

Louisa Wilson: Analyzing the Relationship Between the Public and Criminal Justice System Biases Towards Drugs

Laws surrounding drug criminalization and drug use in the United States have been scrutinized and revised often in recent years, significantly with the “War on Drugs” beginning in the 1970s. With previous research, the relationship between the biases and opinions of the public and the biases and actions of the American criminal justice system towards drug legislation is unclear. The goal of this research study is to answer the guiding research question: “How is societal bias about drugs correlated with systemic bias on drug punishment and legislation?”.

To assess the relationship between public bias and the bias of the American criminal justice system towards drugs, a survey methodology was used, 393 respondents from Colorado, centered in Boulder County. The survey included 51 questions in order to gauge the implicit and explicit biases of Colorado residents towards drugs and drug legislation.

It was concluded that the biases of both the public and the criminal justice system align on some topics and differ on others. The views of Colorado residents and the federal justice system are similar in the general discussion of drugs and risk of harm associated with drug use. However, the views of Colorado residents and the justice system differ on the topic of punishment and criminalization.