

English summary

Youth, drugs and police strategies

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In the last few years, young people's experimental use of narcotics has often attracted attention in Sweden as well as in many other countries. Findings from the annual surveys of young people's drug habits indicate that the use of drugs among youth has increased. In the public debate regarding this issue, it has been emphasised that forceful efforts must be made to thwart this negative trend in development. Furthermore, in the Government authorities' directives for the police, the fight against narcotics has been given a high priority.

This report presents the results of two investigations of the police's preventive strategies as regards the narcotics problem among youth: The Rave Commission's efforts and the VÅGA programme (Swedish version of DARE, Drug Abuse Resistance Education). The investigations were initiated by the National Police Board's research unit at the Police College. When the research unit was merged with the National Council for Crime Prevention in January 1998, both investigations became the responsibility of BRÅ.

The first strategy studied involved intensifying efforts to discourage the possession and use of narcotics, particularly in the context of public entertainment. In November 1996, the police authorities in Stockholm County appointed a special group, the so-called Rave Commission, to work with at rave parties and similar gatherings. The goal of the Rave Commission's work is to reduce, by intensifying its efforts at rave parties, the use of drugs among youth, and to identify persons who have not as yet been linked to narcotics abuse by the authorities. The investigation shows that about 60 percent of the persons who were suspected of narcotics crimes as a result of the Commission's work were already known by the authorities to have engaged in criminal activity or

drug abuse. Moreover, the majority of the persons who were not known to the authorities in this context were cleared of suspicion after more detailed evaluation was carried out.

The Rave Commission's contribution has resulted in several young people being found linked to drug abuse. However, it has not been possible to link many of the youths who have been caught by the Commission to any crime, which means that the possibility of judging whether a person is under the influence of drugs or not is difficult. Given this background, it can be concluded that the young people in question have been unnecessarily subjected to coercive methods on the part of the police.

A current topic of discussion is the extent to which reinforced efforts on the part of the police against narcotics misdemeanours, such as possession of drugs for one's own use, results in fewer young people trying out narcotics. Entirely problem-free evaluations are of course lacking, but a compilation of assessments from earlier studies outside Sweden and various analyses of the Swedish situation shows that efforts of this kind only influence youth's use of drugs to a limited extent. On the other hand, it is possible that intensified police efforts can yield certain positive results if they are carried out at random and based on analyses of local problem scenarios.

The other strategy concerns the police's role as drug advisors in schools. Since 1993, a special training package called the VÅGA Programme has been used in a large number of schools throughout Sweden. The programme, originally called DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), comes from the United States. The goal of the programme which is led by police officers and teachers, is to encourage schoolchildren to say "No" to drugs and violence.

In an evaluation, students in 13 high schools who participated in the 17-week-long programme were compared with students in as many schools in a control group. The comparisons between these two groups were made in part when the programme started (the students were in the seventh grade), and later when the students were in the eighth and ninth grades. If we only assess the value of the VÅGA Programme in terms of the evaluation results, the conclusion is rather unequivocal. There is no evidence that students who took part in the programme are "vaccinated" against drugs to any higher degree than those who did not. The participation of police officers in drug-prevention classes seems to have no decisive importance to the students' attitudes to, or use of, drugs. However, to conclude from these results that collaboration between the police and the schools is unnecessary would be a misconception. Every year, for example, almost 25,000 burglaries and thefts in schools are reported to the police, and in this context the police's competence should be more useful.

Keywords:

Youth; Drugs; Narcotics; Rave; Drug advisors; Preventive strategies; DARE; School; Police