

Why do we need to reform our drug policies?

 Current policies have failed to produce a positive position for drug users in a society.

 This has led to a signifigant lack of care and empathy among drug users and especially among those who suffer from the most serious problems.

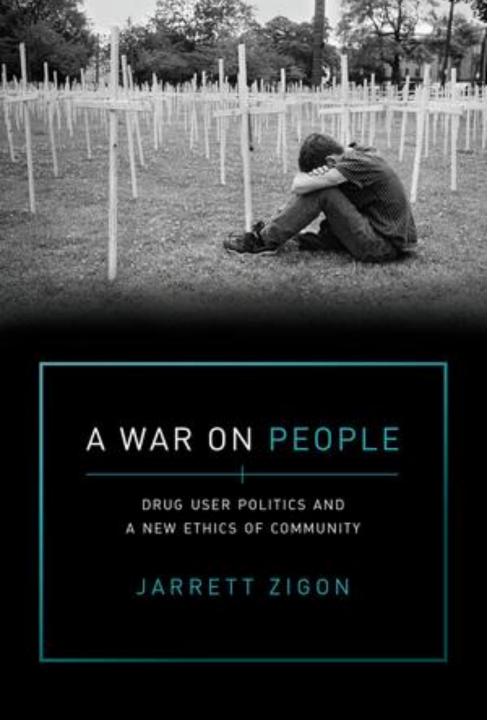


Background

 Research on harm reduction policies in Finland (needle and syringe exchange, opioid substitution treatment and housing first policies) from 2003 onwards

 Current research on threshold of services among the most vulnerable clients, who live and spend their time on the streets

 Advocacy work at substance ombudsman office about users' rights to receive services, good care and treatment



Jarret Zigon (2019):

- War on drugs is a war against people
- Besides actual deaths the war has produced "social deaths"
- People who use drugs are seen as barely human, lacking qualities, which define a "normal person"
- "less than human", "evil addict", "de-humanization"

Finnish Drug Policy

 Two tracks drug policy – public health and criminal control - which no do not communicate with each other

 Tensions in the treatment field between rehabilition and harm reduction orientations

 Moralistic attitudes among public authorities and social and health care professinals

Finnish Drug Policy (street level view)

- Many a user do not receive enough support and proper help —even in the treatment service system
- Distrust toward social and health care professionals and public authorities
- Feelings of constant control on the other hand and neglect on the other.
- Feelings of shame, loneliness and "emptiness"

Zeke, 25 years old

• "I'm actually more a monkey than a human being."

Users' First: Caring and Emancipating Drug Policy

- Takes as its starting point drug users' basic and human rights
- Cultivates users' potentials and gives them possibilities for participation and looking their own position in a society
- Gives possibilities for users to look after themselves –even when they are using
- Actions diminish feelings of shame, loneliness and emptiness

Users First: Caring and Emancipating Drug Policy

Central concepts

• Care:

A person is taken as "who s/he is" and activities are sensitive to an individual need.
Activities are based on interaction and flexibility and support individuals in their everyday life.

Community

• A place/places, where people are able to realize their goals, needs and dreams

Care of the self

 Activites that provide people with information and tools to look after themselves and their health; interaction and action that is focused on peoples' well-being and quality of life

How to move forward?

- Experimenting with profoundly new ways of thinking treatment and help
- Creating institutional structures that support new ways of helping and treating
- Support for drug users' own initiatives and communities