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Cato's Portugal drug study based on false/distorted government data?

By [Donald Hank](#)



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The libertarian Cato Institute recently ran a study of the drug situation in Portugal, which legalized drugs *de facto* in 2001. It published some figures showing how deaths among drug users and some other parameters went down, apparently signaling positive results for the legalization experiment. Scientific American published details on this study and now it is being quoted throughout the world in what seems to be a mammoth push for legalization of drugs everywhere.

But all is not as meets the eye.

Cato is a libertarian institute and part of its agenda is to support the counter-intuitive hypothesis that drug legalization helps reduce the ill effects of drug use.

However, Cato is *not* known to be a professional medical or scientific group, whose agenda is the health and welfare of their clients.

By contrast, there is an online journal called Saude in Portugal published purely by *medical doctors*.

Not so surprisingly, their findings differ from those of Cato, which has ignored the negatives and concludes:

"The data show that, judged by virtually every metric, the Portuguese decriminalization framework has been a resounding success."

http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=10080

Below is my translation of an excerpt from the *Saude* article on this. The world press, always eager to follow the latest trends, has ignored the Portuguese doctors and prefers to disseminate the report of the ideologically based Cato Institute.

It looks like a new policy may again be forged on the basis of statements by political activists rather than professionals who are closest to the problem.

Heroin consumption rose 57.5% in recent years

Method for combating drugs is 'pure disinformation' — APLD President

At variance with what official agencies have recently disclosed, the problem of drug dependence in Portugal has never been more serious: Between 2001, the year the decriminalization law went into effect, and 2007, continued consumption of narcotics rose, in absolute terms, by 66%.

In this period In this period consumption increased 215% for cocaine, 85% for ecstasy, 57.5% for heroine and 37% for cannabis.. These data are from a report of the Institute of Drugs and Drug Dependence (IDT), published in 2008.

Since decriminalization there has been a 50% increase in drug use among young people between the ages of 20 and 24. On the other hand, the number of persons who have experimented with illicit drugs at least once rose from 7.8% in 2001 to 12% in 2007 (IDT Report of Activities of Nov 2008).

End of translation

Saude is an online journal published by medical doctors. Who are you going to believe? Doctors or the government that has driven its government to the brink of bankruptcy?

It is no surprise that journalists the world over would fall for the government data and conclusions. But it is sad to note that Scientific American would take the Cato study at face value without doing any further research. How hard would it have been to ask the doctors of Portugal?

Of course, after the hackers found out how scientists at the University of East Anglia falsified meteorological data for political reasons, no one should be surprised. The scientific method has been falling into disuse in academe, even among scientists.

Full Portuguese language text:

<http://saude.sapo.pt/noticias/saude-medicina/consumo-de-heroina-cresceu-57-5-nos-ultimos-anos.html>

Commentary opposing decriminalization of drugs

<http://www.billmuehlenberg.com/1999/07/26/marijuana-decriminalisation-dispelling-the-myths/>

Demise of the scientific method:

<http://laiglesforum.com/never-the-twain-shall-meet/2473.htm>

<http://laiglesforum.com/why-the-media-are-out-of-touch-with-reality/2579.htm>

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