

Generating a Paradigm Shift around Drugs

Activity: Fred Friendly type round table or small group discussion where participants are presented with the following hypothetical and directed to engage with each other around specific issues and conditions arising from the hypothetical in the form of questions that are posed by the moderator. Each group will have a moderator whose job is to keep the discussion focused, civil and honest. The goal of the exercise is not to arrive at a 'right answer' or correct course of action but rather to 'notice' the types of issues and conditions that arise from certain policy choices regardless of intent.

Hypothetical#1: Year 2024 - Benevolent Businessman has assumed control of government after major economic meltdown that doubled the losses experienced during 2008-2009 housing collapse. Among other things she declares a 'public health' emergency around nicotine consumption, which increased in wake of 2019 WWSF - World Wide System Failure. Level of poverty is at 50% nationally and 90% of wealth is controlled by top 1%.

New federal laws are passed declaring nicotine a Schedule 1 drug (no valid medical purpose) and cigars and cigarettes are now considered illegal nicotine delivery systems. People were given 1 year from enactment of law to attend free smoking cessation classes. As of January 1, 2024, new federal laws in effect establish mandatory minimums for possession of any product containing amounts of nicotine including tobacco, patches, vaporizers, gum, or liquids, etc. Enhanced penalties attached to offenses involving cigarettes - legislators view them as highly addictive because smokable, most accessible to the poor, highly abused by women - linked to adverse health outcomes for children whose mothers smoked nicotine during pregnancy and while nursing. Linked to respiratory problems in children. Evidence of smoking in home where children are present gives presumption of potential for child abuse or neglect.

Questions for Group Engagement:

What shifts in behaviors - including drug consumption patterns would follow implementation of such a law?

How would you go about enforcing the law?

What tools would you need for successful law enforcement?

How would the law impact cost of tobacco products? Distribution? Quality control?

What types of activities would now become crimes under the law?

What does successful treatment look like? How do we measure success?

Hypothetical#2: Year 2024 - Benevolent Businessman has assumed the presidency after international flu pandemic that killed thousands in the U.S. According to the CDC there is a high probability of another pandemic in the coming decade. The President declares a 'public health' emergency and instructs Congress to act. New federal laws are passed forbidding touching in public – holding or shaking hands, kissing, hugging or any other form of embrace are strictly forbidden. Exceptions are made for law enforcement, health professionals and clergy while performing religious duties.

As of January 1, 2024, new federal laws in effect establish mandatory minimums for any violation of public touching offenses. Enhanced penalties attached to repeat offenders. Juveniles and people with cognitive or behavioral disabilities are sent to behavior modification camps where they are trained in appropriate public behavior. Sex workers are particular targets for law enforcement and the crime of intentional transmission of a communicable disease is punishable with life imprisonment.

Questions for Group Engagement:

What shifts in behaviors would follow implementation of such a law?
How would you go about enforcing the law?
What tools would you need for successful law enforcement?
How would the law impact civil liberties? Privacy? Personal relationships?
What types of activities would now become crimes under the law?
What does successful implementation look like? How should we measure success?

Hypothetical #3: Year 2024 - Benevolent Businessman with background in public health has assumed the presidency. One of the many consequences of rising income inequality is a sharp increase in the rate of obesity – especially among children and youth. Health professionals have identified processed sugars as the principal culprit in juvenile obesity and diabetes. The President declares a ‘war on obesity’ and instructs Congress to act.

New federal laws are passed setting a cap on the amount of processed sugar that foods can contain and requires mandatory labeling on all food products, including prepared foods. The importation of food containing processed sugars is strictly forbidden. The cultivation and production of sugar has been nationalized and the crime of illegal sugar cultivation is punishable with life imprisonment.

As of January 1, 2024, harsh mandatory sentences attach to conviction for offenses involving the possession, sale, distribution or manufacture of any product containing more than the legal amount of processed sugars. Enhanced penalties attached to repeat offenders. Juveniles and people with cognitive or behavioral disabilities are sent to restricted diet camps where they are cured of their sugar addiction. Confectioners, bakers and syrup manufacturers are particular targets for law enforcement.

Questions for Group Engagement:

What shifts in behaviors would follow implementation of such a law?
How would you go about enforcing the law?
What tools would you need for successful law enforcement?
How would the law impact food consumption patterns? Social behaviors?
What types of activities would now become crimes under the law?
What does successful implementation look like? How should we measure success?