

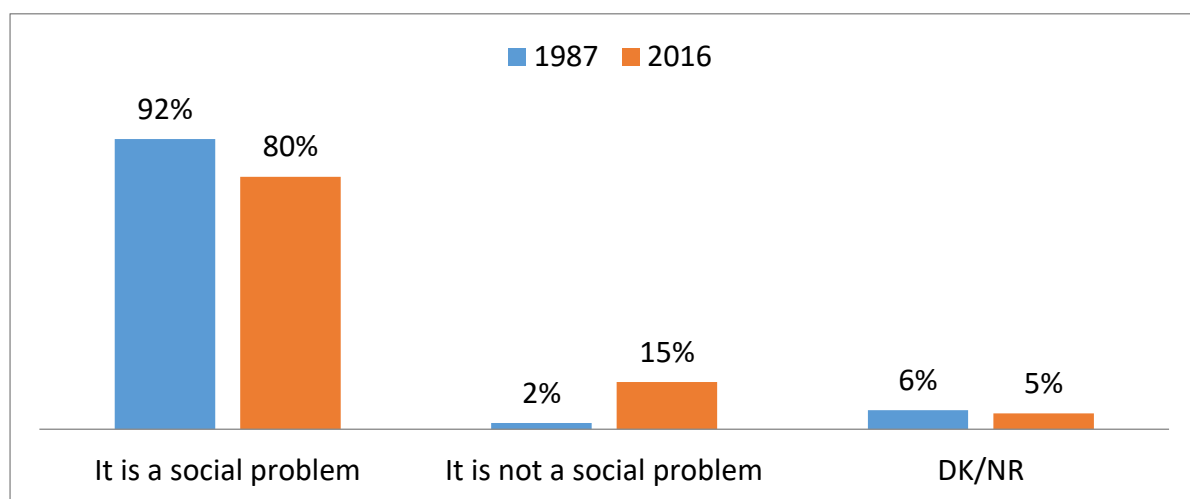
Use of Narcotics in Pakistan

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Abstract: The following paper will endeavour to interpret and explain the findings of two surveys carried out by Gallup Pakistan, both related to the perception of narcotics and alcohol use and consumption in Pakistan. The survey conducted in 2016 and 1987 asked whether drug use was “**exceedingly alarming for our society**” or whether it was “**just a matter of living and eating habits of the people**”. From 1987 to 2016, 13% more people felt like it was not a social problem. A similar survey on Alcohol asked whether “**alcohol use should be strictly forbidden and punished**” or if “**it should be left to individual discretion**”; between 2009 and 2016 22% more people felt that it was a personal matter. There are three broad reasons for this. First, the influence of religion weakened. This is due to the particular religious values that prohibit drugs being 13 – 18% less prevalent, as well as people being 12% less likely to avoid drugs because of religious reasons. Secondly, recreational drugs that are less harmful are believed to be more widely available and their supply has apparently increased, as evidenced by the number of drugs captured by the Ministry of Narcotics Control. Thirdly, less people now tend to view the issues caused by drugs as important, an approximate decrease of 15 – 20%.

Typically, unchecked drug and alcohol consumption within a country is a massive concern as it can lead to mental and physical problems especially if portions of the country’s population is addicted. Despite this, more liberal attitudes that accept the limited recreational use of certain drugs (typically those derived from the Cannabis Sativa plant as opposed to hard drugs such as Heroin) as well as alcohol as a personal preference rather than an activity that needs to be policed by the state are increasingly common. This article examines the increase in such attitudes among the Pakistani populace, and seeks to explain them.

In 2016, Gallup conducted a survey asking respondents “**Some people are of the view that use of drugs (e.g., opium, heroine, Charas, Bhang, etc.) is exceedingly alarming for our society. While others maintain that it is not a problem and it is just a matter of way of living and eating habits of the people. What is your opinion?**”



Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Survey, 1987 & 2016

While on its own, the percentage of people who reported that drug use is not a Social Problem

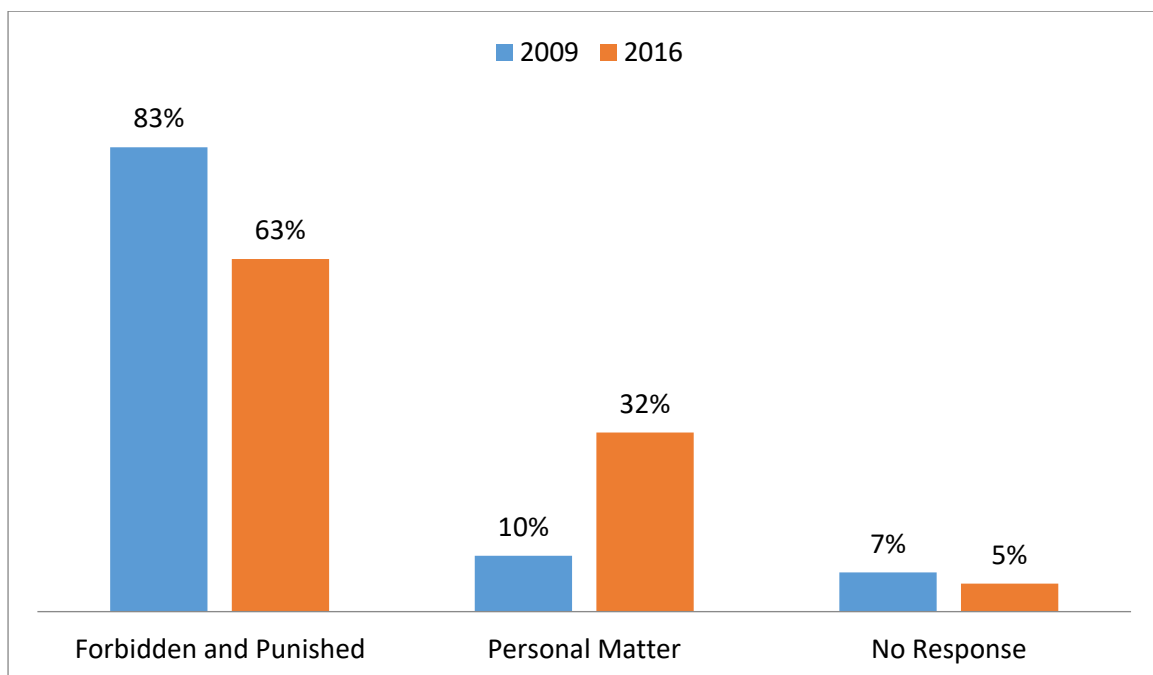
seems low (about 15%), the figure is increasingly relevant when viewed comparatively with the results of the same Gallup survey conducted in 1987.

	1987	2016
It is a social problem	92%	80%
It is not a social problem	2%	15%
DK/NR	6%	5%

Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 1987, 2016

The number of people who believe that drugs are not a social problem has increased from 2% to 15% - a 13% increase - while those who believe that drugs are a social problem has decreased from 92% to 80%.

Another Gallup survey that focused on the use of alcohol betrays a similar perception of its consumption. The 2016 Gallup survey asked ***“Some people say that alcohol use should be strictly forbidden and punished. Others say that it should be left on individual discretion. What is your opinion?”***



Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 2009 & 2016

Here, the number of people who believe that alcohol use should be left on personal discretion rather than punished is nearly a third of the total respondents.

	2009	2016
Forbidden and Punished	83%	63%
Personal Matter	10%	32%
No Response	7%	5%

Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 2009 & 2016

Using a comparative analysis of the results of the same survey asked in 2009, it is obvious that this number has grown from 10% to 32%, whereas the number of people who believe alcohol use should be forbidden and punished has fallen from 83% to 63%.

This increasingly liberal attitude can be explained in a number of ways.

The Religious Stance against Drugs

Typically, the strongest attitude against drugs comes from religion. Islam is the dominant religion in Pakistan and typical mainstream interpretations of Islam completely forbid the recreational use of narcotics and alcohol, although some smaller traditions might accept it. A reduction in religiosity or of the particular religious values that deny the recreational use of drugs can both result in a commensurate increase in the liberal attitude towards drugs.

A Gallup Poll conducted in 2008 and again in 2016 asked respondents *“I will name a few things. Kindly tell for each of the following if it is completely prohibited from religious point of view or it is not prohibited but considered bad or if it is considered right?”*

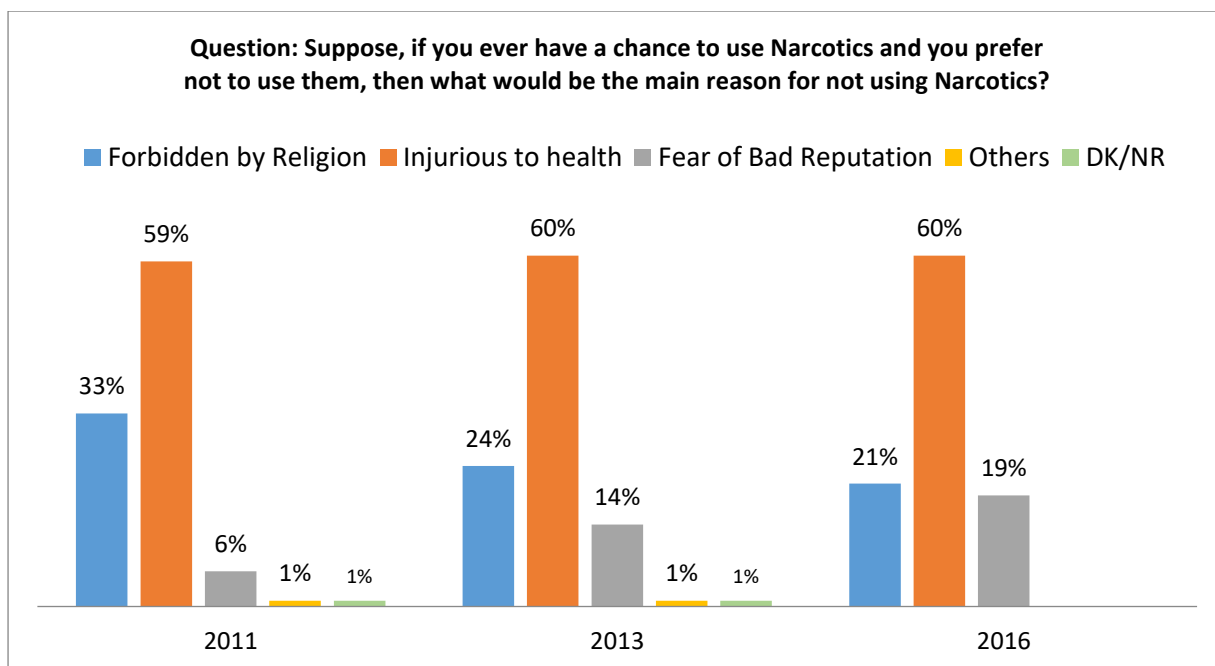
	2008				2016			
	Prohibited	Bad	Good/Right	DK/NR	Prohibited	Bad	Good/Right	DK/NR
Alcohol	97%	2%	-	1%	80%	13%	2%	5%
Charas	81%	17%	1%	1%	63%	31%	6%	-
Bhang	72%	24%	2%	2%	59%	35%	6%	-
Ganja	70%	27%	2%	1%	62%	31%	6%	1%
Opium	81%	17%	1%	1%	68%	28%	3%	1%

Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 2008 & 2016

Almost every substance mentioned is now perceived less as something prohibited under religion from 2008 to 2016, with falls of around 13-18% for each substance. The people that see these substance as *bad* is insignificant since this attitude doesn't usually translate to a hard stance against drugs such as their prohibition does; these people are likely to believe that these substance are a personal matter despite their negative effects. Additionally, the number of people who see these substances as being *good* has also increased by 4-5% for Charas, Bhang and Ganja (all of these are derivative of the Cannabis Sativa plant).

Thus, the particular religious values that are anti-narcotic has reduced by an amount that correlates reasonably well with the 13% decrease in the attitude that drugs are not a social problem.

However, there has also been a decrease in the willingness of people to *act* on said religious values to the extent that they do exist.



Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 2011, 2013, 2016

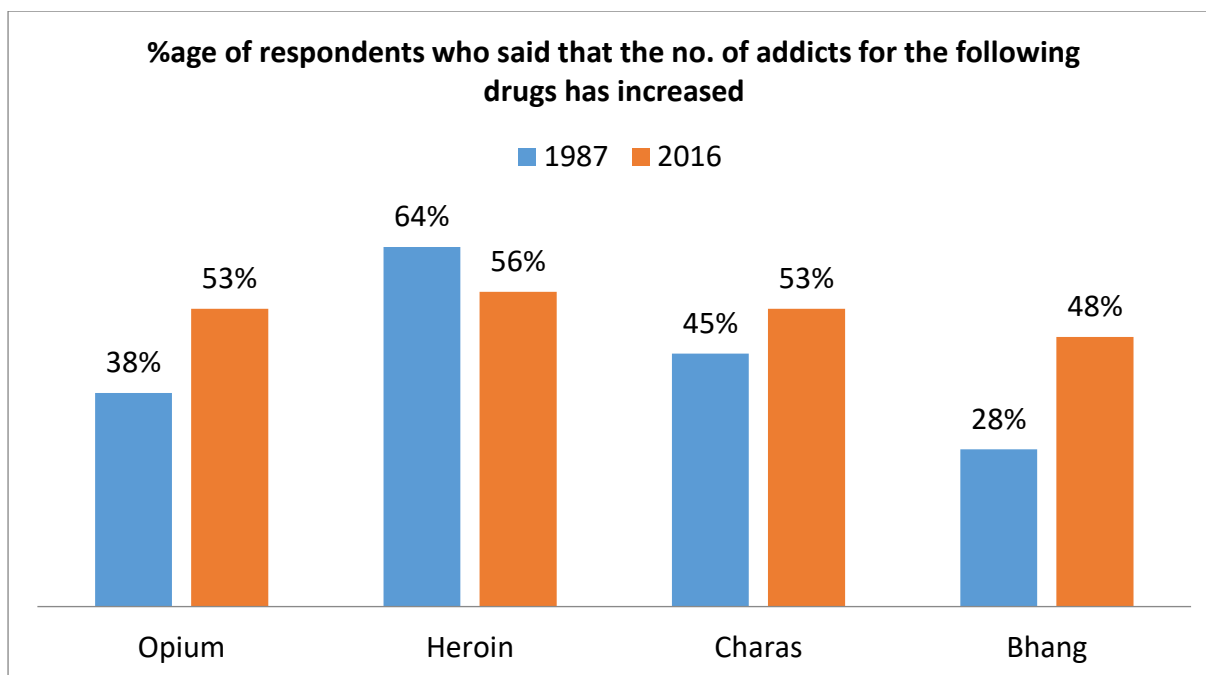
	Forbidden by Religion
2011	33%
2013	24%
2016	21%

Illustrated above is the result of a Gallup Poll conducted in 2011, 2013 and 2016 asking respondents ***“Suppose, if you ever have a chance to use Narcotics and you prefer not to use them, then what would be the main reason for not using Narcotics?”*** and the percentage of respondents who said they would not use Narcotics because it was forbidden by religion. Over the 2011 – 2016 period, the percentage of respondents people who regarded religion as the reason to not use narcotics decreased from 33% to 21%, indicating a reduced inclination to follow religious values that exist in the first place.

The Reduction in the Use of Hard Drugs

While almost all substance abuse has negatives effects that result in a reluctance to accept drug use, the harm varies between different substances. Heroin and Opium is generally more addictive than drugs derived from the Cannabis Sativa plant, and tends to have more negative health effects as well, to the point where larger amounts of Cannabis can be consumed without negative effects as compared to other substances (Dirk W, and Jürgen Rehm). Hence, people are more likely to accept the consumption of narcotics in general if drugs without excessive harmful effects are widely available.

Such an increase in availability likely has happened, given the results of Gallup Surveys conducted in 1987 and 2016 where respondents were asked ***“In your view, whether number of addicts of opium, heroine, Charas*, Bhang** and other drugs has increased or decreased in our country during last one year. (Please tell about each drug separately)”***



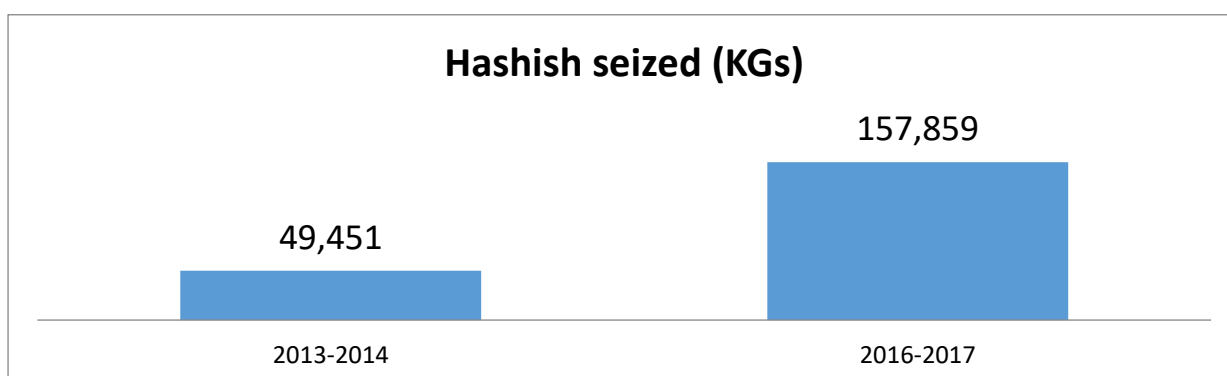
Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 1987 & 2016

	Increased	No change	Decreased	DK/NR
Opium	53%	17%	17%	13%
Heroin	56%	18%	17%	9%
Charas	53%	15%	23%	9%
Bhang	48%	22%	20%	10%

Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 2016

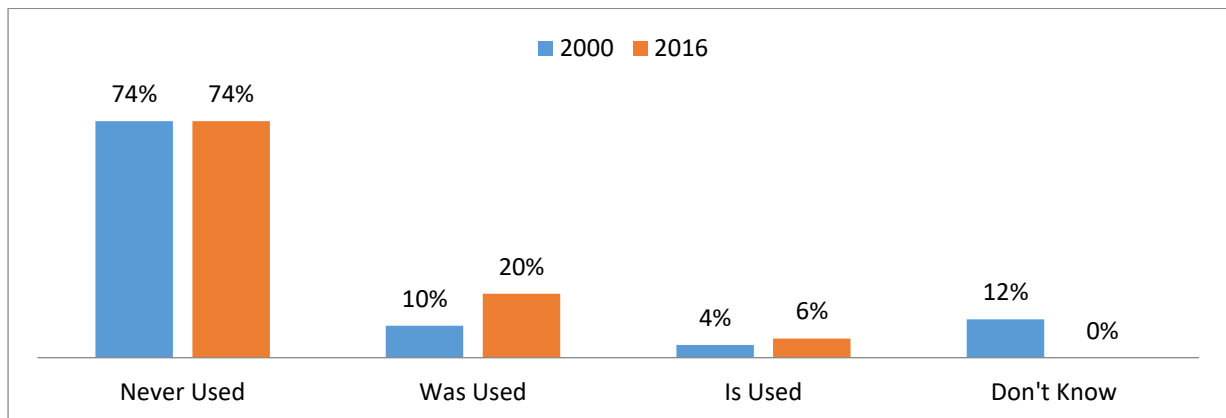
Here, the comparative analysis of the perception of the increase in certain drugs over others is relevant. In 1987 Heroin was increasing the most rapidly (64%); heroin is the most harmful out of these substances and coincides with the time period when harsh attitudes against drugs were at their strongest. However by 2016, comparatively less harmful drugs (of which Bhang and Charas were derivative of Cannabis Sativa) were perceived to be increasing the most – from 28% and 45% to 48% and 53% respectively.

Additionally, the Ministry of Narcotics Controls annual reports of the amounts of substances seized are also indicative of a direct increase in the supply of Hashish (derived from Cannabis Sativa).



Sources: Ministry of Narcotics Control, Government of Pakistan

In addition to this, the medicinal use of opium has increased. Respondents to a Gallup Poll conducted in 2008 and 2016 were asked ***“Some people use opium as a medicine and sometimes give to children. Has it ever or has it not been used as a medicine in your household?”***



Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 2000,2016

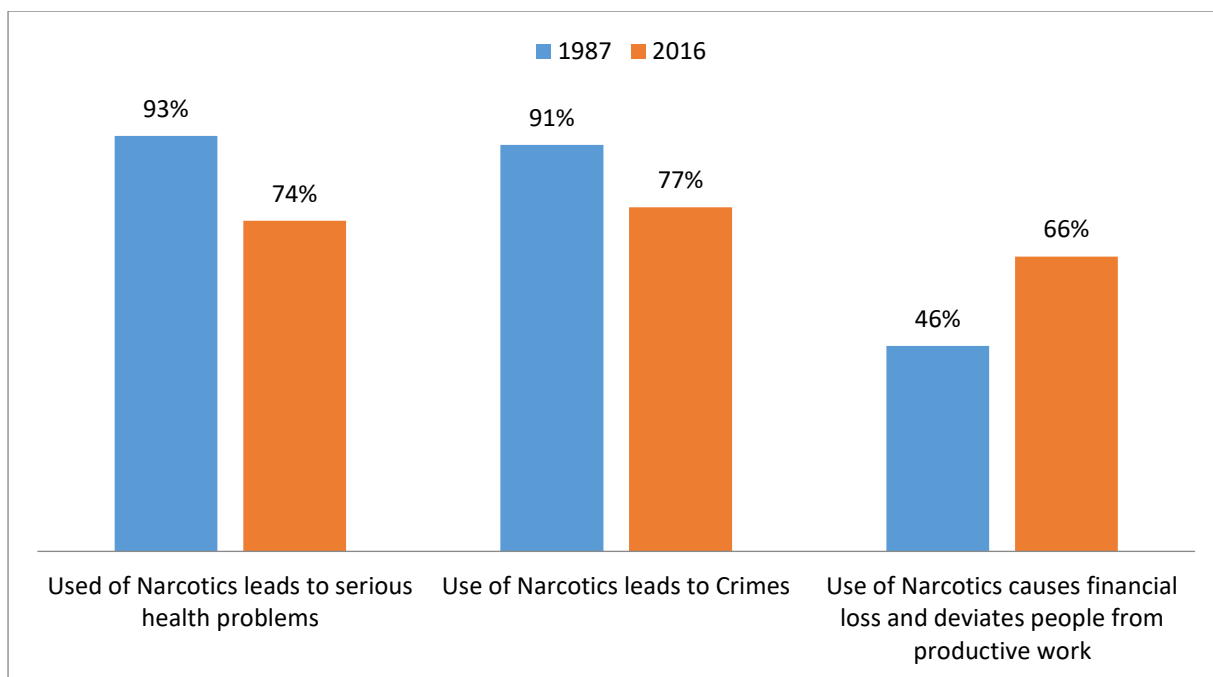
	2000	2016
Never Used	74%	74%
Was Used	10%	20%
Is Used	4%	6%
Don't Know	12%	0%

Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 2000,2016

Thus, 12% more respondents either used or currently use Opium as a medicine or give it to children.

The Perception of Narcotics Related Harm

Finally, it seems that even if people agree that the use of narcotics leads to a number of harmful effects for society, it seems that less people seem to think that these harms are an important concern. A Gallup survey conducted in 1987 and 2016 asked respondents ***‘Different people have different views about the adverse effects of Narcotics for our society. I will enlist a few of such opinions. Please tell me how important or unimportant do you consider the following effects of Narcotic use?’*** Here, only the percentage of people who thought these issues are important is represented.



	1987	2016
Use of Narcotics leads to serious health problems	93%	74%
Use of Narcotics increases crimes	91%	77%
Use of Narcotics causes financial loss and deviates people from productive work	46%	66%

Source: Gallup & Gilani / National Surveys, 1987, 2016

When it comes to health problems and crimes, people tended to view these issues as 15 – 20% less important, though financial issues were seen as a more important by 20% more people (though this is more likely to be seen as a personal issue and hence not one necessarily demanding state action). It is possible that people now attribute the health and crime problems to different factors, such as corruption, or pollution.

Conclusion

Therefore, it is obvious that the decrease in the number of people who view narcotics and alcohol as a social problem and the increase in those who view narcotics and alcohol as a personal matter can be accounted for in a) The weakening of the religious stance against drugs given that the particular religious values that are anti-drugs are less prevalent and religiosity among drug users has decreased in general b) The perception of and the actual increased supply in recreational drugs that aren't as harmful and c) The reduction in how important people perceive the harms of drugs to be.

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