

Illegal Drugs in Grenada: Arrests and Drug Treatment from 2001–2009

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *Illegal drug use and abuse has increased in the Caribbean since the 1990s. In Grenada, statistical indicators such as admission rates to treatment facilities and drug arrests have provided evidence for the increased rates of illegal drug use and abuse. This study reviewed these statistical indicators and explored drug treatment options in Grenada from 2001 to 2009.*

Methods: *A search of statistical records from the Drug Control Secretariat and the Grenada Drug Information Network/National Observatory on Drugs (GRENDIN/NOD) was performed. Literature review of relevant articles from search engines was used to support findings. Additionally, semi-structured interviews of key stakeholders from government and health agencies involved in drug prevention in Grenada were conducted to obtain information on recent developments surrounding drug arrests and treatments in Grenada.*

Results: *From 2001 to 2009, there were a 118% and a 23% increase in the arrest rate for males and females, respectively. There was also an increase in demand for drug treatment at the sole drug treatment facility.*

Conclusion: *Preventive measures in schools and several forms of media programmes have raised awareness. However, drug use/abuse/activities still persist at a significant rate. Programmes that target improvement of treatment facilities and increased inter-agency collaboration may be successful in enhancing drug arrests and treatments.*

Keywords: Drug arrests and treatments, Grenada, illegal drugs

Drogas Ilegales en Granada: Arrestos por Drogas y Tratamiento de la Drogadicción de 2001–2009

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RESUMEN

Objetivo: *El uso y abuso de drogas ilegales ha aumentado en el Caribe desde la década de 1990. En Granada, los indicadores estadísticos tales como las tasas de ingreso a los centros de tratamiento de la drogadicción y los arrestos por drogas, han proporcionado evidencia del aumento de las tasas del uso y abuso de drogas ilegales. Este estudio examinó estos indicadores estadísticos, y exploró las opciones de tratamiento en Granada desde 2001 hasta 2009.*

Métodos: *Se realizó una búsqueda de registros estadísticos de la Secretaría de Control de Drogas, y la Red de Información de Drogas/Observatorio Nacional de Drogas de Granada (GRENDIN/NOD). Se utilizó una revisión de la literatura de los artículos pertinentes mediante los sistemas de búsqueda en internet para fundamentar los resultados. Además, se llevaron a cabo entrevistas semiestructuradas de grupos claves de interés (stakeholders) del gobierno y las agencias de salud involucradas en la prevención de drogas en Granada, a fin de obtener información sobre los últimos acontecimientos en relación con los tratamientos de drogadicción y arrestos por drogas en Granada.*

Resultados: *De 2001 a 2009, se produjeron aumentos de 118% y 23% en la tasa de arrestos de hombres y mujeres, respectivamente. También hubo un aumento en la demanda de tratamiento por drogas en el único centro de tratamiento de la drogadicción.*

Conclusión: *Las medidas preventivas en las escuelas y varias formas de los programas de los medios masivos de comunicación han traído consigo una toma de conciencia. Sin embargo, el uso, abuso, y las*

actividades en relación con las drogas todavía persisten en una tasa significativa. Los programas dirigidos a la mejora de los centros para el tratamiento de la drogadicción y una mayor colaboración interinstitucional pueden contribuir a mejorar con éxito el problema de los arrestos por drogas y los tratamientos de drogadicción.

Palabras claves: Drogas ilegales, arrestos por drogas, tratamientos de drogadicción, Granada

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INTRODUCTION

Grenada is a tri-island state with a population of 108 419 who are mostly of African, Indian and European descent (1). Tourism and the agricultural sector are the main drivers for economic growth (2). The construction and manufacturing industries as well as the offshore financial industry have also contributed to national economic growth in the last few years. The drugs primarily used on the island include alcohol, marijuana, crack and cocaine. Combinations of these drugs (poly drugs) are also used. However, in 2001, the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) reported a growing drug problem in Grenada (3). This tremendous increase in the last three to four decades signifies a major public health problem. It is important to note that cigarettes and alcohol are considered legal drugs which are documented in the Grenada Drug Information Network (GRENDIN) report as drugs frequently abused in Grenada. For the purposes of this report, the terms “drug use” and “drug abuse” are used interchangeably to refer to illegal drugs or substances. The terms “drug problem” and “drug situation” are substitutable and denote the damages drug activities pose to society.

Illegal drug use is a major problem worldwide. It poses health risks through its use and dependence and contributes to social issues such as mental health problems, increased crime rates, domestic violence and unemployment (4). Adolescents are commonly affected by these issues. In 2009, Maharaj *et al* reported that several studies carried out on Caribbean youths showed several risk factors attributed to substance use such as skipping school, rage, psychosis *etc* (5).

As a social problem, illegal drug use creates direct and indirect costs to society in the form of increasing treatment demands, treatment programmes and more dependence on social programmes. These demands place a burden on the national budget due to the higher public health needs and forgone income and tax revenues to the society (6, 7). Drug trade also demoralizes governance, as well as institutional and social cohesion because it creates an opportunity for greed and corruption. Typically, drug traffickers hunt for routes in developing nations where they believe the rule of law is weak. This creates drug-related crimes which expand these nations' susceptibility to instability and poverty since most of their resources are drained in the process of resolving these drug problems (8, 9).

The Grenada Drug Control Secretariat in conjunction with the GRENDIN/National Observatory on Drugs (NOD) routinely collects statistical data on the drug situation in Grenada. This information is solicited from the police force, prisons, hospitals, treatment centres, customs, excise department, laboratories, and financial intelligence unit. Grenada Drug Information Network then compiles and disseminates this information to the public in order to increase the awareness on the dangers of illegal drug use.

Understanding the historical trends surrounding this drug situation is essential to address the drug problem. The purpose of this study is to investigate drug arrests and explore drug treatments.

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

The ethical approval for this study was granted by the institutional review board at the St George's University, School of Medicine, Grenada, West Indies. This study was carried out in conjunction with the Grenada Drug Control Secretariat and GRENDIN/NOD, particularly the drug control officer. These government agencies compile and publicize statistical information on drugs in Grenada. For the purpose of this report, secondary data for the years 2001–2009 were obtained from GRENDIN/NOD and reviewed to obtain estimates and statistical data on 1) the drug-related conviction rate and 2) the drug-related admission rate at the general hospital and Carlton House treatment centre in Grenada from 2001 to 2009.

Additional secondary sources were obtained through a literature search. The search engines used included MEDLINE with full text, PubMed and Google Scholar. Additionally, organizations that promote healthy living and champion drug prevention such as: the Government of Grenada, Ministry of Health in Grenada, United Nations, World Health Organization, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime were used as online sources to search for any statistics and credible explanations about drug use in the Caribbean and Grenada.

The terms “illegal drug use”, “drug treatment”, “Caribbean OR Grenada AND illegal drug use”, “Caribbean OR Grenada AND marijuana use”, “Caribbean OR Grenada AND drug arrests” and “Caribbean OR Grenada AND drug treatment” were searched as key words or phrases on the search engines and organization websites. Due to the insufficiency of literature on developing nations such as

Grenada, inclusion criteria consisted of all available articles from search engines and organization websites that explored drug use and their influencing factors in the Caribbean and in Grenada specifically. All other articles with information not relating to drug use in Grenada were excluded.

For the primary data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to further elaborate on drug arrest and treatments in Grenada. Eleven key representatives from various agencies including the Royal Grenada Police Force, Carlton House Treatment Centre, Drug Control Secretariat, general and mental hospitals, Grenada Ports Authority, Customs and Excise, Ministry of Legal Affairs, and Financial Intelligence Unit were interviewed. All interview sessions were tape recorded except for two interviewees who declined being tape recorded.

Interview responses were thoroughly reviewed to identify the main and overlapping themes. These themes were then organized by informant. The interview findings were used to supplement the findings of the secondary data and literature reviews. The interviews also provide the most updated information from those key representatives involved in combating drug use and abuse in Grenada.

RESULTS

A total of 16 articles, documents, and GRENDIN reports were gathered. The eleven staff members that were interviewed from key agencies included two doctors, a nurse, a counsellor, a police officer, a financial investigator, a customs intelligence investigator, two prosecution officers, one drug control officer and a manager administrator of the Ports Authority.

From 2001 to 2009, of the people charged and convicted for drug related offences, approximately 90% were males while 10% were females (1). In the same period, the arrest rates for drug use rose by 118% in males and 23% in females (12) [Fig. 1]. According to the Drug Control Secretariat official,

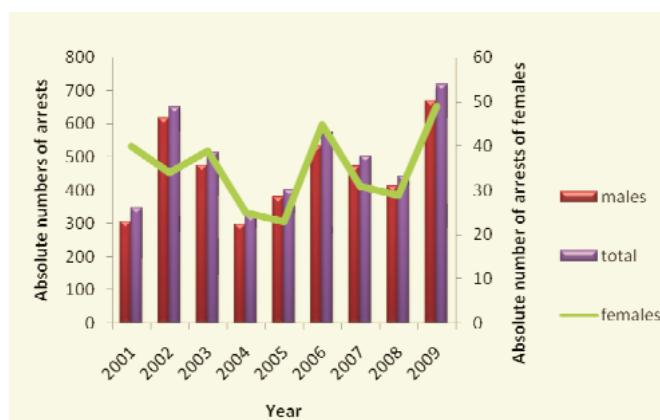


Fig. 1: Arrests for drug related offences from 2001–2009
(Source: http://www.gov.gd/egov/pdf/ncode/newsletters/March_2011.pdf)

“...you might also notice spikes over the years in terms of number of persons arrested and charged, every other number seems to be increasing not because more persons per se are using drugs but ever so often the police would launch specific operations which would have led to them catching more drug criminals. Within the last year or two the police have stepped up a number of these operations leading to a large number of people being charged”.

Prison sentencing for drug use also increased by 38% in males and 20% in females from 2001 to 2009 (12). In addition to the already noted developments in drug arrests, the majority of the interviewees acknowledged the rise in the production of marijuana locally. A Drug Control Secretariat official reported:

“Marijuana continues to be the drug of choice among many Grenadians, this is apparent in the significant number of seizures and eradication of cannabis plants by the police”.

Approximately 314 212 marijuana trees, 32 077 marijuana cigarettes, 2444 grams of marijuana seed, and 10 167.63 kilograms of marijuana were seized by officials between 2001 and 2009. This number is greater than the seizure of other drugs such as crack, cocaine and methamphetamines as only 7.463 kilograms of crack, 462.25 tablets of cocaine, and 89 tablets of methamphetamine were seized by officials between 2001 and 2009 [Figs. 2, 3 and 4].

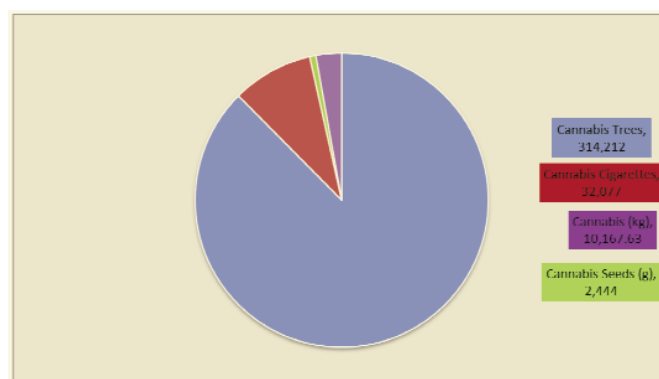


Fig. 2: Cannabis/marijuana related seizures by Royal Grenada Police Force in the years 2001 to 2009 (Pictorial representation of the drug situation in Grenada 2001–2009).

Grenada Drug Information Network data reported alcohol use as the most frequent reason for admission (41%) at the sole treatment and rehabilitation centre, Carlton House. The next most frequent reason for admission was poly drug use (31%), then cocaine/crack (14%) and finally marijuana use (13%) (1) [Fig. 5]. Similarly, a total of 240 patients were admitted to the Carlton House treatment centre in Grenada as a result of drug induced medical problems from the period 2001 to 2009 (13) [Table]. Several other hospitals not mentioned here also treated patients with illegal drug use



Fig. 3: Methamphetamine and cocaine seizures by the Royal Grenada Police Force in the years 2001 to 2009 (Pictorial representation of the drug situation in Grenada 2001–2009).

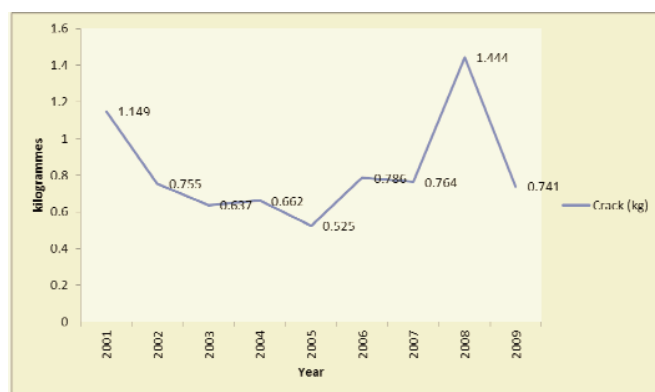


Fig. 4: Crack seizures by the Royal Grenada Police Force in the years 2001 to 2009 (Pictorial representation of the drug situation in Grenada 2001–2009).

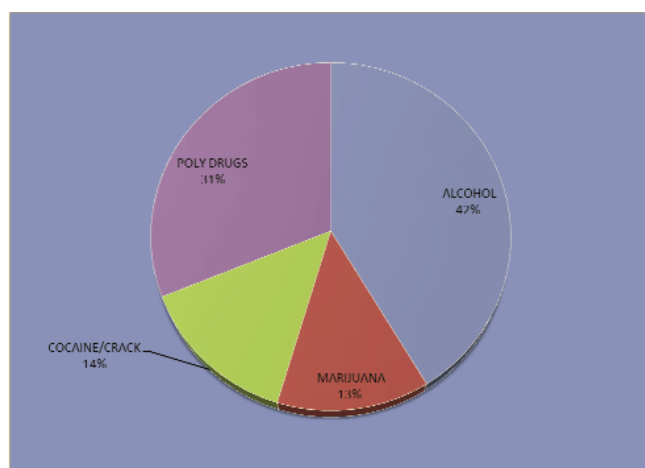


Fig. 5: Types of drugs that resulted in admission to Carlton House from 2001–2009

problems. The high demands for drug treatment reflects the growing problem and burden that illegal drug use places on the economy of Grenada. This is evident by the lack of adequate staffing for drug treatment programmes. A nurse at the Carlton House illustrated:

Table: Drug-related admissions to Carlton House from 2001–2009

| Year | Male | Female | Total |
|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 2001 | 53 | 0 | 53 |
| 2002 | 32 | 1 | 33 |
| 2003 | 59 | 6 | 65 |
| 2004* | 38 | 0 | 38 |
| 2008 | 24 | 6 | 30 |
| 2009 | 19 | 2 | 21 |
| 2010 | 24 | 7 | 31 |
| Total | 225 | 15 | 240 |

* Data are for the period 1 January to 30 June 2004, due to the destruction of the facility and loss of records by Hurricane Ivan on September 7, 2004. Data resumed on 21 January 2008.

(Source: <http://www.gov.gd/ncode.html>)

“We need a residential facility staffed by persons qualified in counselling and the whole works, we need a physiotherapist, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, we need everything...the social workers, follow-up care, officers to follow-up patients after disasters such as Ivan”.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted in St George’s, Grenada, and as such the results are specific to this area. However, due to its similar sociodemographic characteristics to other areas of Grenada and to other Caribbean countries, the findings may be relevant to other areas.

Studies by GRENDIN have already recognized an increase in drug arrests in Grenada and the burden they place on the economy in terms of drug treatment demand. This is partly one of the reasons for drug treatment demand decline. However, the main reason for this decline as established by the nurse interviewed is the hurricane which occurred in 2004 which destroyed treatment and rehabilitation facilities especially the main treatment centre, Carlton House. This disaster left many drug-users helpless and their treatments cut short. The abandonment of drug-users led to relapse as stated by the nurse interviewed. According to the GRENDIN report findings, in the years 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2009, there were spikes in drug arrests and seizures. These spikes were attributed to the enhanced police operations, although it is possible that more arrests were made due to an increasing drug-user population. Further studies or research is needed to support these report findings.

The World Drug Reports give a general view of the drug situation in the Caribbean (10, 11). Focussed studies by the GRENDIN report seem to briefly address the objectives of this paper yet there are still areas void of information such as the follow-up treatment of drug patients after the natural disasters such as Ivan. More attention should be paid to the area of patient relapse, as relapse can also be a leading cause of the increasing number of arrests. In essence, drug treat-

ment indirectly affects drug arrests. The lack of complete drug treatment leads to recidivism of drug offences and hence more drug arrests. It is also possible that lack of essential drug treatments could promote a misconstrued view of the hazards of drug use. That is, because treatment is taken lightly, there might be an inclination toward tolerance for continued drug use and/or relapse, thereby increasing the number of drug arrests. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of researched information on drug arrests and treatments in Grenada.

But, programmes and policies targeted at drug treatment, specifically in the area of prevention, have been established. In 1992, the Grenadian government enacted the Drug Abuse (Prevention and Control) Act. This foremost step in tackling drug problems helped to establish preventative measures (14). Policies were also formulated to maintain a link and to network related aforementioned agencies to combat the problems of drug abuse in Grenada (14). Grenada developed awareness raising programmes through television shows and monthly newsletters to inform the public on the dangers of drug abuse. Programmes targeted at supply and demand reduction of illegal drugs were also implemented. One such programme is the Grenada National Drug Control Programme. There are also drug and violence prevention programmes targeted at secondary schools in Grenada and Carriacou. These programmes are regularly evaluated to ensure effectiveness and efficiency (15). The evaluation of these programmes was published by the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD), through the Multilateral Evaluation Mechanism (MEM), and the Governmental Experts Group [GEG] (15). Success has been achieved in the area of prevention programme implementation, and training of law enforcement officials; the latter is a possible claim for the increase in drug arrests.

Nevertheless, there has been insufficient documentation of the success rate of these implemented programmes in enhancing the drug treatments and arrests in Grenada. A valid recommendation made from insights drawn from key informants was that there is a need for more human resources and infrastructure. Limited staff in the areas of policing, drug testing, and drug treatment was cited. Providing more rehabilitation or resocialization centres can be an essential step to prevent relapse and recidivism. A significant improvement in drug treatments and arrests can be attained if recommended steps are executed in conjunction with the already existing programmes. This would help speed up the process of drug detection and ultimately drug treatments and arrests. The primary constraint as also signified by interviewees lies in the dearth of financial resources that need to be allocated for the implementation of these projects.

Limitations

Internal threats and limitations to this study are natural disasters. In fact, a major hurricane, Hurricane Ivan, occurred in 2004 which destroyed the major drug rehabi-

litation centre, Carlton House, in Grenada and this led to loss of records/data. The focus of the current study has not been well-researched in the past, particularly in Grenada. This limits the efficiency and quality of information or data for this study. Additionally, the Drug Control Secretariat/GRENDIN records were the only source of quantitative information, making this a limitation of the methodology for this study. The lack of varied information limited the opportunity to enhance quantitative data comparisons. There was also no available information on the method of analysis employed by GRENDIN. For the interviews conducted in this study, reporting bias due to respondent's inaccurate recollection of events is another possible limitation to this study. Social desirability bias could also have affected these results.

In conclusion, this study highlighted the need for additional research on drug arrests and treatments in Grenada. For example, documentation of the effects of implemented preventative programmes, and follow-up treatments of drug-users should be pursued in future research. These future studies can provide solutions to this evolving problem.

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