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Issue:

New Jersey is facing a rising heroin epidemic.

Necessary Background:

Heroin is an illegal drug that is processed from the Asian opium poppy plant. Once consumed, this causes users to crave more and more in desperation of getting a high. New Jersey has some of the purest forms of heroin in the nation with the average purity near 50 percent[4]. To put into perspective, the average purity of heroin in the nation is only 31 percent. This is because New Jersey's sprawling highways, large airport, and three ports help to connect dealers to the suppliers from South America[4]. The demand for heroin is largely caused by the high prices of prescription drugs. Once people realize that a \$35 dollar prescription pill is much more expensive than a \$10 bag of heroin, they will start turning to the latter to satiate their desires[4].

Evidence of Problem Existing:

The drug culture among young adults has truly become an epidemic. According to Chris Christie's Council on Drug and Alcohol Abuse, the number of people from New Jersey between the age of 18 and 26 that were admitted to addiction treatment centers for heroin increased by more than 12 percent between 2010 and 2011[1]. In 2013, heroin overdoses killed 557 people in New Jersey, which is nearly twice as many as in 2010[3]. Additionally, with increased social media usage, obtaining heroin from a dealer is easier than ever[4].

Impact:

First, it encourages others to use it, as more people will perceive heroin to be a "popular" drug. Second, it encourages crime because of heroin's highly addictive nature[3]. Once hooked, users have much difficulty to quit because of the symptoms of withdrawal[2]. Thus, they often deplete their bank accounts rapidly and resort to stealing from their families and even neighbors. Third, heroin use can affect employment because drug abuse can keep people from seeking employment and can impair performance at work[5].

Possible Solutions:

The most important thing legislators can do is to abandon the binary view of addiction, where there are only people who use or don't use heroin. In addition, the government cannot incarcerate itself out of the problem because that does not treat addiction at the heart of the problem. Instead, the government should encourage private pharmaceutical companies to distribute and sell a cheaper drugs like Naloxone, the anti-overdose medication, to stop heroin addiction. In addition, the government should encourage insurance companies to fund more care in treatment.

Sources:

1. http://www.nj.com/politics/index.ssf/2014/12/christie_government_private_sector_need_to_step_up_fight_against_heroin_in_nj.html
2. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2012/10/heroin_use_among_young_in_nj_i.html
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5. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/31/us/heroin-war-on-drugs-parents.html>