

Drugs in the CNMI

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Community Issues Topic

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Our islands hold some of the most beautiful sites in the world; crystal clear waters, year round warmth, and mesmerizing sunsets and sunrises. However behind all this beauty, is a growing problem that has been taking roots in our islands for what seems like forever. The drug pandemic that sweeps all across the world has come to call our islands home. Drug abuse and all the hardships that come along with it are very conspicuous; as you see families struggle in worn down houses while main breadwinners of the home squander every last dollar at a conveniently located poker establishment that litters our islands. Thieves and drug addicts roam the streets, searching for their next victim. I believe that the steady availability of drugs, mainly methamphetamine, greatly contributes to the rapid growth of crimes being committed in our community. This essay will address the history of drugs , drug related cases and what the government is doing to combat this situation. Information from news articles, surveys and statistics will be included to support my thesis.

Saipan is the main island in the archipelago. The island acts as the capitol and is the main commercial center. Saipan serves as the major trans-pacific travel route with shipping vessels and planes entering and leaving the island on a daily basis. Because of its ideal location, drug traffickers from around the world use the island as a distribution hub because of its close proximity to Guam, Hawaii, FSM, and Palau. Since the 1990's local authorities have reported a spike in the distribution and abuse of methamphetamine. With purity levels remaining the same while value decreases typically points towards a greater supply and availability of the drug (Drug threat Assessment 2003). Methamphetamine that enters the CNMI are usually transiting from Guam and other asian countries such as the Philippines and China, although recent law enforcement investigations revealed ties to American crystal meth distributors in California

(Hilliard 2020). This is a growing issue because drug traffickers are treating our home as a drive through for drugs. They have no regard for the lives they affect and ruin.

Along with the increased availability of methamphetamine, comes the issue of the growing violent crime rates. According to the *Northern Mariana Island Drug Threat Assessment* a steady increase in drug related crimes, mainly domestic violence, has continued to grow in the CNMI since the 1990's. Methamphetamine users are prone to be more violent and aggressive; especially during withdrawal. Other crimes such as theft, burglary, and robberies also continue to rise along with the increase of methamphetamine. From 1997 to 2001 nearly all drug related investigations and federal indictments involved methamphetamine (Drug Threat Assessment 2003). To this date numerous drug related cases continue to occupy local news. Saddening stories of people being robbed or parents being sentenced to federal prison while leaving their children behind to be taken care of by family members or the Division of Youth Services have become a normality in our islands. According to Police Lieutenant Joseph Benevente from DPS about 35-45% of the crimes committed on saipan are drug related.

The DEA had established a task force with local authorities to fight the war on drugs since 1996. Since then a copious amount of drugs have been seized and removed from the community. Even though drugs are being confiscated, for example, the CNMI Customs confiscated over 300 grams of meth on November 06, 2020 (Press Release 2020) the decline in drug availability is unhindered. The CNMI government seems to be fighting a losing war, especially since they promote businesses that provide a "safe space" such as poker establishments where drug traffickers frequent. I feel that more funds to train and hire personnel

to intercept drugs coming into our islands should be a priority. Mainly because we are a tourism based economy; the thought of high violent crime rates such as robberies will deter the economic growth of our islands. Another issue is corruption within the government. A Police Officer was arrested for allegedly trafficking methamphetamine on March 09, 2015 (De La Torre 2015). It is quite repulsive that the people entrusted to enforce the laws are the ones breaking it.

In conclusion, this essay has provided insight into the history of drugs and how it enters our islands. I have discussed the effect drugs have on the community and how drug availability correlates with the rising crime rates. I have also considered the efforts the CNMI government is taking to combat this situation. Overall, this drug problem will only continue to rise unless extreme measures are taken to prevent and deter the importation and distribution of drugs.

References

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