



EPPIC

**EXCHANGING
PREVENTION PRACTICES
ON POLYDRUG USE
AMONG YOUTH
IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE
SYSTEMS**

**The relationship between drugs and crime from the
perspective of young people in contact with criminal justice
systems.**

A qualitative, cross-national research.

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Theoretical background



The relationship between crime & drugs has been debated since the beginning of XX sec. **but** with many limits:

- The nature of samples (mainly heroin/crack cocaine users...)
- Epistemological approaches, often influenced by political agendas (Allen 2007)
- Evidences mainly from the US, UK and Australia

However,

- The link between drugs and offending became one of the main issues related to the use of substances in policy arena, a sort of self-evident concept which led to the development of the terms “drug-related” or “drug-driven” crime (Seddon 2006).

Theoretical background

The need of a more informative framework



<i>Economic mechanisms</i>	<i>Pharmacological mechanisms</i>	<i>Lifestyles mechanisms</i>
<p>Drug-use-causing-crime connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtaining money for drugs - Obtaining drugs directly - Saving legal money for drugs 	<p>Drug-use-causing-crime connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aggression - Courage to offend - Judgment impairment 	<p>Drug-use-causing-crime connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Criminal contacts - Offended for treatment - Retaliation
<p>Crime-causing-drug-use connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtaining drugs directly - Surplus proceeds of crime spent on drugs 	<p>Crime-causing-drug-use connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Courage to offend 	<p>Crime-causing-drug-use connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dealing provided surplus drugs

(Bennett and Holloway's 2009)

Theoretical background

Social exclusion



- Crucial to understand the crime-drugs link → **social exclusion** (Buchanan 2004; Seddon 2006; Pearson 2001): a multidimensional process of “exclusion from participation in ordinary social activities” (Seddon 2006).
 - ≠ poverty → the social actor as actively engaged in looking for alternatives in the irregular economy
- The contemporary “**relatively deprivation** is rooted in a disjunction between the cultural emphasis on the consumption of pleasurable commodities” and the limited opportunities for participation to consumerism experienced by some people (Seddon 2006:695).
- **Consumption** as a key concept. The involvement in the illegal economy is a cultural response to increase quality of life – based on circumstances and (sub) cultures (Seddon 2006; Allen 2007).
- Boundaries between recreational use and problematic drug scenes are blurred (MacDonald & Marsh 2002; Simpson 2003)

Aims



Adopting a perspective that acknowledges that links between drug use and offending behaviours are historically and culturally situated, this study **aims to update and elaborate on this relationship by exploring variations within a cross-national sample of drug-experienced young people in touch with criminal justice systems.**

Methods and analysis



- The **trajectory-based approach** was chosen as considered the most suitable to catch the complexity of the relationship between drug use and offending (Simpson 2002; Hser, Longshore & Anglin, 2007)
- 194 interviews with young people (aged 15-25), in six countries (Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Poland, UK), focused on drug use trajectories from the onset to the time of interviews, when they were in the context of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) but under different penal measures (detention, custody, probation, community-based interventions....)
- The cross-national sample of young people provides in fact an opportunity to get an updated and broader view on the phenomenon, including European countries which have not been studied in the past.
- The link between drug use and their offending behaviours was in some cases directly asked to the interviewees, in other cases arose spontaneously in their narratives

Results

Economic mechanisms (1)



- Theft, robbery, and dealing were the typical offending behaviours related to obtaining money for drugs
- Quoted also with references to cannabis, alcohol, NPS, amphetamines (eg Poland)
- With reference to dealing, becoming a regular cannabis smoker is often reported as a turning point in young people’s narratives
- Also reported by young people coming from families with not economic, health, or social big issues → **not necessarily related to social exclusion!** Attraction for money...

After that, when I saw that to get money it was sufficient to do so [dealing to schoolmates], I became more obsessed by money than by drug itself. (IT_39_ALT_M_19)

- Dealing is not only about money, but also experiencing financial independence and self-affirmation in a situation of “**relative deprivation**” (Seddon, 2006), eg unfavourable conditions on the labour market

Many opt for the criminal way. It’s easier, it’s faster. And nobody plays the boss who treats you like a dog. (GER_06_ALT_M_18)

Results

Economic mechanisms (2)



- The role of dealer of cannabis is perceived by some as means for respect and status, providing a recognisable role and boosting their self-esteem.
- The **normalisation** of cannabis consumption has led to a relatively normalisation of supply of recreational drugs in close social network → **lack of awareness about legal risk!**

I really liked being able to work. Being able to do something that would make me feel more adult, that would make me be noticed, also because I had serious problems with bullying before . (IT_40_ALT_M_17)

- In turn, dealing increases the likelihood of using drugs, because it provides a steady supply of drugs for one's own use and entails getting enrolled in more serious criminal circles
- **Crime precedes use of drugs** → pattern related mostly to interviewees living in deprived neighbourhoods and subject to social exclusion.

Results



Pharmacological mechanisms

- All the possible links observed by Bennett and Holloway (2009) – aggression, courage to offend and judgement impairment – did emerge by data
- For some interviewees the turning point with reference to offending careers was explained as a consequence of having started to use cocaine, crack, heroin, amphetamines.
- Is not (only) a matter of substance, but also of doses and consumption styles, not necessarily linked to a condition of “addiction”
- Also intoxication from cannabis, alcohol and NPS were mentioned as key factor in offending behaviours

I acted in a different way because if I wasn't high, I wouldn't have wanted to fight probably. But because I was high and he said something that pissed me off and I felt like he was going to try hitting me, so that made me even more paranoid...smoking weed make me even more paranoid. (UK_INT07_BP3_M_16)

Results



Lifestyles mechanisms (1)

- Drug use and offending can be strictly related to **social exclusion** due to socioeconomic inequalities.
- E.g. illegal immigrants experience exclusion from the regular labour market and from social and health care → in these cases substances help to cope with the deprivation and anguish of their precarious lives

I was a barber in Tunis. I knew how to cut hair, but I did not have any documents for which no one took me on, so I started selling a bit of hashish. I started selling, and using it at the same time. Then after 3 years I started using cocaine because I was holding it, I was dealing it, and so it went on. (IT_03_CS1_M_23)

- Similar patterns of use and offending also can be found among other non-immigrant interviewees, subjected to any kind of social exclusion and/or deprivation, often including **lack of parental care and mental illness**.
- When referring to deprived neighbourhoods, not all the interviewees reported family and/or health problems, but some simply underlined the key **influence of their peers** and environment in the development of their life → drugs and crime as not-real choices!

Results

Lifestyles mechanisms (2)



- Using drugs and committing crimes can become part of lifestyles among young people who are not experiencing economic poverty nor social exclusion
- In some cultural contexts the desire to maintain a sort of **hedonistic lifestyle** can explain both offending and drug use.

There are people who carry out robberies to buy drugs. I don't. I do robberies to get money. I go to make money to spend. I like money, I like many things. (IT_17_PRI_M_19)

Common attitudes emerged that can also explain both behaviours:

- **lack of concern** for consequences
- impulsivity and **sensation seeking**

Robbery also brings adrenaline and you can become addicted to it, as from drugs. When I was counting money I felt incredible euphoria. I stole under the influence of stimulants. I felt that nothing could happen to me. (PL_34_PRI_M_24)

Conclusions



- Mechanisms to explain the relationship between drugs and crime are intertwined and shift over time
- Both-direction-connections did emerge, and, in many cases, it was difficult to conclude whether offending or use of drugs came first.
- The lifestyles mechanisms seem to be the best explanatory tool in understanding this relationship, as they account for interactions
- Social exclusions is a key concept to look at the phenomenon. In some cases offending is an obvious choice given the lack of legal income, and the use of drugs is seen as an alternative way to cope with pain, mental health symptoms and suffering related to complicated life conditions due to social inequalities.
- In other cases young people involved have not economic or social exclusion issues: the attraction of money fostered by the consumer society plays a crucial role, as well as the desire for hedonistic lifestyles.

On the one hand, results call into question a more equal distribution of resources and human rights, on the other hand, they highlight the contradictions inherent to a society where the use of (certain) drugs is prohibited, but also socially accepted and widespread.



Thanks for your attention!

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