



Full Name

Instructor Name

Course

Date

### Cause and Effect Paper On Drugs

There is a significant relationship between illicit drug use and gun possession and use, especially unlawful gun possession and use. Both are viewed extremely negatively by society. While there is certainly a relationship between illicit drug use and gun use, the relationship is not as simple cause and effect one. Many people are in prison because of illicit drug use. In fact, this has been described by many as an American pandemic, with police departments and prosecutors unfairly targeting drug users (Reiman and Leighton 41). Many fewer people are in prison because of unlawful gun use, but many of those who are have prior convictions for drug crimes (Reiman and Leighton 41). Yet, many of the social problems caused by illicit drug use have nothing to do with gun use and vice versa. Excessive drug use leads to increases in violent crimes, transmittable diseases, and overdose causing death. Unlawful gun use can, of course, lead to death. Featured in the current essay is a comparison of illicit drug use and unlawful gun possession. It is argued in this essay that illicit drug is viewed much more negatively by society than unlawful gun possession.

Illicit drug use has long been a major issue for the United States. A major reason for this is that the U.S. has particularly strict laws concerning illicit drug use. Offenders often face crippling fines and even jail time. 99% of offenders rely on public defenders, which contributes to the 97% rate of plea deals being reached for these offenders, regardless of their material guilt or innocence (Reiman and Leighton 73). The U.S. has some of the strictest laws regarding illicit drug use in the developed world. This results in extremely high incarceration rates for illicit drug



users. Many European countries have adopted a rehabilitative approach to dealing with illicit drug users (Reiman and Leighton 82). Under this approach, repeat offenders are not imprisoned, but required to attend a comprehensive rehabilitative process that is paid for by the country. This leads to much lower recidivism rates and contributes to the much lower crime rates in many European countries. Yet, the U.S. has failed to adopt the rehabilitative approach, relying instead on a retribution approach in which drug offenders are punished for their often victimless crimes. The result is high incarceration rates in the U.S. and hundreds of thousands of American citizens marked as criminals, making it impossible for them to get jobs.

Like illicit drug use, unlawful possession or use of firearms has harsh consequences in the U.S. Offenders are somewhat likely to spend some time in jail and will face major fines. However, despite these few similarities, laws concerning the unlawful possession or use of firearms is very different than the laws concerning illicit drug use. Many states have recognized a near-absolute right to carry a firearm, extending the already broad right to bear arms defined by the Supreme Court in interpreting the Second Amendment of the Constitution (Fleegler et al. 735). With such strong rights to carry firearms, there are far fewer instances in which someone can get busted with the unlawful possession of a firearm (). There are certain private restrictions on carrying firearm. Individual organizations can ban them on their premises. Likewise, there are certain public buildings in which firearm possession is illegal, including public high schools and Congressional offices. Yet, every U.S. citizen is born with the right, once they reach a certain age, to carry a firearm in their own homes and, to some degree, in public. The limitations on what guns are lawful are not very strict, such as the ban on automatic firearms. These stark differences between the laws concerning firearm possession and drug use are striking.



The major point of intersection between the two issues is obvious. With such high rates of incarceration for illicit drug possession, use, and intent to distribute, many offenders become ineligible to carry firearms at all. The greatest limitation on firearm possession is that convicted felons and certain others with criminal convictions are disallowed from carrying firearms. The greatest restriction on firearm possession, then, is extremely dependent on drug possession convictions. The public perception, as reflected in the laws in the U.S., is strongly against drug use, but is highly supportive of the right to carry firearms. This conundrum contributes to the U.S. having only 5% of the world's population and 25% of its incarcerated population (Grinshteyn and Hemenway 270). Meanwhile, U.S. residents are ten times more likely to be killed by firearms than residents of other developed countries. The firearm homicide rate in the U.S. is 3.6 deaths per 100,000. The second highest in the developed world is Canada at 0.5 deaths per 100,000 (Grinshteyn and Hemenway 270).

The relationship between illicit drug possession and unlawful gun possession is clearly misunderstood by American policymakers who pass the laws that define both illicit drug possession and unlawful gun possession. While there are certain similarities between how drug laws and gun laws are imposed and interpreted, there are many more differences. As Americans continue to enter the convoluted and backwards-thinking (often privately owned) prison systems, firearm homicide and suicide rates remain extremely high for the developed world. As more and more information comes out about gun deaths and drug convictions, as well as their effects on society, maybe one day public perception will shift, forcing lawmakers to take seriously the negative effects that these two contradicting issues are having on society.



### Works Cited

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