

Summary
Enforcement of and compliance with the coffee shop rules in 2004
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Since 1976 the Netherlands follow an internationally unique drug policy, not attaching a penalty to the use of cannabis and tolerating the sale of cannabis under certain conditions. The coffee shop owners have to comply with a number of criteria (no advertising, no harddrugs, no public disorder, no young people, not selling more than 5 grams per day per person) and with two extra rules: no alcohol vendor and no more than 500 grams in stock. In some cities rules apply for a minimum distance to a school or to the Dutch border.

To follow the developments of the coffee shops, the Ministry of Justice commissions yearly research. In the present report the rule enforcement by the police and the compliance with these rules by coffee shops in 2004 are established.

Data collection

A so called: 'multi-proxy indicator-approach' was used to collect data for the present research. This means that five sources per coffee shop were explored: coffee shop owner, local police officer, observant, customers, and neighbours. Because of this the obtained information could be verified against eachother. A very good response has been established from these different datasources, so enough data are available on all 75 coffee shops in the sample. For 50 cities also a 'police coordinator coffee shops' provided data.

Results

In the first place it can be concluded from this research that the Dutch lenient policy is not identical to a 'laissez faire' policy. It is clear that inspections of coffee shops take place everywhere. These inspections mostly concern all coffee shops and are executed several times a year, mainly unannounced. Not only the enforcers but also those who have to comply with the rules, take the regulation serious. Many activities take place to effectuate compliance to the rules, such as the coffee shop owners checking the age of the customers or the continuous supply of new stock in connection with the 500-gram criterium. It is quite clear that those most concerned, the policemen and the coffee shop owners, do not use the toleration policy as a front for doing what they like. In many districts not all rules are inspected though, particularly the 5 grams per day and the 500 grams stock criteria are sometimes not taken into account.

Not only is the policy enforced, there also exists a reasonable amount of support for the rules. Generally the policemen, coffee shop owners, customers and neighbours of the coffee shop consider the rules clear and reasonable. On the other hand, the 5 grams rule is often found unreasonable and not practical and the same applies even stronger to the stock rule of 500 grams - especially the coffee shop owners find this aggravating and not functional for the policy's goals.

Besides this, the advertising-rule is not quite clear and many law enforcers have a general lack of knowledge. Quite a lot police coordinators and policemen don't know exactly which rules apply.

The research shows that 41% of the coffee shops break one or more coffee shoprules. Especially the public disorder criterium is often broken (20%). 8 to 12% of the coffee shops break the advertising criterium, the age criterium, the 5 grams per day and the 500 grams stock rules. The criterium prohibiting alcohol and hard drugs are followed best (only violated by 2 and 3% of the coffee shops).

It is difficult to judge the degree of violation of the rules by the Dutch coffee shops because we don't have similar data for eg bars, canteens in sport centres, discotheques or community centres. In general, the coffee shops appear to breach the rules as one would expect of such a setting, and in that light it is not alarming.