opinions about the person being labeled based on the surrounding context of the conversation when those words were used. As for the survey, researchers included certain questions that addressed labeling. For instance, “I would be frightened if someone I knew was a convicted felon, regardless of the nature of the offense.” “People should never be able to get their record cleared after serving a prison sentence, regardless of the nature of the offense.” “I would break off a significant relationship if I found out the person had a criminal record of any kind.”

Social Control Theory

The lack of a healthy bond or attachment to society is what

causes people to become criminals, according to social control theory. In order to test for this, researchers interviewed members of the community who work in rehabilitation facilities or who were former addicts. Researchers asked questions such as, “How do you perceive people perceiving the addicted?” and looked for answers that involved the addict’s personal relationships and found that this was a very crucial aspect of a person’s road to recovery.

The survey addressed conflict theory by asking participants to indicate their level of agreement with statements. These include: “Non-violent offenders ought to get a second chance after their sentence is served without the impediment of a criminal record.” “I would be frightened if someone I knew was a convicted felon, regardless of the nature of the offense” (that question also applied to labeling theory). “The convicted should remain separated from society even after the sentence is served.” “I believe prison sentences should be longer for drug crimes than they currently are, regardless of their nature.” Finally, “I believe it is the individual’s sole responsibility to solve their substance abuse problems.” These questions aimed at asking about the drug addicts relationships and interactions with others and how long people believe that a person convicted of a drug crime should be separated from the public, or essentially how long the bond to society should be broken.

Conflict Theory

In order to inquire about people’s views when it comes to conflict theory, interviewers asked them to reflect on the current policies in place and their effectiveness. Questions such as, “What is your current perception of the drug war?” and “Would you say that the prevailing image of rehab as ‘soft and effeminate’ is hurting society’s chances of taking it seriously, or do you think people have a different image of rehab?” were aimed at decoding any discrepancies between the current policies and actual opinions about them. This is to center around the conflict between those who are in control and making policies and those who the policies are affecting; lawmakers versus criminals.

The survey addressed conflict theory by asking participants to indicate their level of agreement with these statements. “I believe the rehabilitation of criminals is too expensive for the taxpayer.” “The criminal justice system is too soft on drug users and non-violent drug offenders.” “I believe drug use among consenting adults should not be a criminal offense.” “Public funded rehabilitation is a good idea.” “I believe the criminal justice system and society preys on the vulnerable.” These questions were designed to discover the general public’s opinions of the current policies in place and if they would be agreeable to an expanded social policy centered on rehabilitation.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to compare the general public perception of rehabilitation and retribution of criminals with the opinions of professionals in the criminal justice system

and with previous research on rehabilitation and retribution. This research was focused on people convicted of drug-related crimes in order to accommodate for time constraints. Data were gathered for public perception via survey (Appendix 3). To assess the opinion of criminal justice professionals, informal in-person interviews were conducted of two Superior Court Judges, a police officer, multiple staff-members at a rehabilitation facility, medical professionals from the American Medical Response (AMR) ambulance system, and an ER doctor. Interviews of previous drug addicts and people who have gone through the criminal justice system were conducted as well (Appendices 1,2). The data from those sources were then compared to previous research on rehabilitation and retribution including current laws that are in place. This research demonstrates that the retribution/punitive era of criminal justice is just as prevalent as ever [30], but is starting to move back toward rehabilitative approaches, at least socially, but not necessarily politically. This research also shows that the rehabilitation of criminals is more effective at reducing recidivism [14] and is therefore more cost effective Little Hoover Commission, 2003, suggesting that rehabilitation is the approach that the system should be using.

Current Policy

Many policies currently in place emphasize retribution much more than they emphasize rehabilitation. These include sentencing guidelines, mandatory minimum sentences, Truth-in-Sentencing laws, Three Strike Laws, increases in the length of prison sentences, and the high rates of incarceration in the United States in comparison to other developed countries [9]. Of those incarcerated in federal prisons, 48.6% are incarcerated for drug related offenses [31]. Drug offenses account for 17% of the total inmate population in both state and federal prisons. They also account for the largest proportion of new admissions and parole violation admissions [32]. Inmates convicted of drug crimes serve an average sentence of 14 months [33]. These numbers do not include the thousands of people in jail for drug-related offenses. All of these statistics emphasize a political rhetoric of retribution and punishment. Instead of helping people convicted of drug crimes to receive treatment, the offenders are being incarcerated at the highest rate of all.

Public Opinion

Current policies suggest that the public's preferred treatment of drug criminals is incarceration, but this study found that this is not the case. When surveyed, the vast majority of people preferred that people convicted of drug crimes received drug treatment and therapy instead of incarceration. In other words, the majority of people favored rehabilitation over retribution 89.25% of those surveyed. This is a direct disagreement with the current "tough-on-crime" policies in place. In fact, when asked if the criminal justice system is "too soft" on non-violent drug offenders, 90.42% of respondents said that it was not and 89.36% of respondents said no when asked if punishments should be harsher. They also thought that prison sentences were too long

for drug crimes, which rebuts the mandatory minimum and disproportionately lengthy prison sentences that those convicted of drug crimes receive. Participants also overwhelmingly agreed that non-violent offenders should receive a second chance without facing a criminal record and that they should have the opportunity to be fully reintegrated into society. Not only did they support rehabilitation, they support funding it as well. Survey participants did not agree that rehabilitation of criminals is too expensive for the taxpayer, and 87.24% of people thought that publicly funded rehabilitation programs are a good idea.

Professional Opinions

While the public may prefer rehabilitation to retribution, this does not necessarily hold true for some professionals in the criminal justice system. The interview of the police officer suggested that rehabilitation obviously was not working when taking into consideration rates of recidivism. They believed that in an ideal world, rehabilitation would be the end-all fix to drug crimes, but that is simply not always the case. Police officers typically see the same people committing the same crimes repeatedly, especially when it involves drugs. The officer suggested that there is something wrong with the system if that keeps happening, but it's been happening for years, so it's difficult to say exactly what needs to be fixed. It could be that criminals are not being rehabilitated adequately, punished harshly enough, or it could be due to a lack of resources for convicts once they leave jail or prison. Either way, through the eyes of police officers, recidivism suggests that whatever is happening is not working [34].

The interviews of two superior court judges, however, indicated that our primary focus as a society should be to rehabilitate offenders. It was emphasized that when discussing the option of rehabilitation, it should be reserved for nonviolent offenders [7]. By locking someone up, a person is not changed, but rehabilitation gets one what they need and potentially changes their lives. One judge (corroborated by a second) said that incarceration does not work because after about 48 hours, the shock of prison life is gone and they become accustomed to it. Therefore, they do not feel the need to change because prison becomes the new "normal" [35,36]. When talking to those who are directly involved with drug addicts, including addicts themselves, the majority of them agreed that substance abuse is a problem and how it is managed and treated is as much of a problem as the actual use of drugs itself. As one anonymous rehabilitation specialist put it, "Locking people up is no way to cure any disease. Addiction is no different" [37].

Theoretical Applications

Labeling Theory

Often times, whether the person knows it or not, the label of "felon" sticks with them for most of their life. For people convicted of drug crimes, not only do they have to deal with the label of "felon," they have additional labels of "addict," "druggie,"

or “junkie.” Among those interviewed, the sting of being branded a drug addict, even years after being “clean,” can still bring a tear to their eye. As one interviewee put it, “it’s like being the kid who peed himself on the bus in elementary school, now it’s high school and people act like it [happened] yesterday” [38]. The inability to forget an addict’s past and to move forward is ultimately one of the milestones society is going to have to collectively overcome. Many of the interviewees affirmed that addiction is hard enough without having everyone around them treat them like less of a human for having to struggle with it [39,40].

As it turns out, the impact of labeling is one of the most prominent problems people reported encountering when trying to turn their lives around [40]. When somebody is labeled and that label is affirmed from a source of socially accepted authority, such as a person in a position of control, or simply the masses themselves, that person becomes much more self-conscious, and negatively reflects on themselves because of the label. In short, as creatures that operate as a herd, a group, clan/tribe, and family, people are intimately interested in the views of others, regardless of what the person thinks about himself or herself. When others tell them that they are a “criminal,” “junkie” or otherwise broken person, it focuses their internal narrative on the more negative attributes of themselves [41]. This is not to say that negativity has no place in society and that there is no good that can come from it, but when dealing with issues of human health and vitality at the personal and social level, such as substance abuse, or behavioral therapies, it does not do well to dwell on the negatives.

The labels applied to a person can in many ways mold a person’s sense of identity even more than their own thoughts about themselves. If they are applied at a particularly vulnerable point in life, such as childhood, in the lock of addiction, or when serving time in prison, the labels applied are far more likely to stick and leave a mark internally [39,40]. Once the person believes the labels placed on them are true, secondary deviance takes place and their behavior begins to match those labels even more so. Secondary deviance is thought of as being a direct reaction to the initial label placed on them [4,423,43]. Essentially, it is the person becoming who society is telling them they are and in the case of this research, that is a criminal.

Labels do not only affect drug addicts negatively though. They can provide intrinsic motivations to come clean and successfully complete rehabilitation. When one successfully goes through a drug rehabilitation program, they receive additional labels such as “graduate,” “successful,” or “clean.” These make one feel good about themselves and help them to stay clean. To the contrary, ones who do not successfully complete rehabilitation are labeled as “failures.” Therefore, they do not have anything to live up to and often relapse into a life of abusing drugs. One judge mentioned that others see the labels others receive as well as the praise or discipline they get which drives them in a direction toward what

they want or away from what they do not want [35].

The future, however, does look promising for those affected by these labels. There have been many campaigns to make it easier for convicted felons to find work (see “bantheboxcampaign.org”). Additionally, based on the survey information collected, many people do not classify people based on their status as “criminal.” When asked if a person’s status as a convicted felon would cause them to be afraid of them, a significant majority (84.05%) of people said that it would not. The majority of people surveyed (62.36%) said that they did not believe that the drug use of consenting adults should be criminalized and every single person surveyed (100%) also indicated that they do not believe that the convicted should be separated from society. The issue society faces now is to admonish the policies put in place that reflect the outdated “tough-on-crime” rhetoric.

Social Control Theory

The feeling of isolation that accompanies addiction is bad enough, but the stigma placed on addicts can make the problem exponentially worse. Because society functions as a cohesive whole, if a person feels isolated or left out of the picture, their tendency to start using may be significantly increased [37,40,44]. It is often the unsaid or passive judgments that people pass on others that have the most profound impact. Many drug users feel as though the pain of letting someone close to them down (the attachment element of the bond) is worse than most anything that could happen to them legally. This is why it is so important to have someone (anyone) on the outside. A valued person who truly cares about the addict would suffice. In turn, it could be someone who the addict cares deeply about [39,40]. This reflects the bond to society that is a paramount aspect of the social control theory. When an addict has that bond, it creates a motivation for them to get help or to stay clean.

This research provided support for the importance of the attachment element of social control theory [5], especially for the addict. They need those bonds and attachments to people in order to have a motive to stay clean [37,39,40,44]. This is another reason why rehabilitative programs are so important for the addict. They provide them with people who know what they are going through and people who have the time and resources to provide them with companionship in addition to therapy. Based on the data collected from this study, it is encouraging that every person surveyed thinks that convicts should be reintegrated into society. This is important in maintaining and repairing conventional bonds to society instead of illicit bonds created through drug use and incarceration.

Successful completion of rehabilitation can provide a bond to society that they did not have before or give back the ones they lost after being convicted. Some rehabilitative Drug Courts, if one is successful, will allow an offender to graduate the program without a charge on their record [35]. If they are a first time offender, this means that they will not have to check the box

on a job application and will have a better chance at being hired. One might also be able to regain custody of children or become connected with family and friends that cut off relationships with them as a result of their addiction. Additionally, the other participants in the program provide working relationships as they all strive to better themselves. Another part of drug court is community service, which gets one involved in the community in a productive way. Generally, one feels better about themselves after doing community service and they feel like a productive member of society, keeping them on the right track to success. These bonds are driving forces in the success of one's rehabilitation [35,36].

Additionally, when retribution is emphasized above rehabilitation, the risk of incarceration, and particularly lengthy prison sentences is far greater. Given that the average prison sentence for a drug crime is 14 months, that is 14 months that the person is separated from society. There is no bond to society during that time aside from the few visits they might receive. Given the importance of a criminal's bond to society in preventing further criminal activity, this is just another example highlighting why lengthy incarceration rates for drug crimes are unnecessary and a futile effort to deter addicts from engaging in drug crime. The passive social demeanor that is so prevalent needs to be changed to break the stigma of addiction while at the same time discouraging drug use. While nearly all of those who are users will tell you that they do not encourage drug use, the vast majority do not want to be shunned for making those same poor life choices [37,39].

It is society's job to ensure that opportunities for people to seek help are available to them when they need them. It is very easy to make excuses for not protecting these vulnerable members of society. When it comes to social control theory, Sykes' and Matza's work on techniques of neutralization are often applied to the deviant, but in this research, it seems as though the rest of society is using them to justify their neglect of the deviant. These techniques are denial of responsibility - "it should be up to the drug user to get the help they need," denial of injury - "They are hurting themselves by using drugs. I am not hurting them by not helping," denial of the victim - "Drug use is a victimless crime," condemnation of the condemners - "rehabilitation is too soft on criminals," and appeal to higher loyalties - "we should be focusing our money on people who obey the law." Those are just a few examples of how people justify not paying attention to this issue, and they very neatly fit into Sykes' and Matza's social control theory [4,45]. According to the survey data collected, most people (92.55%) believe that it is not up to the substance abuser to solve their addiction alone. This is also a crucial component for the addict in terms of social control theory. The deviant needs other people and the attachment element of the social bond in order to become a healthy and contributing member of society. Whether it be that someone does not support helping criminals, or they just do not see this as being a paramount issue in today's society, the

research is clear. Rehabilitation works, and a large majority of the public is in support of it.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory is potentially the most significant of the theories for this research. To reiterate, this theory's main foundation is that groups in society are competing for control. The group with the most power in society is the group that has control. They exercise this control by creating laws and policies that benefit their interests. The policies that benefit the group in control often do not reflect the interests of the group not in control and may even directly attack their interests. The same laws that have saved lives can also serve as roadblocks to helping those who have no control over the situation [46]. It is no surprise that in the United States, the group of people making laws and policies are typically male, upper-class, white-collar, and the majority Caucasian [4]. The average drug addict is often poor with limited resources, reflective of the opposite group in conflict theory with little resources to exercise any control they may have. The policies that the group with power have put into effect in terms of drug crimes not only do not reflect the values of those that are the victims of those policies, based on the survey results, they do not reflect the views of the majority of society either.

Conflict theory interacts with substance dependence in many ways, including the private forces that drive the social engine either positively or negatively. Among those interviewed from rehab facilities or previous drug addicts, a prevailing theme of either anger or disgust at the systems and powers that exist was made clear. This is a very authentic and tangible example of the two systems in conflict theory opposing each other. In light of recent political changes on the American landscape, faith in what minimal help the establishment has been willing to provide has dwindled to an all-time low, but there is still a sense of optimism for the future generation's perseverance [37]. Regardless of the status of the person, the problem is clear, and that is that there is a problem that needs to be solved. Of those interviewed, each confirmed that the reality of this problem, the reality of the stigma of the addict [47], and the reality of the lack of public initiative all need to be addressed.

One of the critical discrepancies between the "tough on crime" approach and the more balanced approach of both rehabilitation and retribution is what to do with people after they leave the system. As with most things in life, recovery is a two way street, although many people, especially our lawmakers do not view it this way. Slightly over 50% of Americans are in favor of a more rehabilitative than retributive approach to the incarcerated such as fines, court ordered rehab, community service, etc. [11]. When a person makes a mistake, or out of sheer malice commits a wrong against another, it is important to realize that to ever expect that person to fully get back to normal, and become a complete member of society, the public must be willing to provide at least a decent chance for the person

to rehabilitate themselves. This would require a drastic policy change.

In terms of sentencing, because the elected prosecutor of a county has discretion over what cases to charge and how to charge them, the prosecutor usually determines whether retribution or rehabilitation is to be more prevalent. A liberal prosecutor would likely be more in favor of rehabilitation, while a conservative prosecutor would favor retribution. Whether an offender even has the option of rehabilitation is up to the prosecutor [36].

Conflict theorists would agree that the reason there is such a disconnect between these two groups, the addicts and the general public against the lawmakers, is not only because of a lack of power on the part of the public, but also a lack of organization [4]. Based on the survey results, it is apparent that people have acknowledged the flaws in the system, at least in regard to Conflict Theory. When asked if they believed that the criminal justice system preys on the vulnerable, 73.12% of people agreed that it does. It is clear from the survey results that the majority of people (84.04%) are supportive of rehabilitation programs even at the expense of the taxpayer, but there are few policies in place that reflect that support. As discouraging as this may seem, it does provide a clear pathway for the underrepresented to take and that is demanding programs that represent their values and support the vulnerable in our society.

Social and Public Policy

In terms of social and public policy applications, this research suggests that the policies enacted during the 1970s and 1980s to combat street and drug crimes, appropriately named, "The War on Drugs," need to be repealed [48]. Not only have they been shown to be ineffective, they are not reflective of society's values today. This significant topic to address has not received enough attention. These policies are allowing some of the most vulnerable and helpless people in humanity to be left alone to drift in and out of a criminal justice system that does not care about their mental or physical health and wellbeing. This same system seems to release offenders and give them back their freedom only to turn around and make the offender a victim of the system again. The stigma given to previous convicts is so harsh and so debilitating that they cannot find jobs, housing, healthy relationships, or legal means of living. Then society asks, "Why do they keep committing crime?" The research suggests that it is because they have no other options.

Given the data found in this research that the majority of people do care about the drug addicted and want them to receive the help they need, it is important for these ideas to become organized. Further, it is essential that these ideas are taken into political leader's offices, and brought up in town halls, and advertised to enough people that they become a priority. If the platform is that rehabilitation is more effective at reducing recidivism, more humane, cheaper for the tax-payer, and what the people want, it will be a platform that policy makers will

listen to, and it will be the truth.

Discussion

It is apparent, based on the research conducted for this study, that there is a disconnect between society's beliefs and the policies that are actually in place when it comes to the course of action taken for drug crimes in the United States criminal justice system. Currently, there are many policies in place that emphasize the retributive aspect of criminal justice. These include, but are not limited to, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, Three-Strike Laws, and Truth in Sentencing laws. These laws were created in order to address the seemingly "soft" treatment of criminals in the system, but the research has shown that when it comes to non-violent drug crimes, rehabilitation is more effective at reducing recidivism and is more cost-effective for the taxpayer. In fact, not only is it more effective, it is what the vast majority of those surveyed and interviewed indicated that they support. This discrepancy provides a clear issue to be addressed by society as a whole when it comes to criminal justice reform. If it is true that the majority of the population supports more lenient and rehabilitative sentencing for drug crimes, then that should be a prominent concern of the legislature and those who are in positions to make those changes by representing their constituencies. In turn, it is the people's responsibility to voice those concerns and beliefs. Those who can implement those policies into the United States' criminal justice code and systems must become aware.

Limitations

As with all research, this study included numerous limitations that with additional time and resources could be addressed. Given the time constraints experienced, it was difficult to find and read through all of the previous research available on rehabilitation and retribution. Having a more thorough review of all of the research would be beneficial in providing a complete framework to compare and contrast with current opinions received from the surveys and the interviews. Researchers largely focused on previous literature and policies that center on the punitive aspect of the criminal justice system, but it should be acknowledged that there are many programs available to help people with drug addictions within the criminal justice system. Whether or not those programs are effective is a different question to be addressed all together. Further research could address those programs and the benefits and limitations therein.

Another limitation of this study may be the reliability of the variables tested. The interviews were coded for specific words and generalizations made from the conversations. This could allow for different interpretations to be made by other people, thus the inter-rater reliability may be less than ideal [29]. In order to address this, researchers suggest that with more time, a more strict coding policy be implemented when analyzing the data.

The survey demographic could also be problematic for the results received. The survey was sent out to representatives at three universities. Therefore, responses may be limited to a specific demographic of younger, educated, and potentially more socially liberal college students. This could have been reflected in the survey results. The researchers would point out however, that this is promising for the future of this problem. The group surveyed is reflective of the type of people that will comprise the future job force in the criminal justice system and in the legislature. If the survey results are accurately reflecting their opinions about rehabilitation in the justice system, then ideally they will be incorporating these values into their future occupations and implementing them into the criminal justice system. This generation will eventually be the one in power (conflict theory) and will have a great deal of influence in changing the way the criminal justice system treats drug criminals.

These results were also generalized to society as a whole, and while the sample was both random and sizeable, the results may not be an accurate representation of society's opinions. Additionally, all interviewees were from one medium-sized city and could have potentially shared similar and biased viewpoints.

Further Research

With more time, researchers would like to address additional points brought up in various interviews. Researchers found that not only are illicit drugs causes for crimes, but that alcohol and prescription drugs play a major role as well. An interesting point brought up by one of the interviewees was that alcohol is, more often than not, playing a factor in the same crimes that illegal drugs are [36]. With more time, researchers would like to incorporate certain types of abuse of legal substances into their research. A large majority of rehabilitation programs focus on alcoholics, such as AA. This information would be beneficial for a more complete understanding of abuse and resulting criminal activity.

Additional theories could be applied to this research as well that with more time, researchers would have incorporated. Differential association theory plays a key role in recidivism. While incarcerated, offenders establish relationships with other offenders and learn from them. When released, they go back to what and who they know, which tend to be other offenders because of their time spent incarcerated together. This leads to more crime and further establishes illicit relationships that contribute to reoffending. Connecting this research to differential association theory would offer alternative explanations for why people offend and then continue to offend [48-51].

Additionally, researchers would extend the survey questions to more members of the public. Especially those who are known to be more conservative would be included, and also those not currently enrolled at a university. Researchers would also recommend interviewing representatives from criminal justice

systems of all sizes, including large cities and rural communities. This expanded research could address the limitations mentioned previously and provide a more complete overview of society's views as a whole. This is necessary in generating a popular opinion to address the discrepancies between policies for drug crimes and research that supports rehabilitation of drug addicts in order to successfully prevent further criminal activity.

Appendices

Survey Data & Analysis

Throughout the course of this project, two surveys were conducted with the aim of obtaining the general populace's opinion with regard to the research questions and inquiries. The first was 15 questions in length and served as the raw data base. The second survey was more or less identical to the first, with a single question of content added, and four questions pertaining to participant demographics added, totaling 20 questions.

The first survey was used in the construction of this paper, as it has the most total participants, 94 as opposed to the 67 of the second version, and was targeted to a younger audience, while the second was targeted to a more general audience, including people of wider age ranges. Attached are the printouts for the surveys, 35 questions in total and the statistical relevance of each question. Below are the abbreviated highlights of the transcripts of 7 interviews conducted to further the aims of the research. Some of the interviews were audio recorded, others were not. All persons were promised that the full extent of the conversations would remain heard only by the interviewer. In the interest of remaining totally anonymous, certain details of the participant's character have been intentionally omitted and conversations have largely been abbreviated, as the natural discourse of human speech is far too choppy and broken to capture in a succinct manner, at least for the purposes of this research.

Isabella House

Brian: What is your current perception of the drug war?

Isabella House: A definite failure, without doubt, while it may have had some good intentions at its beginning, those were lost a long time ago. It's a more political conflict than a respect of human life and wellbeing.

Brian: I would agree with that, and with regard to addiction, how do you perceive people perceiving the addicted?

Isabella House: People look at substance abusers in a negative light. It's a social stigma that is very strong and hard to break once applied.

Brian: What are your thoughts on more progressive reformation of drug policy and laws, like needle exchanges, suboxone, and even things like the heroin supplementation programs used in some European nations?

Isabella House: I am in favor of most of these programs and skeptical of some of them. I understand that people are slow to change their minds with regard to drug treatment. For the most part, if we can follow what works and educate the public about the nature of narcotic addiction rather than falling back on buzzwords and outdated slogans and fear tactics, we could really make some headway and save countless human lives in the process.

“Sunray Court,” Counselor, & Reformed Addict.

Brian: What do you think is the current societal notion of what a substance abuser is?

Counselor: Currently, it is damaging and pretty outdated. People have this image of us being these liars and thieves climbing over fences and breaking into homes in the dead of night, nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, there are some out there like that, but I was a drug addict for 22 years and the people I used with were kind, loving, creative, generous, and compassionate. The conventional image is outdated.

Brian: So while it is easy for one person to get into it, almost never one person gets out of it.

Counselor: Exactly.

Brian: So would you say the prevailing image of rehab is kind of “soft, effeminate,” or things of that nature is hurting societies’ chances at taking it seriously? Or do you think people have a different image of rehab?

Counselor: For sure, sometimes rehab is a smooth ride, if it’s a rich kid with parents that can pay, but most of the time it isn’t. Rehab is often too short for many people, and by the time they get to our center here, they have gone through multiple rehabs previously. The total recidivism rate is terrible, many people believe it doesn’t work at all if it doesn’t work the first time, and lose faith in the process. It’s going to take as many times as it’s going to take for that person, there’s just no way around it.

Brian: What about the cost of rehab? This must factor into how people perceive its efficacy, money talks and I know even brief programs can be pretty pricey.

Counselor: Certainly, and that’s one of people’s criticisms of it. There are celebrity rehabs that might run you tens of thousands of dollars, court ordered rehab, rehab that only accepts private insurance and the like. A problem we have here is the court doesn’t usually send people here for longer than 2 weeks at a time, and we don’t start to get their attention, their mind doesn’t start to come out of the haze of withdrawal until maybe the third week. We have to ask for extensions past the second week most of the time and we used to be able to keep them for 30-60-90 days at a stretch, that’s when the real healing and condition management comes into play. But people want to believe it will be a short ride and it’s just something you’ll get over in a week or two, you won’t.

“First Responder” Retired Paramedic, Active Firefighter.

Brian: So is substance abuse a problem here?

Firefighter: Without doubt, it’s worse than many people might think, per capita, it’s worse off than some larger cities on the west coast. The problem is not out is the open and getting the publicity it might in a larger city, but it is there.

Brian: So with your experience as a paramedic, how have you perceived the problem? Do you get a lot of frequent flyers and is there a particular age demographic that you call on?

Firefighter: I have run on people from their mid-teens to seventies, probably 4,000-5,000 easily in the last 20 years. Some people you might run on 5 days a week, no kidding.

Brian: Sounds pretty bad, and what is your perception of the legal end of this? Do you think the current laws on the books are ineffective, solid, lacking in any way, etc.

Firefighter: I don’t really know too much on the legal side of things. You see these people day in and day out, year after year, and you really wish you could help them, but the same laws that give them the freedom to call 911 without risk of prosecution in the event of an overdose also prevents them from being placed in rehab through legal means. Not that I am advocating forcing people to do things against their will, but something new might need to be considered to get some of these people out of the their current predicament.

“Gateway Counseling” Services, Counselor, Former Substance Abuser

Brian: What is your perception of the problem here, and nationally, if you have that perspective?

Counselor: Oh yeah, it’s a huge problem. By far the biggest problem is that we keep sending people to jail instead of treatment. If addiction is a disease, we need to be treating it, not locking people up, that’s not to say if you screw up royally, then you have to be an adult and take responsibility, but somebody selling a little on the side to support their habit might be better suited in intensive rehab.

Brian: What’s your perception of how the current political scene is affecting the situation?

Counselor: Well, truth be told, we have already had a few places close down recently in light of the recent events. I can’t speak specifically beyond that, but I am not optimistic to the future of the problem. We gained some ground in the last few years but that could go away pretty quick, by the looks of things.

Brian: Do you perceive there being a stigma between drug users and people’s perceptions of those that abuse one drug versus those that abuse another?

Counselor: Oh absolutely, it happens all the time. Alcohol and marijuana are both the more socially accepted forms of

addiction, but in the end, the internal mechanisms are the same for the guy smoking pot to taking amphetamines. People like to look at others and excuse their own behavior by saying “at least I’m not like that person over there, at least I’m not like them,” when all they are doing is covering for their own problems. It’s a defense mechanism and one of the biggest mistakes people can make with regard to getting better. Don’t compare yourself to others, acknowledge your own problems and work on those. There is nothing better about being an alcoholic than abusing anything else. And it certainly isn’t glamorous or interesting.

“Colonial Clinic” Recovered Substance Abuser/ Counselor.

Brian: So tell about your experiences with substance abuse.

Counselor: I am recovered from multiple addictions myself, but it is not something you do once, recovery is a lifelong thing. It is so easy to take yourself back into old habits, don’t, don’t even think about it, put the past away and take responsibility for yourself.

Brian: What is your belief with regard to the war on drugs?

Counselor: The war on drugs is a failure, and as a society, we like to tell ourselves we are better than or at least we are “not like those people” over there, out in the dark or wherever one might think substance abusers dwell. In reality, most people who drink will never become alcoholics, only a few will and the vast majority of those have a brain chemistry and neurobiological difference that separates their perception of pleasure and reward from others. We don’t make alcohol illegal to stop alcoholism, or fast food to stop obesity. For the most part, these are the products of genetics, your brain reacting a little to favorably to an exogenous substance.

“Childhood Traumas,” Polydrug user.

Brian: So what got you started down the road to drug use?

Friend: I had some friends in middle school who were in high school, they were smoking heroin, and using a few other things and I was curious so I decided, why not.

Brian: Did it change your life rapidly?

Friend: It didn’t happen overnight, but faster than I ever thought, nobody thinks it’ll happen to them, then it does, and you find yourself looking back at yourself wondering what happened. Where did youth go, why did I end up like this, most of the time it’s not even worth dwelling on. The only thing that I can do, is move on.

Brian: Heroin is a hell of a place to start, where did it go from there?

Friend: Meth, cocaine, marijuana, alcohol, and who knows what else, it’s all lost in the haze.

Brian: Do you regret starting? I know we parted ways in high school, but where did it go from there?

Friend: Yes, I regret starting, but not as much as you might think. It’s all life experience, I wish I didn’t crave and I never had it as bad as a lot of people did, I still go to AA and few prospects ahead of me, but yeah to put it plainly, it sucks.

Brian: What is your perception of rehab?

Friend: It can work, but it all starts inside, if you’re not ready, being put into a box isn’t going to make you see the value of sobriety.

Brian: And I know you’re still religiously involved, that seems to have helped a lot for you at least?

Friend: It has.

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