



Editorial

The stigmatization of people who use drugs and its social and political consequences

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Goffman (1970) defines stigmatization as a negative attribute that establishes differences among people that do and those that do not, creating rejection and underestimation situations towards those who are in such situation. After Goffman's concept in the 70's, Link & Phelan (2001) establish that the stigma is a result of the process that involves five interrelated components, which include: first, labeling people because of their differences; second, the creation of social stereotypes for those labeled as undesirable; third, there is a separation between those who carry the label and those who do not; in the fourth place, comes the loss of the condition of a person as a result of the labeling, thus bring about discrimination, devaluation, rejection and exclusion; and finally, there is unequal power between those who stigmatize and those who are stigmatized.

Drugs represent everything that is considered "bad" and "harmful" for society, and with the imaginary that come about it, the people that use are considered second hand citizens, pariahs, who deserve contempt and collective rejection due to the fact that drug use is associated to violence, illness, degradation and loss of social status. This is the way classification of people that use drugs as "delinquents" or "drug addicts", whether it is the first they use, or it is occasional or continuous; or whether they have been convicted of committing crimes under the influence of such substances, tears humanity away and brings social acknowledgement only as far as the assigned label; the situation brings about serious implications regarding interpersonal relationships, for who stands by my side is no longer a person with a past history, a present and a future; he or she is no longer a cousin, a friend, a student, a professional and becomes only a drug addict or a potential delinquent.



A concern is that the previous arguments have become the basis that justify the creation of government structures and mechanisms oriented to the repression of such behaviors that stray away from socially established patterns. Those that use drugs are stigmatized as drug addicts or possible delinquents and based on this analysis legal strategies that try to control such deviation from the medicalization for the first and the use of the penal system for the latter.

In this way, the medical disciplines as well as the judicial ones have been the representatives of the positive science to dominate the body and social behavior, through several government strategies that seek to reduce harm risk to one or to others, using fear as the main state tool to control human heterogeneity; this tool that is hidden under scientific statements the fact that the social imaginary relates drugs to delinquency and illness, thus bringing about the transgression of the limits between the public and private environment, in order to protect and maintain social order.

The unfortunate results that have come about from stigmatization of people who use drugs as drug addicts or possible criminals, without differentiating substances, types of use, as well as medical and juridical interventions models; including, on the one hand, the proliferation of attention centers for drug users based on punishment and humiliation as a strategy of behavioral adaptation oriented to abstinence, likewise, there is the indiscriminate medication, the guilt and mistreatment of patients, generating setbacks in the search for treatments and not achieving intermediate objectives such as occupational skills and improving interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, the consequences of the judicial model include abuse and mistreatment carried out by police and judicial agents, also, the increase in the imprisoned population for having substances without cause-effect between using, having and participating in drug trafficking networks, even worse, the penitentiary programs do not offer effective re-socialization measures, focusing on social exclusion and limiting the possibilities of resilience.

Drug use is a social and cultural complex phenomenon, which cannot be limited to interaction of biological, situational, judicial or environmental variables, that favor the risk of addiction or delinquency; that is why, the state intervention ought to go beyond the sanitary medical model, as well as the punitive judicial model, in order to provide macro-structural to the complexity of the situation. Such measures should guarantee education, dignified jobs, recreation, housing and other social benefits that people who use drugs have rights to, as citizens who are equal before the law, in equity and democracy.

Therefore, the proposition is to approach the drug phenomenon according to public policies that intervene the multiple ways of social exclusion such as the lack of: a public voice, income to provide basic needs, formal employment and access to health services, among others; creating critical spaces to debate the political participation of the academy, drug users, communities and social movements.