

## What we believe

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### **‘Harm reduction’ approaches are un-Christian**

Teenage pregnancy and drug taking are recognised as two of the major social problems affecting this country.

Telling young people to steer clear of drugs and to abstain from sex until marriage is now viewed as ‘indoctrination’ and a waste of time.

Such approaches have been ridiculed as a simplistic ‘just say no’ message. For the past twenty years the argument has been made that preventative approaches which give strong moral guidance to young people do not work. Instead, ‘harm reduction’ approaches have been advocated with the justification that telling young people not to take drugs or engage in underage sex will not stop them doing it, therefore it’s better to allow them to do it and ensure they do it safely. This harm reduction philosophy has led to young people being told how to have ‘safer-sex’ and how to take drugs ‘safely’.

This philosophy is superficially appealing because it has a desirable goal – the reduction of harm. Many people have been taken in by this profoundly naïve philosophy. But by opposing restraint, ‘harm reduction’ actually increases the number of people involved in a harmful activity rather than reducing it.

Harm reduction was originally introduced to help drug addicts who were hooked on a chemical substance. As part of a programme to end their addiction, addicts in danger of killing themselves were given advice on how to take their drugs more safely. The important point was that the aim in view was to end the addiction. This original approach has now largely been abandoned. Heroin addicts are now being given methadone on a long term basis.

Of even wider significance is the fact that harm reduction approaches have been extended to cover the whole population of young people rather than just those who are addicts.

From a Christian perspective, harm reduction greases the tracks of sin. Instead of telling young people that actions inevitably have consequences, harm reduction presents as a paradise what is inherently dangerous.

Harm reduction creates an atmosphere of acceptability that encourages more people to engage in harmful activity and stigmatises those young people who remain opposed to it. This will result in increased harm, not reduced harm.

This is clearly seen in the field of sex education. Since 'safer sex' education was introduced the number of children engaging in under-age sex has increased. The levels of sexually transmitted disease have also rocketed, as have teenage abortions. Meanwhile, it has become almost impossible for young people to feel free to say they want to wait until they are married before having sex. 'Harm reduction' has increased harm, not reduced it.

Harm reduction undermines the rule of law and parental authority. It leads young people into wrong-doing. It sends out the message that taking drugs or engaging in underage sex is acceptable.

Increasing use of the 'harm reduction' philosophy is leading to increasing failure. The only answer that the gurus of harm reduction can give to this is to say that there must be more use of harm reduction at ever younger ages.

By contrast, where preventative approaches are used they have been seen to succeed. Take, for example, smoking. The Government has embarked on a tough anti-smoking campaign that tells people in no uncertain terms: don't smoke. It has launched hard-hitting advertising campaigns with heart-rending stories of people suffering from lung cancer. Many public buildings no longer allow smoking. Instead, we see smokers huddled outside because smoking is not allowed inside. The result of the public education programme has been a decline in smoking amongst men. Lung cancer incidence rates in men peaked in the late 1970s and since then have decreased by more than 40%. If we can

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promote 'just say no' to smoking, why not to activities which are illegal and morally wrong?

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