

LATIN POST

Demi Lovato: How the Disney Star-Turned-Cocaine Smuggler Helped 'Support' the Illegal U.S. & South American Drug Trades

By: Melissa Castellanos – December 13, 2013

Illegal and legal drug use is all around us, from Canada, the U.S. to Latin America and beyond. We've seen Toronto's Mayor Tom Ford admit to smoking crack cocaine, Colorado and Washington states give the 'green light' to recreational marijuana use, and Uruguay become the first country in the world to legalize the trade of marijuana (in an effort to decriminalize the drug industry) -- and recently, Disney and "X Factor" fans have learned that singer/songwriter Demi Lovato was smuggling cocaine on airplanes at age 19.

Just two years ago, the now 21-year-old "X Factor" judge has revealed the dark details of her drug addiction to cocaine during the culmination of her teenage years. In a recent interview with Access Hollywood, the former Disney's "Camp Rock" star admitted that she couldn't go 30 minutes without cocaine and even took to smuggling it on airplanes.

"I've really never talked about this stuff before...I don't know if I should be sharing this," she told Access Hollywood's Kit Hoover.

Lovato also said that her addiction made her "a manipulator and a liar," and that she was able to "hide her drug abuse even from trained minders."

"I couldn't go 30 minutes to an hour without cocaine and I would bring it on airplanes," she admitted. "I would smuggle it basically and just wait until everyone in first class would go to sleep and I would do it right there. I'd sneak to the bathroom and I'd do it...And that was even with somebody (with me), I had a sober companion, somebody who was watching me 24/7 and living with me (and) I was able to hide it from them as well."

"Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug made from the leaves of the coca plant native to South America. It produces short-term euphoria, energy, and talkativeness in addition to potentially dangerous physical effects like raising heart rate and blood pressure," according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Avid cocaine users and/or addicts can ultimately "suffer heart attacks or strokes, which may cause sudden death."

"Binge-patterned cocaine use may lead to irritability, restlessness, and anxiety. Cocaine abusers can also experience severe paranoia-a temporary state of full-blown paranoid psychosis-in which they lose touch with reality and experience auditory hallucinations," the National Institute on Drug Abuse adds.

The former "Barney & Friends" star also admitted to having an alcohol problem and an eating disorder. She hit rock-bottom when she realized that showing up at an airport at 9 a.m. with a soda bottle filled with vodka wasn't normal.

"I was throwing up in the car and this was just to get on a plane to go back to LA to the sober living house that I was staying at," she said. "I had all the help in the world, but I didn't want it. When I hit that moment I was like, it's no longer fun when you're doing it alone."

As hard as it was to face the music, she realized the detrimental effects her addiction had on her life and health, saying, "that is alcoholic behavior. (It's) no longer, I'm young and rebellious and out having fun, it was, wow, I'm one of those people...I gotta get my (act) together."

While Lovato, who wrote her memoir "Staying Strong: 365 Days a Year," has now become a role model for her strength for overcoming her addiction as well as a philanthropist for Voto Latino, anti-bullying and mental health campaigns, the star contributed to a problem on a much grander scale -- she inadvertently supported both the U.S. and South American illegal drug trades.

While it may seem like a stretch, when you take a closer look, it's the reality of the situation for any drug user, and you don't have to be a drug smuggling narco-trafficker.

"An analysis of recent surveys and research studies places the size of the illegal U.S. drug market at \$200 billion to \$750 billion per year, with most estimates coming in between \$400 billion and \$500 billion," according to a report released back in October 2013 by market strategists at ConvergeX Group, a global brokerage company based in New York. "The analysis also found that the current decade has logged the heaviest drug use per person per year in U.S. history, each region has its favorites, there are regional favorites..." And while Lovato was a teen with a cocaine addiction, it's important to note that "the most avid drug users are not teens," the report adds.

Market strategists at ConvergeX Group also included six other facts about the illegal U.S. drug trade in its report, according to the International Business Times.

1. "Prices are the same on the black market as they are at brick-and-mortar dispensaries. Pot users can expect to pay about as much at a dispensary as they will on the street for an 1/8 ounce of marijuana. Competition from the street keeps dispensary prices low because street dealers don't have to pay taxes or building costs."
2. "Illegal producers make a killing on markups. In the U.K., heroin sold in smaller quantities on the street can sell for 60 times its bulk price. Cocaine can sell for 18 times and marijuana for about 3.5 times their respective bulk prices."
3. "Drug money is regularly spent on luxury goods. When police bust a drug dealer, often they discover that the suspect lives a kind of "millionaire lifestyle" complete with luxury cars, jewelry, high-end spirits and clothing."
4. "Drugs generate profits for suppliers and costs for the state. The cost to the U.S. on account of the drug trade is enormous. About 330,000 of the U.S.'s 1.6 million prison inmates in 2012 were doing time for drug offenses, at an average annual cost of \$25,000 per inmate -- a total of \$8.2 billion."

5. "Drugs raise health care costs by \$11 billion annually. The cost rises to \$193 billion when accounting for crime-related costs and lost productivity at work, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Prescription narcotics abusers who see multiple doctors cost insurers between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per user."

6. "Legalization would positively impact the economy. Legalizing marijuana -- and potentially other illegal drugs -- would have a net positive effect on the economy by generating sales tax revenue for state and local governments and saving money on incarceration costs. The Cato Institute estimates that yearly tax receipts could amount to about \$8.7 billion."

As far as South America's illegal drug trade is concerned, cocaine use is still present, but has somewhat declined, and while the general consensus would point the finger to Colombia as the culprit, there has been a shift.

According to an earlier report from the *The Economist*, "in 2000 Colombia grew 74 percent of the world's coca leaves, the raw ingredient for cocaine. But these days it has fallen behind. The UN believes that in 2011 Colombia produced about 42 percent of the world's coca, only slightly more than Peru. And last year a White House report concluded that when it comes to the production of cocaine itself, Colombia has now fallen behind both Peru and Bolivia.

"Virtually all coca comes from three countries: Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. The slopes of the Andes provide perfect conditions for the coca bush, whose leaves Andean people were chewing long before the arrival of European explorers. Chomped or boiled up as tea, the leaves provide a mild, caffeine-like buzz which dulls hunger and cold. Combined with a few everyday chemicals it makes the much stronger cocaine," *The Economist* added. "Colombia was not always the biggest producer: in 1990 it was responsible for only 19 percent of the coca market, behind both Bolivia and Peru. But government crackdowns in Peru, and then Bolivia, drove the trade over the border into Colombia. In 1995 it overhauled Bolivia, and then overtook Peru in 1997 to become the world's main supplier of coca leaves.

The *Economist* also noted that the "recent fall in coca cultivation in Colombia is partly down to a ramping up of enforcement by the Colombian government."

"With the help of funds from the United States under Plan Colombia, the government stepped up eradication efforts, spraying weed-killer from planes (Bolivia and Peru prefer manual eradication), *The Economist* explained. "At the same time demand fell in United States, Colombia's main market: in 2010, 2.2 percent of adults took the drug, down from 3 percent in 2006. Europeans, meanwhile, who get most of their cocaine from Bolivia and Peru, have become far more interested in cocaine: consumption in Britain, for instance, almost doubled between 2000 and 2010 (though it has since tailed off a bit). Bolivian and Peruvian growers therefore stepped up production. They have also had to meet greater local demand: Brazil has become the world's biggest market for crack and the second-biggest for powder cocaine."

The U.S. Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration's 2013 National Drug Threat Assessment Summary reiterated this shift as well, stating "the trend of lower cocaine availability in the

United States that began in 2007 continued in 2012. Moreover, reporting from several metropolitan areas including Chicago, Houston, St. Louis, Phoenix, and Baltimore indicated sporadic interruptions in cocaine availability in the spring of 2012.

"Seizures at the Southwest Border and price and purity data also indicate decreased availability of cocaine. Southwest Border cocaine seizures were markedly down the first quarter of 2012 as compared to 2011. This trend continued over the first half of 2012."

While the decline in cocaine availability and trafficking may seem positive to some, when users get their temporary high (whether you are Canadian, American and/or European, etc.), it has a much longer-lasting effect by supporting violence and corruption that continues to plague the U.S. and South America.