

“Crack Baby”

There is no such thing as a “crack baby.” Stories on TV and the news about the effects of crack on fetuses were unsupported, misleading and inaccurate. Dozens of studies now show that other factors are responsible for many of the problems that women who use crack are blamed for, such as poverty and lack of pre-natal care.¹

Crack vs. Cocaine Sentencing

Crack is produced from powder cocaine. The penalties for possession or sale of crack are far more severe than for powder cocaine. A person who sells or possesses five grams of crack get the same five year federal mandatory sentence as someone who sells or possesses five hundred grams of powder cocaine. Drug policy reform advocates see these laws as racist, since 85% of people arrested for crack sale or use are Black.

Harm Reduction²

Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies that reduce negative consequences of drug use. It seeks to minimize the harmful effects of drug use rather than ignoring or condemning drug users. It calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to drug users, families and communities. Needle-exchange is an example of a harm reduction strategy. Harm reduction sees drug use as a public health issue.

Mandatory Minimums

In the 1970s and 1980s, the U.S. Congress and many state legislatures passed laws that required judges to give fixed prison terms to those convicted of specific crimes, most often drug offenses. Lawmakers believed these harsh, inflexible sentencing laws would catch those at the top of the drug trade and deter others from entering it. Instead, this heavy-handed response to the nation's drug problem filled prisons with men and women found guilty low-level offences resulting prisons being filled with people serving long sentences at tremendous cost to taxpayers. Mandatory sentencing laws disproportionately affect people of color and, because of their severity, destroy families.³

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has been the dominant ideology behind economic policy for more than 20 years. Neoliberalism calls for free markets and a smaller role for the government. According to neoliberal thinking, government policies and regulations—including taxes on the wealthy—create conditions that slow down economic growth. Neoliberalism calls for free trade between the U.S. and developing countries; the reduction of protections for workers and families; the private ownership of hospitals, water, transportation and education; drastic cuts in public spending for welfare, housing and job development; and no voice for workers and unions. Neoliberalism claims its approach will generate economic growth and prosperity for all. In the neoliberal view, poverty is the result of government interference and lack of motivation on the part of poor families. However, neoliberal policies make it harder and harder for most people to survive. One way those in government and business enforce these policies is by making poor people believe they are poor because of their shortcomings rather than the effects of negative effects of neoliberal policies on their daily life.

Racialized Patriarchy

Women of color face many forms of discrimination which are deeply rooted in our society. Racialized patriarchy is what happens when racism AND sexism are combined. The effect is that the combination makes the negative effects not just two times more powerful but many more times more powerful since racism strengthens sexism and sexism strengthen racism. This powerful combination can lead women of color to face even greater vulnerability than white women to poverty, lack of access to quality education and discrimination in jobs and housing. While individual women experience its effects and individuals perpetuate it, racialized patriarchy is a complex set of harmful beliefs, attitudes, economic practices, and laws which restrict and/or prevent the full development of girls and women of color in the U.S. and around the world.

Transactional Sex

Transactional sex is the exchange of sex for money, drugs, a place to live, rent money, or what ever it is that the person performing sex needs. Many people engage in transactional sex without even realizing it. Women who engage in transactional sex by working the streets are exposed to tremendous risk of abuse and violence and exposure to sexually transmitted infections including HIV. They are also at risk of police harassment and arrest in most cities in the U.S.

1. National Advocates for Pregnant Women website:
www.advocatesforpregnantwomen.org

2. Harm Reduction Coalition website:
www.harmreduction.org

3. Families Against Mandatory Minimums website:
www.famm.org