

34th annual conference of the European Society for Social Drug Research (ESSD)

Copenhagen, 28.-30. September 2023



BOOK OF ABSTRACTS & PROGRAMME

Hosted by
Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research
Aarhus University
Denmark

Thomas Friis Sjøgaard, Jonas Strandholdt Bach,
Nina Tvede Korshøj & Annette Bang Rasmussen
ESSD 2023 Organising Committee



CENTRE FOR ALCOHOL AND DRUG RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES
AARHUS UNIVERSITY



ESSD
European Society for
Social Drug Research

PROGRAMME

WEDNESDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2023	
from 19:00	Get-together in a restaurant in city center – latecomers are welcome till 22:00
THURSDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2023	
09:00 – 09:30	Opening of conference and general information
09:30 – 10:30	<p>Session 1: New trends in drug use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rob Ralphs: Is it Finally Time for ‘T’ in the UK? Current Developments in Manchester’s Crystal Methamphetamine Market. • Jesper Dunell: Psilocybin – a solution for any given problem. • Bernd Wersé, Gerrit Kamphausen, Jennifer Martens: Benzodiazepine and opioid use as a lifestyle feature among (post-) adolescents – preliminary results from an ongoing study. <p>*Chair: Tom Decorte</p>
10:30 – 10:50	Coffee break
10:50 – 11:50	<p>Session 2: Drug use, life changes and addiction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joe Price: Understanding the cultural significance of cannabidiol in the United Kingdom. • James Morgan: Lifestyle change and serendipity: Exploring accidents, agency and positive change. • Alfred Uhl: How much spontaneous remission should we expect in the field of substance abuse and addiction? <p>*Chair: Bernd Wersé</p>
11:50 – 12:50	<p>Session 3: Drug use: Historical and novel trends</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kristiana Bebre: Drugs, youth and the Soviet Union: A brief look at drug use under an authoritarian order during the 1960s-1970s Latvia. • Olga Juul Eriksen: Young people’s place-making in a rural context: Emphasizing the role of alcohol and drugs. • Mika Tsupari, Matilda Hellman, Tuukka Tammi: “You get what you need, not what you want” Biographical perspective on benefits of psychedelic use in Finland. <p>*Chair: Zsuzsa Kaló</p>
12:50 – 13:40	Lunch
13:40 – 14:40	<p>Session 4: Drug policy and harm reduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jessica Williamson: Implementing the Three Ps Drug Policy: Harm Reduction or Risk Production? • Esben Houborg, Marie Jauffret-Roustide & Vibeke Asmussen Frank: Harm reduction policy in different welfare states – Denmark and France. • Josefin Månsson, Jessica Storbjörk, Eva Samuelsson, Lena Erikson, Katarina Winter: More than medical: Analyzing the positive attitudes about needle exchange in a prohibitionist context. <p>*Chair: Marta Pinto</p>
14:40 – 15:00	Coffee break

15:00 – 16:00	<p>Session 5: Cannabis use, prevention and policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michal Wanke: Invisible omnipresence of cannabis in the South-East Turkey - a lesson for prevention in diverse contexts. • Anke Stallwitz: An innovative pragmatic approach to youth prevention in the context of the planned cannabis legalization in Germany. • Mats Ekendahl: "Speaking legally" to rule out exceptionality in law - invocations of emergency in Swedish cannabis offence cases. <p>*Chair: Gary Potter</p>
17:30	Social Event: Guided tour at Christiania
19:00	Conference dinner: Spiseloppen, Christiania

FRIDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2023

09:00 – 10:00	<p>Session 6: Drug use: Families, parents and politicians</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephanie Fincham-Campbell, Polly Radcliffe, Elaine Robinson, Judith Warburton, Anne Whittaker: Examining the 'Whole Family Approach' to providing services, contrasting the policy, agenda, rhetoric and reality. • Emma Beecham, Carol-Ann Getty, Polly Radcliffe: Representations of the problem of parental opioid use in interagency decision-making practices in England and Scotland. • Liviu Alexandrescu: Illicit drug use admissions among British politicians: a narrative perspective. <p>*Chair: Josefin Månsson</p>
10:00 – 11:00	<p>Session 7: Drug markets: Production and digitalization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mafalda Pardal, Charlotte Colman, Sophia De Seranno, Tim Surmont: Illicit synthetic drug production and waste in Belgium: what we know and what (can) we do about the environmental harms? • Nina Korshøj: 'SoMe' dealing: Merging on- and offline worlds when dealing drugs via social media. • Kristoffer Magnus Bjerre Aagesen, Alessandro Moretti, Jakob Demant: Social Media Markets for illicit drugs. Algorithmic affordances and the change of drug dealing. <p>*Chair: Gary Potter</p>
11:00 – 11:20	Coffee break
11:20 – 12:10	<p>Session 8: Policing and drug markets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ross Coomber, Charlie Lloyd, Kate Brown, Chris Devany, Tobias Kammergaard, Laura Bainbridge: Understanding vulnerability vs criminality in drug supply. • Meropi Tzanetakis & Nigel South: Policing in the dark? Innovation and uncertainty in digital drug markets and law enforcement responses. <p>*Chair: Tom Decorte</p>
12:10 – 12:40	Communication from the ESSD Board
12:40 – 13:40	Lunch
13:40 – 14:40	<p>Session 9: Drug-related implications of Covid-19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophie Massin, Phu Nguyen-Van, Bruno Ventelou & Marc Willinger: Hysteresis in addictive consumption trajectories after lockdown: the power of time-preferences. • Franziska Schneider: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on help measurements for drug-using detainees in a German prison. • Michaela Roubalova: Problem drug users as victims of crime in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. <p>* Chair: Kristiāna Bebre</p>

14:40 – 15:00	Coffee break
15:00 – 15:45	<p>Session 10: Methods, ethics & vulnerable populations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rebeca Marques Rocha: Assembling Recreational Settings – Drugs, Harm Reduction and Youth. • Luke Parkinson: Identifying Social Norms & Rules using Serious Case Reviews of Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines drug dealing. <p>* Chair: Zsuzsa Kaló</p>
15:45 – 17:00	<p>Panel discussion: Drug policy: A time for change?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisa Williams, Michaela Roubalova, Anke Stallwitz, Mafalda Pardal <p>*Chair: Bernd Werse</p>
18:00	Social dinner

SATURDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2023	
10:00 – 11:00	<p>Session 11: Drug markets: Transitions and psychedelics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alejandro Sáez Carretero: Marijuana Entrepreneurs: In transition from illegality to legal markets. • George Simpson, Caroline Chatwin: Liminal spaces, seasonal faces: Challenging drug market assumptions via an exploration of naturally occurring magic mushroom markets in rural Kent. • Margit Anne Pedersen & Thomas Friis Sogaard: Psychedelic sessions: Challenging the boundaries between ‘criminal entrepreneurship’ and ‘alternative medicine’ in Denmark. <p>* Chair: Nina Tvede Korshøj</p>
11:00 – 11:20	Coffee break
11:20 – 12:20	<p>Session 12: Psychedelics and harm reduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linas Tavaras: Evaluation of the Psychoactive Substance Testing Service in Lithuania: Challenges and Opportunities. • Oskar Enghoff, Margit Anne Petersen & Nina Tvede Korshøj: Psychedelic harm reduction: practices, procedures, and personal agendas. • Jessica Neicun, Andres Roman-Urrestarazu , Katarzyna Czabanowska: A three-level epidemiology of Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) use and health-related harms from an international perspective. <p>* Chair: Jonas Strandholdt Bach</p>
12:20 – 12:40	Winner – Early Career Researcher Award
12:40 – 13:00	Closing words and end of the conference

ABSTRACTS

Authors in order after session & presentation

Contents

Session 1: New trends in drug use	6
Session 2: Drug use, life changes and addiction	9
Session 3: Drug use: Historical and novel trends	12
Session 4: Drug policy and harm reduction	15
Session 5: Cannabis use, prevention, and policy	18
Session 6: Drug use: Families, parents, and politicians	21
Session 7: Drug markets, production, and digitalization	24
Session 8: Policing and drug markets	27
Session 9: Drug-related implications of Covid-19	29
Session 10: Methods, ethics and vulnerable populations	31
Session 11: Drug markets: transitions and psychedelics	33
Session 12: Psychedelics and harm reduction	37

Session 1: New trends in drug use

Is it Finally Time for 'T' in the UK? Current Developments in Manchester's Crystal Methamphetamine Market

Presenter: Rob Ralphs

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Keywords: Crystal Methamphetamine, Chemsex

Abstract

Background A recent report into methamphetamine markets in the EU by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) refers to crystal methamphetamine as 'an unwelcome addition to the EU drug market' (EU Drug Market: Methamphetamine, 2022:7). In a UK context, 'Crystal meth' has been most associated with the 'Chemsex' scene. This paper reports on findings from the annual Greater Manchester Testing and Research on Emergent and New Drug Trends (GMTRENDS) on changes to the local crystal meth market.

Methods GMTRENDS is the UK's only regional annual drug trend survey. It is an interdisciplinary, mixed-methods project that incorporates online surveys of both people who use drugs and professionals, covering 44 groups of substances from alcohol to Z-drugs; interviews with over 80 key professionals working with people who use drugs and forensic chemical analysis of drugs for content and purity levels. The survey findings are used to direct an a more in-depth 'trend focus'. In 2022, the trend focus was on the three main drugs associated with 'chemsex' – crystal methamphetamine, mephedrone, and GBL/GHB. This resulted in an additional 32 in-depth interviews with men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM), who are involved in Manchester's chemsex scene.

Results Crystal methamphetamine was widely reported to be more available in Manchester than the previous year. It was commonly recounted that the numbers of dealers had increased, leading to a reduction in price from £100-£120 a gram to as low as £40 a gram. This significant reduction in price has resulted in crystal meth being used by a much younger (teenage) demographic. Its use was also reported to be spreading into other demographics (females and clubbers). At least five different types of crystal meth were reportedly available, including 'English T', 'Hong Kong T', 'Chinese T', 'German T', and 'Pink Champagne T'. Forensic analysis found high purity levels of between 71 to 94%.

Conclusions We recommend the monitoring of the local market including regular testing of crystal meth. This monitoring should also include monitoring the crystal meth market for organised crime networks, including international networks. We also recommend the monitoring of the use of crystal meth both within and beyond the MSM and the chemsex scene. This should include collecting local treatment data and monitoring admissions to A & E and mental health inpatients for drug induced psychosis. For the substance use sector, we recommend a review of existing staff competency in working with these substances.

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Funding sources: Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Contact Details: Rob Ralphs, Manchester Metropolitan University, Dept Criminology & Sociology, Oxford Road, Manchester, England. M15 6LL

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Biography: Rob Ralphs is a Professor of Criminology and Social Policy and Co-founder and Director of the Substance Use and Associated Behaviour's Research Group at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has over 25 years drug related research experience that has spanned substance use, drug markets, drug policy and treatment responses. This has incorporated researching drug dealing gangs, prison drug use and markets, homelessness and substance use, image and performance enhancing drug use, new psychoactive substances, heroin, and crack cocaine, chemsex, 'club drugs', and evaluating and developing treatment responses.

Psilocybin – a solution for any given problem

Presenter: Jesper Dunell

Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Sweden

Keywords: Psilocybin, Psychedelic therapy, Sweden

Abstract

Background As the psychedelic renaissance continues to unfold, psychedelic substances are generating wide interest as potential problem-solving tools in therapy and enhancement. The use of psychedelic substances in treatment and for recreational purposes remains illegal in most countries. It should come as no surprise that this is the case in Sweden with a long history of strict drug policy, and where drug use is widely viewed as something inherently bad. Emanating from Zinberg's (1984) theoretical framework of drug, set, and setting, the overall aim of this study is to explore the functions and meanings of psilocybin use in a setting where the substance is used for personal development.

Methods Through an ethnographic approach, observations were carried out on a four-day retreat held by psychologists, traveling together with 11 participants from Sweden to the Netherlands where psilocybin can be used legally. Observations were conducted during two ceremonies where large doses of psilocybin truffles are administered, in multiple sharing sessions, therapeutic workshops, and exercises, as well as in the informal discussions taking place among the participants in between organized activities.

Results Traveling to the Netherlands, the participants leave the prohibitional realm of Sweden in more than a physical sense, as they enter a setting where all connotations of psilocybin as an illegal drug are removed. The staff provides a sense of safety as well as legitimacy through their mere presence, and they pay great attention to details as they set the stage for the ceremonies and sharing sessions, creating a space for new meanings and functions of the substance to arise. The program alludes to the therapeutic potential that resides in psychedelics as shown in clinical trials. Without making any promises, the participants are encouraged to articulate their intentions for participating, ranging from processing childhood traumas, becoming more confident in their professional role, to rebuilding neurological pathways after a stroke.

Conclusions The use of psilocybin in this context must be approached as multifaceted. It transcends classic dichotomies such as drug/medicine, recreation/therapy as it turns into a solution for any given problem. The sense of curiosity that characterizes the recent trends in pharmacological and psychological studies carried out in the psychedelic renaissance seeps down onto individuals of the general public, creating a lust to experiment on their own. The formation of the set and setting directs the participants in search of hidden or apparent insights and meanings in their experiences.

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Contact Details: Jesper Dunell, Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Sweden

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Biography: Jesper Dunell is Ph.D. student at the Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Sweden. His main research interest surrounds the meaning ascribed to substance use by individuals and in society at large.

Benzodiazepine and opioid use as a lifestyle feature among (post-) adolescents – preliminary results from an ongoing study

Presenter: Bernd Werse, Gerrit Kamphausen, Ph.D., Jennifer Martens

Goethe University, Centre for Drug Research, Frankfurt, Germany

Keywords: opioids, benzodiazepines, youth culture, rap music, adolescents

Abstract

Background After preparations like the codeine-containing “Lean”/“Purple Drank” were made popular in US rap scenes as early as in the mid-1990s, sedative drugs have also become an issue among European rappers by the mid-2010s, including “Lean” and other opioids as well as benzodiazepines. It is still unclear how the presence of these substances among popular musicians affected the prevalence among its recipients.

Methods Preliminary data comes from an ongoing study on the issue in Germany, funded by the German ministry of health. In addition to preliminary numbers from a quantitative online survey addressed to young people (14-30 y-o.) with experiences with illicit drugs and/or psychoactive medical drugs, the main evidence comes from 15 qualitative interviews with young people with relevant experiences.

Results Preliminary analyses from the interviews show that there is a group of young people whose motivation for the use of sedatives was sparked by role models from popular culture. While the often-depicted “Lean” mixture plays a minor role in patterns of use, mainly other medical opioids (e.g., Tilidin) are often combined with cannabis and/or alcohol. Quantitative data show a wide range of experience with opioids and benzodiazepines among young persons who use illicit drugs.

Conclusions At the time of the conference, we will have more evidence available about patterns of use of different sedative drugs, backgrounds and motives for use. While role models from domestic rap musicians seem to play a major role for experimenting, continuing use depends not only on peer dynamics, but also on mental issues of individuals, some of which use these substances as self-medication.

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Biography: Bernd Werse, sociologist. Numerous drug-related research projects, e.g. the local drug monitoring system “MoSyD”, several projects on NPS, small-scale drug dealing, cannabis cultivation, open drug scenes etc. Board member of the ESSD, and several journals. Speaker of German drug policy network “Schildower Kreis”.

Session 2: Drug use, life changes and addiction

Understanding the cultural significance of cannabidiol in the United Kingdom

Presenter: Joe Price

Supervisors: Dr Gary Potter, Dr Thaddeus Muller & Professor Christopher Partridge

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Keywords: Cannabidiol, Cannabis, Drugs Cultures, Legal Drugs, Ethnography

Abstract

Background The economic growth and consumption of cannabidiol (CBD) has increased exponentially in the UK. The rapid growth of the industry has caused confusion over the legal and regulatory status of the substance in the UK. This raises questions over the cultural understanding of CBD and cannabis. Previous research has showed a clear medicinal and pharmacological benefit for CBD but has lacked any understanding of the social and cultural aspects of consumption. By understanding the reasons, patterns, and barriers of consumption, this will produce a clear understanding about the environment and purpose of CBD consumption. Therefore, the research project is investigating the history and cultural significance of CBD and the demographics of consumption within the UK. Specifically, analysing the relationship between CBD, cannabis, health, and wellbeing cultures.

Methods The project is analysing the potential connections between CBD culture and cannabis culture through interviews and ethnographic fieldwork of consumers of CBD, cannabis or both substances in addition to CBD shop owners and consumers. Online anonymous questionnaires and interviews will assess the culture around CBD, by asking consumers about the environment, reasons, and ways they learnt about the substance. Participant observations in the CBD stores will evaluate the environment and the feelings that customers experience when purchasing the substance.

Results The presentation will give the findings from the first stage of the research project. An extensive literature review of cannabidiol culture, the legal framework for CBD and the pharmacological literature on CBD will be outlined. In addition, the data from the online survey of CBD users and CBD store owners will be reported to show the trends and findings. The results from the participant observations of CBD users around CBD stores in Manchester and Birmingham will also make part of the presentation.

Conclusions A clear link has been identified between CBD culture and other cultures, most notably cannabis culture and health and wellbeing culture, with tension evident between different cultures. There is also significant association with CBD and medicinal cannabis as well as an association with the wider cannabis legalisation movement.

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Contact Details: Joe Price, Lancaster University Law School, Lancaster, LA1 4YN

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Biography: I am a postgraduate researcher at Lancaster University Law school with research interests in drugs cultures, specifically CBD and cannabis culture. My research specifically looks at the interactions between legal and illegal drugs in the United Kingdom. In addition, I currently work as an associate lecturer teaching on several modules in the Law School, such as the module on measuring crime. Moreover, I am also working as a co-researcher on a widening participation project in the Law school.

Lifestyle change and serendipity: Exploring accidents, agency and positive change

Presenter: James Morgan

London Metropolitan University

Keywords: heroin, serendipity, opportunity

Abstract

Background While it is often perceived that the lives of people who use heroin are out of control, the present paper explores the curious narratives concerning positive change with minimal agency. This is based on the paper by Morgan and Bennett (2023) which identified narratives of lifestyle change among people who use heroin.

Methods Based on semi structured interviews with 51 people who use heroin in South Wales (UK), instances of lifestyle change were identified. The narrative where participants described these changes were developed into three themes: grabbing onto *hooks for change*, *losing control* and *taking an opportunity*. The latter theme of *taking an opportunity* is explored through the lens of serendipity.

Results Participants sometimes retrospectively understood positive changes through a combination of good fortune and their readiness to make use of such fortune. These changes were subjectively valued as positive and ranged from being given the opportunity to move to another location to support desistance, to being offered criminal opportunities for allowed for increased drug use.

Conclusions Accounts to suggest that people who use heroin either have no control or full control over their heroin using careers should pay attention to the narratives of people who use heroin. However, methodological issues remain open for debate. How far do the participants possess an insight into how far their own agency affected positive changes in their lives? How far do the narratives relate to a lack of belief in their own agency at the time of the interview, and how much do these narratives reflect their decision making at the time of their lifestyle changes. Considering the value in helping people who use heroin to make positively valued changes to their lifestyles these issues should be further explored.

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Contact Details: James Morgan, London Metropolitan University, 166 Holloway Road.

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Biography: Dr James Morgan is senior lecturer of psychology at London Metropolitan University, having previously lectured criminology at the same institution. While his published output continues to relate to data collected during his PhD studies on the lifestyles of people who use heroin, James takes in interest in many issues relating to substance use including theory, research methods, policy and harm reduction practice.

How much spontaneous remission should we expect in the field of substance abuse and addiction?

Presenter: Dr. Alfred Uhl ^{1,2}

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2 Sigmund Freud Private University (SFU), Freudplatz 1, A-1020 Vienna, Austria

Keywords: flawed scientific reasoning, methodological competence, pragmatism

Abstract

Background As long as the political mainstream in the Western World concerning illicit drug use focused on repression (catchword: "War on Drugs" and "Zero Tolerance"), adherers of a humane drug policy tried to convince the public that using illicit drugs commonly does not lead to disastrous outcomes and that many addicts remit spontaneously when they grow older (catchword: maturing out, self-delimiting disease). When it turned out more and more obvious that the War on Drugs and insisting on abstinence as only legitimate goal had failed, and step-by-step harm reduction (to help addicts survive without pressure towards abstinence) and substitution treatment (to basically accept lifelong opioid use) turned into the new state of the art. Those supporting a humane drug policy were successful to turn around the wheel. Consequently a new narrative evolved, presenting addiction as a chronic disorder, similar to diabetes or hypertension, where lifelong treatment and support is inevitable and needed (catchword: Chronic Relapsing Disease). The argument of addiction as self-delimiting disease was no more needed to support main drug policies, but the discussion about the magnitude of spontaneous remission rates in addicts kept on.

Methods Unsystematic search based on scientific literature as well as theoretical reflections.

Results There are numerous systematic biases existing, which can inflate the spontaneous remission rate in epidemiological surveys enormously ("regression towards the mean bias") and others that underestimate the spontaneous remission rate in clinical situations dramatically ("overestimation-of chronic-cases bias" and "lack-of-feedback bias").

Conclusions Intuitive interpretations when analysing empirical results are often highly misleading due to common methodological biases. The nature of these biases can be illustrated convincingly with simple experiments of thought, but it is quite hard to prevent or control these biases when designing or interpreting empirical studies. It is essential to know how to avoid these biases when designing studies and to be aware of them when interpreting data or drawing conclusions from published research.

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Contact Details: Dr. Alfred Uhl, Sigmund Freud Private University (SFU), Freudplatz 1, A-1020 Vienna, Austria
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Biography: Psychologist in Addiction Research since 1977. Deputy head of the Addiction Competence Centre of the Austrian Public Health Institute, Lecturer in quantitative Research Methodology as well as deputy head of the international PhD Programme of the Sigmund Freud Private University. Current research focus: epidemiology, prevention, evaluation, research methodology.

Session 3: Drug use: Historical and novel trends

Drugs, youth and the Soviet Union: A brief look at drug use under an authoritarian order during the 1960s-1970s Latvia.

Presenter: Kristiāna Diāna Bebre

Social Sciences Faculty, University of Latvia, Latvia

Key words: Soviet Union, Latvia, hippies, madness, drugs

Background Much is known about the development of the beatnik and hippie movements in the West that occurred between the 1950s and the 1970s. The same can be said about the links between these movements and different mind altering substances. Much less is known about these trends on the other side of the Iron Curtain, in the Soviet Union. Given the contrasting social order, cultural norms and available freedoms, it is important to shed light on this less researched phenomena. Therefore, the objective of this presentation is to discuss how Soviet hippies negotiated the formal authoritarian structures to access drugs and freedoms that otherwise would be forbidden during its peak in the 1960s-1970s in Latvia.

Methods This presentation is part of a wider course that is delivered to BA Sociology students at the University of Latvia called *Psychedelics & Society*. The findings emerged from a desk based study that utilised a literature review and a review of primary archival news sources. The literature review drew primarily from the works of Juliane Furst, Rebecca Reich and Terje Toomistu. This was complemented by primary data which was gathered by scanning archival 1960s-1970s news articles on periodika.lv (Latvian newspaper archive) for key terms.

Results Soviet hippies, unlike their Western counterparts, had to negotiate authoritarian governmental structures in their pursuit of alternative lifestyles. Although LSD emerged rarely, cannabis was distributed through a large social supply network, *systema*, and household chemicals were substituted for mind alteration. The hippies utilised myths that surround mental illness, madness and communist utopia to live outside the law. Acts of disobedience, unhappiness or interest in altered states of consciousness were perceived as illogical in a society that was believed to be perfect by its authoritarian state. Lack of interest in the authoritarian society was labelled as madness and resulted in young people being placed in asylums. Yet, this did not create a conflict between the hippies and authorities. The new labels of madness ensured freedom from mandatory employment, military service and access to state prescribed drugs.

Conclusions Even in an authoritarian regime, such as the Soviet Union, young people were able and willing to source and distribute forbidden mind altering substances. Similar to contemporary times, the cost of this illicit involvement was their professional development and social stigma. Labels of madness were used to disempower and exclude people from making decisions about themselves. Once labelled as mad, young people were forced to live out the rest of their lives in the margins of society. This resulted in increased problem substance use risk, poverty and ill health.

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Bibliography: Kristiāna is a PhD candidate at the University of Latvia, ASPRI grant holder, THRSP scholarship winner and a board member to the European Society for Social Drugs Research. Her PhD evaluates harm-reduction outcomes in Latvian cannabis policies. She also teaches sociology modules to BA students across the University of Latvia. As an adviser she has provided support to governmental, non-governmental and private entities on (il)licit substance topics.

Young people's place-making in a rural context: Emphasizing the role of alcohol and drugs

Presenter: Olga Juul Eriksen

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Keywords: place-making, youth, recreational drug use, alcohol, geography

Abstract

Background While extensive research has been conducted on youths' alcohol and drug use practices in urban settings, there has been a relative lack of attention given to the experiences of rural youth. Rural areas present distinct social and physical contexts that influence the conditions and dynamics of youth's alcohol and drug use practices. One structural factor that has tended to be ignored is the limited geographical and territorial scope of rural youth. Such constraints stem from various factors such as inadequate transportation infrastructure, limited availability of private cars, considerable distances to the night-time economy, and possible scrutiny and control of public spaces by adults in their rural hometowns. These circumstances significantly impact how rural youth meet, socialize and engage in alcohol and drug-related activities. This presentation will focus on rural youths' place-making activities within this rural context, specifically exploring how alcohol and drug use practices influence the characteristics of the spaces they choose.

Methods The presentation is based on in-depth interviews conducted with 40 young individuals aged 18-25 years old in small Danish towns with a population of no more than 4,000 inhabitants. Employing a participant-driven photo-elicitation method, participants were invited to bring to the interview photographs representing places that held personal significance, where they socialized with peers, or engaged in alcohol and drug consumption.

Results The majority of the participants described informal places where they frequently met to consume alcohol and drugs recreationally. Such places included caravans, sheds, bus stops, shelters, empty garages or designated spaces within natural settings. The analysis focuses on how these places are constructed and the benefits they offered, which encompassed affective, material, and discursive dimensions. Furthermore, the interplay between these spaces and the broader structural, physical and social context of these young rural individuals will be explored. Preliminary findings emphasize the influence of alcohol and drugs in establishing these spaces, encompassing the ways in which these substances contribute to the atmosphere within these spaces, including feelings of relaxation, excitement, festivity, and a willingness to take risks. Additionally, youth purposefully choose areas that are separated from adult-dominated spaces, enabling them to engage in alcohol and drug-related activities without scrutiny or interference.

Conclusions Understanding the social life of rural youth, including their alcohol and drug use practices, is crucial for correcting the urban-centric focus of youth studies and recognizing the unique circumstances and experiences of rural youth.

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Biography: I am currently enrolled as a PhD student at the Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research at Aarhus University. My PhD research investigates alcohol and drug consumption among youth in a rural context through qualitative methods. I hold an MA in sociology from the University of Copenhagen. My research interests include youth life and geographical perspectives on alcohol and drug studies.

“You get what you need, not what you want” Biographical perspective on benefits of psychedelic use in Finland

Presenter: Mika Tsupari, Matilda Hellman & Tuukka Tammi

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Keywords: psychedelics, benefits, Finland, well-being

Abstract

Background The use of psychedelics is on the rise worldwide and more people are experimenting and seeking benefits from the use of psychedelics. It can be argued that self-medication with psychedelics is also a rising trend. The findings of a global drug survey (2020) support this claim. This study explores what kind of self-reported benefits people who use psychedelics report in this sample collected in Finland. I'll introduce the first findings of my second PhD article.

Methods A Qualitative study, the data consists of 40 half-structured thematical interviews of Finnish people who have used psychedelics. We analyzed the data from biographical perspective and focused on the self-reported benefits and self-medication practices done with psychedelics. The material for this article was coded and analysed by discerning the type of meaning-making that communicated the interviewees' apprehensions of the positive use benefits from psychedelic drugs.

Results The benefits of psychedelic use that people reported were feelings of beauty, calmness, feelings of awe, connecting with others and mystical experiences. The use of psychedelics had helped people with depression, anxiety and to deal with difficult experiences and traumas. This forms an interesting contrast since psychedelics are considered illegal drugs in most western countries and there is a lot of stigma connected to use of psychedelics at least in Finland.

The findings can be divided into 3 categories: 1. psychedelics catalyst for change 2. psychedelics as a self-regulatory and self-medication practice for depression, anxiety, cluster headache, and as a tool for contemplating emotion and life situations 3. psychedelics as a way of betterment of oneself.

Conclusions In the western discourse psychedelics seem to offer experiences that everyday life does not necessarily offer. On the other hand they have a dual role in the form of self-medication and going through emotions and life situations. In the fragmented modern world, the use of psychedelics can offer some people more benefits than possible harms, especially when factors related to the set and setting are taken into account.

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Funding sources: The research has funding for the years of 2022 and 2023 from the Finnish Alcohol Research Foundation (ATS).

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Biography: Mika Tsupari is a second year PhD student and grant researcher in University of Helsinki. His thesis focuses on psychedelics in Finland from the perspective of set and setting, motives, meanings, the culture linked to psychedelics and well-being of the users. His research interests include addiction research and drug culture, interactions between groups and individuals, and well-being in general.

Session 4: Drug policy and harm reduction

Implementing the Three Ps Drug Policy: Harm Reduction or Risk Production?

Presenter: Jessica Williamson

University of Manchester, Manchester, UK.

Keywords: Policing, Private Security, Festivals, Drug Policy, Harm Reduction

Abstract:

Background Music festivals are associated with high levels of illegal drug use. Strategies to reduce drug-related crime at festivals through private policing have been criticised for producing unanticipated effects that contribute to drug-related crime and drug-related harm.

Methods This presentation presents findings from an ethnographic study that collected data using observations and interviews. This study aimed to investigate the role of festival security in harm reduction at English music festivals, with the overarching aim of contributing to existing knowledge regarding contemporary drug and crime issues. Adopting an active-membership-role as an unpaid member of festival security, the observational stage of this study explored and analysed policy in practice.

Results Critically engaging with the Three Ps drug policy, this paper evaluates strategies to Prevent, Pursue and Protect. With a predominant focus on entrance searching and the policing of drug possession, this presentation offers qualitative insights into the harms caused by the policing of drugs and festival drug markets.

Conclusion: This presentation concludes by advocating for the implementation of additional harm reduction measures at English music festivals, beyond public and private policing.

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Funding sources: University of Manchester

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Biography: A 4th year PhD criminology student at the University of Manchester exploring harm reduction initiatives at English music festivals. With a research interest in drug use and drug policy, I strive to produce a thesis that contributes to existing knowledge regarding contemporary crime and drug issues, and develops a theoretical foundation for reducing harm at English music festivals.

Harm reduction policy in different welfare states – Denmark and France

Presenter: Esben Houborg¹, Marie Jauffret-Roustide² & Vibeke A. Frank³

1 Center for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University, Denmark

2 CEMS (Inserm U1276/CNRS UMR 8044/EHESS), Paris, France

3 VIA University College, Denmark

Keywords: Drug policy, harm reduction, problematizations, justifications

Abstract

Background Harm reduction has been described as developing as local responses to HIV/AIDS in cities like Liverpool, Amsterdam and Frankfurt. Today we see similar local initiatives in relation to the overdose crisis in North America. It has therefore been argued that the local level is a key site for understanding the development of harm reduction policy. However, national legislation and policies, type of welfare regime and state structure also influences the form and content of drug policy, including harm reduction policy. We compare Denmark and France with regards to local development of harm reduction policies and how this is influenced by national drug policy, the welfare regimes, and the state structures in the two countries.

Methods The presentation is based on case studies of the development of local harm reduction policies and measures in Denmark and France with specific focus on drug consumption rooms. In each country three cities/municipalities have been studied through document analysis and semi-structured interviews. National legislation and policy documents, local policy documents, local media stories about harm reduction and structurally vulnerable people who use drugs (PWUD) was sampled and analysed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders. Analytical tools included stakeholder analysis, analysis of policy problematizations and (moral) justifications of proposed policies and measures.

Results Denmark is a Nordic welfare state where much power for social and health policy, including harm reduction policy has been delegated to the local level, i.e. municipalities. Municipalities have monopoly on establishing some measures (including drug consumption rooms). Harm reduction policy becomes highly institutionalized and highly dependent on the constellation of local stakeholders. This creates a varied harm reduction geography in Denmark with unequal access to (certain) harm reduction services for PWUD.

France is a paternalistic welfare state where much power is centralized at the national level, including harm reduction policy. France has a medicalized harm reduction policy that is mainly focused on access to opioid substitutive treatments. This policy includes drug consumption rooms, albeit on a trial basis. France has also a repressive law towards drug use. This prohibitionist regime is a barrier for disseminating DCRs all around the country, despite the willingness of local politicians to implement DCRs in their cities.

Conclusions Denmark and France have different state structures and different welfare regimes, but both states create conditions that leave limited room for civil society actors to develop new local harm reduction measures, particularly with regards to drug consumption rooms. In both cases this creates a varied harm reduction geography where PWUDs have unequal access to certain harm reduction services.

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Funding sources: No funding sources for neither the Danish study nor the French study

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Biography: *Esben Houborg*, sociologist, associate professor, work on drug policy, harm reduction, criminology, vulnerable PWUDs. *Marie Jauffret-Roustide*, sociologist, Research Fellow at the French Institute on Health and Medical Research (Inserm), works on drug policies with a focus on harm reduction histories in different settings, and vulnerable groups including people who use drugs with an intersectional approach. *Vibeke A. Frank*, anthropologist, work on drug policy, harm reduction, drug dependence, volatile substances.

More than medical: Analyzing the positive attitudes about needle exchange in a prohibitionist context

Presenter: Josefin Månsson¹, Jessica Storbjörk², Eva Samuelsson¹, Lena Eriksson², Katarina Winter³

1 Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Sweden

2 Department of Public Health Sciences, Stockholm University, Sweden

3 Department of Criminology, Stockholm University, Sweden

Keywords: needle exchange, harm reduction, prohibition, Sweden

Abstract

Background Compared to many European countries, Swedish drug policy is often portrayed as prohibitionist. An increase in drug-related mortality recently thrived harm-reducing interventions, e.g., promoted access to needle exchange programs (NEP). Yet, harm reduction remains controversial as morality and demands for sanctions persist in some circles. This inconsistency is evident in how strictly governed harm-reducing interventions are. Concerning NEP, there are e.g., identification-, registration-, and blood testing requirements for visitors, and staff must report to child protection if the person has underage children. Despite this, when interviewing people who inject drugs (PWID) about their experience of NEP, we notice strikingly positive narratives about these institutions. While the work done at the NEP is officially characterized as strictly medical, aiming at reducing medical “risk factors”, the client narratives raise a number of questions about the role these clinics have in tending to the challenges for PWID. Emanating from Rhodes (2009) theory on risk environment, the particular aim of this presentation is to analyse the positive attitudes about the NEP in order to critically discuss the role of harm reduction in prohibitionist environments.

Methods We have interviewed 32 PWID and analysed their narratives about experiences of NEP as well as other societal institutions.

Results As stated, the NEP is generally described very positive. While the participants describe the medical aspects of the program as important (e.g., access to clean needles and Hepatitis C medication), they however primarily highlight the attentive, caring, accepting and friendly staff. At the same time, it is recurrently stated that contact with for example social services and primary health care is avoided as it is experienced as too bureaucratic, stigmatizing and unhelpful.

Conclusions While the positive narratives about the NEP can be attributed to the ethics of care (Mol, 2008) represented by the staff, along with a plethora of rule-breaking practices developed to push the boundaries of the strict regulations, it also vividly paints a picture of the stigmatized and difficult realities for PWID in prohibitionist contexts. This political context seems to create a particular need for care and inclusion which can be provided by harm reduction institutions such as NEP. It however seems crucial that these institutions are created to be “more than medical” as they respond to a wider set of inequalities encountered in the everyday life of PWID. To understand and acknowledge this potential is crucial for producing relevant harm reduction interventions anywhere, but particularly so in prohibitionist contexts.

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Funding sources: FORTE (Grant nr. 2021-01712)

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Biography: Josefin Månsson (PhD) is a researcher and senior lecturer at the Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Sweden. Her main research interests are in substance use, drug policy and drug discourses.

Session 5: Cannabis use, prevention, and policy

Invisible omnipresence of cannabis in the South-East Turkey - a lesson for prevention in diverse contexts

Presenter: Michal Wanke

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Keywords: cannabis, prevention, stigmatisation, family, Turkiye

Abstract

Background Cannabis use undergoes a dynamic redefinition under selected legal frameworks globally. It is also the subject of cultural negotiations stretched between modernised liberal narratives and more traditional ones that can be described as conservative. Many prevention programs face a dilemma between delivering abstinence objectives or to pursue more nuanced, harm reductionist aims. However, drug use in South-East Turkey is strongly stigmatised and absent from the official life and narratives of the community, so neither of these discussions take place.

Methods The author participated in development of a Drug Abuse Prevention programme for Youth, acronymed 'DAPY', and this paper is grounded in qualitative data acquired through this project in Turkiye. A follow-up study was conducted among the youth participants of a pilot phase of the programme (N=20), developed by an international group of professionals in the form of an online workshop and video campaign. The data was collected using a semi structured qualitative interview.

Results The participants live amid the omnipresence of drugs and simultaneously very actively detach themselves from it. There is a powerful taboo and families attempt to conceal the cases of use among them. They also stigmatise the users in order to distinguish themselves from the substance. The gendered patterns of stigmatisation are prevalent.

Conclusions This localised study sheds new light on the Western-dominated scholarship on drug use and counters the normalisation thesis. It is counterproductive to talk about drug use to the audiences who actively deny its presence within the community. The interventions ought to account for stigmatisation to ensure realistic delivery. It is arguably a practical lesson for prevention in diverse contexts, eg. in European communities influenced by migratory movements.

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Funding sources: The 'DAPY' - 'Drug Abuse Prevention for Youth' is a Strategic Partnerships for Youth Erasmus+ project 2019-3-TR01-KA205-079609, but the study itself is not funded externally.

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Biography: Dr. Michał Wanke is a sociologist based at the University of Opole and working previously in the field of digital identities (PhD from Jagiellonian University in 2017) and later: cannabis users and also migrations. He conducted three national studies funded by the Polish National Bureau of Drug Prevention. He was recently involved in the Strategic Partnership Erasmus+ project on drug prevention in Turkiye and co-edited a special issue of *Drugs: Education, Prevention & Policy* journal on Cannabis Cultures and Market. He is also a UO leader of Diversity &

Migration Lab in the FORTHEM Alliance of European Universities.

An innovative pragmatic approach to youth prevention in the context of the planned cannabis legalisation in Germany

Presenter: Anke Stallwitz

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Keywords: Cannabis legalisation, Germany, black market, youth prevention policy, risk competence

Abstract

Many countries around the world have legalized medical cannabis, Canada as early as in 2001. In recent years, there has been a global trend towards legalising cannabis also for recreational use, as exemplified by countries such as Uruguay, Canada, and meanwhile almost half of the US states.

The first European country to consider legal production, supply, and consumption of the drug is Germany, where medical cannabis has been legally available since 2017. However, the legalisation process is complicated or deferred by various international treaties. Besides the intention to dry up the cannabis black market, German politicians cite the protection of youth from overly strong and contaminated products as the main argument for the national legalisation of cannabis. At the same time, the draft laws do not provide for access to legal, quality-tested cannabis for minors: Under-18s are to be denied access, 18- to 20-year-olds are to have access to THC-reduced cannabis and 21-year-olds to all commercial cannabis products. Cannabis-using 16- and 17-year-olds, who make up a significant proportion of the cannabis-using population in Germany, will therefore have to continue to resort to the black market, with all the potential risks that illegal drug acquisition entails.

Taking into account the international research findings on the physical and psychological risks that cannabis use can pose for young people, a pragmatic harm reduction policy approach is proposed that is modelled on the German alcohol policy: Already 16- and 17-year-olds should be able to legally purchase quality-tested THC-reduced cannabis products supplied by cannabis dispensaries. Before purchase, minors must have a brief counselling talk with a qualified person, who educates them about the possible risks involved in adolescent cannabis consumption as well as the principles of risk-competent substance use. This approach to youth prevention should also be adopted by the national alcohol policy.

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Biography: Anke Stallwitz is a professor of social psychology at the Social Work Department of the Protestant University of Applied Sciences Freiburg. She has conducted numerous studies on drug cultures in Germany, Sweden, Canada, and Great Britain with a focus on social structures, mentality, socio-political embeddedness, violence (in dealing situations and against women), and peer interventions. Other focal points in her research, teaching, and practice constitute migration and drug use/trade, drug policy, participatory approaches in research and policy, and organised drug crime.

“Speaking legally” to rule out exceptionality in law - invocations of emergency in Swedish cannabis offence cases

Presenter: Mats Ekendahl

Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Sweden

Keywords: cannabis, law, defence of necessity, drug prohibition, “slow emergencies”

Abstract

Background The presentation draws on a multi-site book project that concerns critical engagements with legal cases, run by Kate Seear (La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia) and Simon Flacks (University of Sussex, Brighton, UK). As many other Western countries, Sweden has a history of prohibitionist drug policy. Politicians and law enforcement officials show pride in being tough on drugs, but also in providing legal certainty and treatment to so called “drug abusers”. Those who ignore the illegality (through producing, smuggling, selling, buying, possessing or using drugs) are considered to choose deviance, and must accept consequences such as prosecution and stigmatization. Research is scarce on how case law deals with extenuating circumstances in drug offences. In light of recent years’ political focus in Europe on how illegal drug use feeds gang criminality and violence, thus instigating drugs as inherently bad, it is important to study legal proceedings that concern situations that could challenge the stubborn anti-drug consensus prevailing in policy, practice and not least law.

Methods In this paper, I scrutinize legal proceedings related to states of emergency (“nödsituation” in Swedish); one case about cannabis trafficking and one about production and use. Drawing on Ben Anderson and colleagues’ (2017) work, I read the cases as illustrating two conflicting invocations of emergency, as bureaucratic governance relevant in a “state of exception” (prosecutor), and as a humanitarian “spark of hope” referred to in a defense of necessity (defendant). In these cases, I identify instances when the law not only enunciates “truth” through applying rules and principles to facts, but actively produces it through advanced legal reasoning, i.e. through “speaking legally”. Focus is on the process of making the law, and ultimately on the effects that legal truth claims may have for the people and settings that are represented. The study is limited to textual reports of convictions and it illustrates the leeway regarding assessments and rulings that surface in the “passage of law” (Latour, 2010).

Results Three examples are pinpointed of what “speaking legally” can encompass in this practice: 1) reductionist “truths” about drug use; 2) presumptions that emergencies are always acute; 3) references to disparate preceding cases that bolster prosecutor arguments. Findings are analyzed in light of the neglect in law of the slow and seldom acute emergencies that people who use drugs encounter under prohibition; those emergencies that surface through ordinary lives of marginalization, secrecy, liability, poverty, violence and poor health.

Conclusions The cannabis offence cases studied here could have been, but were not, spoke about legally as legitimate opportunities to let civil rights and personal wellbeing overtrump the long arm of the law. This should oppose the public awareness of social justice.

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Biography: Mats Ekendahl is a Professor of Social Work at the Department of Social Work, Stockholm University, Sweden. His research covers a wide range of topics in the context of Swedish alcohol and drug policy, such as user perspectives, drug discourses and policy processes.

Session 6: Drug use: Families, parents, and politicians

Examining the ‘Whole Family Approach’ to providing services, contrasting the policy agenda, rhetoric and reality.

Presenter: Stephanie Fincham-Campbell¹, Polly Radcliffe¹, Elaine Robinson², Judith Warburton², Anne Whittaker²

¹ King’s College London, Addictions Department, National Addiction Centre, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience

² Stirling University, Nursing Midwifery & Allied Health Professions Research Unit, Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport

Keywords: family, parents, ethnography, qualitative, social-ecological model

Abstract

Background Holistic ‘whole family approaches’ and ‘family inclusive practice’ are at the heart of policies for providing services to families affected by drug and alcohol use in Scotland and are recommended in England. Similarly, the drug strategies of most other European countries recognise the importance of supporting children affected by parental substance use. However, the approaches taken at a national level vary. The EMCDDA found ‘extensive provision’ of such services in Scandinavia, Portugal, and Italy. In this presentation, we will examine how practitioners represent, enact, reproduce, and contest the policy agenda through accounts and observations of their practice.

Methods This presentation draws on data from an ethnographic study examining the governance of parental opioid use in Scotland and England. Twenty-two families (including 27 parents and 81 children), and 10 services (including 103 professionals) took part in the study. The study used a relational ethnography approach, and collected data using participant observation (staff team meetings, clinic and home visits, supervised contact visits, case conference/core group meetings), interviews with parents in the home (‘walk and talk’ sessions in the local community, telephone and video calls, visits to the park with their children, family, friends), interviews with staff (focus groups with staff teams, ‘workday debriefs’), and analysis of organisational policies, practice guidance, and parent information. Data were thematically analysed.

Results Although, there are examples of successful implementation of whole family approaches including practitioners’ accounts of facilitating relational ways of working, a ‘strengths-based’ approach, holistic care, and the engagement of the wider family rather than offering support to individuals; and despite a strong policy landscape promoting the ‘whole family approach’ and ‘family inclusive practice’, these approaches are rarely implemented in practice. The data suggests that there are several barriers to implementing the ‘whole family approach’ in families where parents use/receive treatment for drug use, most notably existing working cultures. Our research suggests that many substance use treatment and social care services focus on individuals who use drugs rather than families. The bio-medical model dominates care, and teams work in silos. Barriers to implementing the ‘whole family approach’ is exacerbated by the assumption that drug use is incompatible with parenting.

Conclusions The presentation concludes there is a need for a more social model of care underpinned by a social-ecological model, considering personal, social, economic, and political factors and a stronger focus on the wider caregiving environment.

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Funding sources: Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

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Biography: Stephanie is a research assistant working on this study. She is also writing up her PhD which explores social networks amongst people with alcohol dependence who frequently attend hospital to inform social network therapeutic approaches and questionnaires. Stephanie has a background in psychology and mental health epidemiology.

Representations of the problem of parental opioid use in interagency decision-making practices in England and Scotland.

Presenters: Emma Beecham, Carol-Ann Getty, Polly Radcliffe

National Addictions Centre, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College

Abstract

Background The governance of parents who use drugs brings together professionals in drug services, child welfare and protection, and child health. Differing professional understandings regarding parents who are in treatment for and use opioids, impacts on the care and support for parents and child welfare outcomes. To date, little attention has been paid to the practices of interagency decision making in families where parents use drugs. This paper uses Carol Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) approach to understand how each service conceptualises the 'problem'.

Method We draw on data from the Relations Study, an ethnographic study examining the governance of parental opioid use in Scotland and England. The study employed interviews and observations with parents and families, drug services social services, health and third sector services for families across six sites in England and four sites in Scotland. A thematic analysis was undertaken of verbatim interview transcripts and field notes from observations of consultations in family homes; drug-treatment clinical appointments; multi-agency case conferences; and social work case discussions.

Findings Despite a longstanding UK policy emphasis on multi-agency decision making in child welfare practice, our analysis suggests conflicting representations of the problem of parents who use and are in treatment for opioid use amongst and within professionals from substance use treatment and child welfare agencies. We illustrate how drug treatment practitioners and children's social workers hold differential thresholds for risk. We identified differing thresholds of adequacy and acceptability of parenting and different expectation for ways in which parents can demonstrate their motivation and engagement with treatment. We discuss how consensus is reached in multi-agency meetings and how the different framing of the problem by professionals in the different services impacts on decision making.

Conclusions Decisions made in case conferences have implications for decisions about risk and whether children can be cared for by parents who use opioids. Despite representatives from a range of health and welfare professionals in meetings, child welfare professionals' voices often dominate. We ask how more equitable representations of parents who use opioids might impact on how multi-agency consensus is reached.

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Illicit drug use admissions among British politicians: a narrative perspective

Presenter: Liviu Alexandrescu

Sociology, Manchester Metropolitan University

Keywords: narrative, normalisation, stigma, politicians, drug talk

Abstract

Background In recent years, British politicians have increasingly been admitting some of their own personal experiences with illicit drugs. This paper draws on normalisation theory and narrative criminology to question the moral and ideological positioning of such personal accounts of transgressing drug laws by high-ranking government and opposition figures, who otherwise officially uphold punitive controls – despite ongoing trends towards decriminalisation in other European jurisdictions and beyond. It thus addresses a gap in narrative approaches to critical drug studies, that tend to traditionally focus on people who use and sell drugs, without often questioning the role of how biographical and political narratives meet at the top, when uttered by the powerful, to circumscribe the boundaries of drug policy discourse.

Methods Narrative accounts of substance use episodes conveyed through the mass-audience media are collected for ten top tier politicians from the dominant Conservative and Labour parties, in the UK. These are analysed for storytelling patterns and three major scripts or frames are identified and illustrated through examples.

Results Encounters with illicit substances are thus mostly framed as past encounters, where symbolic distance is established between the more reflective, mature self and a younger persona; ambiguous encounters, where the effects and agency of the substance are blurred or even questioned altogether; and displaced encounters, that take place within settings geographically and culturally far away from home.

Conclusions Through such narrative scripts that seek to lessen the perceived severity of drug law infringements, there emerges a sense of discrepant normalisation: in which on one side the realities of the widespread, casual presence and use of drugs in British society are normalised and accepted as such; but where, on the other, the political imagination remains wedded to the confines of prohibitionist responses. The theoretical possibilities of a narrative criminology of the powerful are discussed.

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Biography: Liviu Alexandrescu is currently a lecturer in criminology, within the Substance Use and Associate Behaviours (SUAB) research centre at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. He is interested in critical approaches to substance use and drug policy, most recently in how drug and dependency stigma are constructed 'from above', through policy and media discourse, and how they intersect with the political economy and structural inequalities of contemporary society.

Session 7: Drug markets, production, and digitalization

Illicit synthetic drug production and waste in Belgium: what we know and what (can) we do about the environmental harms?

Presenter: Mafalda Pardal

Co-authors: Charlotte Colman (Ghent University), Sophia De Seranno (Ghent University), Tim Surmont (EMCDDA)

RAND Europe

Abstract

Background The production of illicit drugs contributes to important environmental harms. In the European context, the production of synthetic drugs, particularly MDMA and amphetamine (and more recently methamphetamine), increasingly poses environmental challenges. The production of these substances in Europe is mainly concentrated in the Netherlands and to a lesser extent in Belgium. This production process generates a significant amount of waste, which is illegally dumped or discharged, thus posing threats to public health and the environment.

Objectives: This presentation has the following main objectives: 1) to provide an overview of the known trends concerning the production of illicit synthetic drugs and the waste generated through that process; 2) to explore media coverage of the environmental harms associated with illicit synthetic drugs production and dumping; 3) to map the range of stakeholders involved in the dismantling and environmental remediation of dumping sites, and the overall aftercare process. In doing so, we engage with green criminology studies and perspectives on green harms and crimes.

Methods The presentation relies on data from two recent projects addressing these issues.^{1,2} The analysis draws on a mix of mainly qualitative data, including: a) data from the Belgian Federal Police; b) an analysis of 289 news articles published in selected Flemish newspapers (2013–2020); c) semi-structured interviews with actors involved in the aftercare of dumping sites (n=5); d) case file analysis (n=14 cases).

Results and discussion The analysis suggests that although there may be an increased presence of synthetic drug production and dumping sites in Belgium, the nature and extent of the associated environmental harms are often not well understood. We identified important challenges concerning the detection of dumping sites, as well as in terms of the monitoring of environmental hazards by law enforcement agencies. Beyond these difficulties in detecting certain types of dumping events, there are also important blind spots in relation to the monitoring and remediation of environmental hazards, difficulties around establishing agreements on financing of the aftercare activities, and how that information is shared among the relevant actors with a role in that process.

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¹ Colman, C., De Seranno, S., & Pardal, M. (2023). Opgeruimd staat netjes? De ontmanteling en nazorg van synthetische drugsdumpingplaatsen in België. *Panopticon*.

² Pardal, M., Colman, C. and Surmont, T., 2021. Synthetic Drug Production in Belgium – Environmental Harms as Collateral Damage?. *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, 3(1), p.36–49. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31389/jied.84>

'SoMe' dealing: Merging on- and offline worlds when dealing drugs via social media.

Presenter: Nina Tvede Korshøj

Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University. Bartholins Allé 10, 8000 Aarhus, Denmark.

Keywords: Drug markets; Drug dealing; Social media; Hybrid; On- and Offline

Abstract

Background In recent years, a new drug market trend has emerged in which social media platforms (SoMe), such as Facebook, Telegram, Reddit, and Snapchat, are increasingly used to deal illicit drugs. Existing research tends to examine primarily online interactions, often neglecting the fact that a huge part of 'SoMe drug dealing' actually takes place in offline spheres, such as the transaction of money for drugs etc. Against this background, the aim of this presentation is to investigate the fusion/hybridization of on- and offline worlds, that is SoMe drug dealing.

Methods This presentation draws on in-depth online mediated face-to-face interviews with 25 young Danish adults, who have extensive experience with dealing drugs via different social media platforms, and 12 months of netnography conducted on various platforms.

Results In my research it became clear that having a successful business dealing drugs via SoMe, in large is a result of actions both on- and offline, technological, and non-technological. For dealers, having online digital capital, for e.g., navigating the different platforms and their cultural environments, is widely important. But the data also reveals that having offline social capital, e.g., in forms of other friends/acquaintances in the drug business who you trust, or street capital, e.g., in form of a willingness to communicate a readiness for violence (both on- and offline) is essential. Further, a mix of resources and skills such as, offline in-depth local knowledge of the city where you operate, the ability to scour competitors online, and having one's finger on the pulse on how to stay off the polices radar, both on- and offline, is equally required. Dealers also often describe how their SoMe business, and their online presence, can mean a massive influx in both on- and offline symbolic capital. This can be expressed by e.g., other SoMe dealers contacting them online and asking for help e.g., if their supply is running low, or the ability for the dealers to ask their customers for favours, that improves their business in various ways.

Conclusions I wish to elaborate on how SoMe drug dealing is not an isolated online phenomenon, but is a complex intermingling of technological and non-technological actions and interactions, skills, and capitals. If we ever want to fully understand the depths and nuances of digital drug markets, we must explore what is required both on- and offline.

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Biography: Nina Tvede Korshøj is a Ph.D.-student at The Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University, with a Master of Science in Social Sciences in Social Work from Aalborg University. Nina is a qualitative researcher, who has previous research experience, as a research assistant, on a study of criminal exploitation of vulnerable young people. Her research interest revolves around (digital) drug markets, drug dealing, youth and drug use, and digital criminology.

Social Media Markets for illicit drugs. Algorithmic affordances and the change of drug dealing

Presenter: Kristoffer Magnus Bjerre Aagesen, Alessandro Moretti, Jakob Demant

University of Copenhagen, Department of Sociology, Øster farimagsgade 5, 1014, Copenhagen K

Keywords: Illicit drugs, Cocaine, Puffbars, Social Media, technology,

Abstract

Background Online drug dealing includes dark web markets as well as sales on social media and apps. Social media drug dealing makes drugs available to large groups of earlier un-disposed young people. These market changes has moved drug dealing away from a relation-based (closed networks) model and over to an open marked. We relate to markets for cocaine, cannabis and MDMA, but also Puffbars and other more grayzone products.

Methods Based on a netnography this paper seeks to understand accessibility of drugs in these social media markets (with Snapchat as a case), specifically in order to understand the role of existing networks supporting drug purchases. Online ethnography treats online spaces as data fields, that provide certain affordances for use. Inspired by Kozinets' Netnography a detailed immersion journal is kept for structuring observations of, noting attempts, failures, successes and more interpretive comments from the researcher.

Results SnapChats affordances is formed by low (or no) contend moderation, anonymity, temporal nature of messages and easily searchable usernames. Further, the algorithmic suggestions of profiles, groups and contend, not only proved an easy access of illicit drugs for sale, but also present further careers into drug dealing (as drug mules, money laundries, drug currieries or in prostitution).

Conclusions In the paper we show that the relation based model is still relevant but that we must include a stronger perspective of affordances, including algorithmic based contend. On the methodological level, the study shows the importance of better and more detailed interpretative use of qualitative observations within studies of affordances; in particular, it points towards the wider use the contextually reflected immersion journal data.

SLIDES NOT AVAILABLE

Funding sources: Tryg foundation, Denmark and EMCDDA.

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Biography: Kristoffer Aagesen is research assistant on the ongoing project. He has however a longer history of developing netnographic methods in the field of illicit markets. He has aspirations for writing a PhD on the project. Moretti (Post-doc) has published work on markets for illicit tickets sales in UK and beyond and is currently running a study on puffbars markets with Demant and Aagesen. Demant (associate professor) is PI on the puffbar project and is running the MOD-Lab. A qualitative lab for 'Microinteraction Online Deviance' at Department of Sociology.

Session 8: Policing and drug markets

Understanding vulnerability vs criminality in drug supply

Presenter: Ross Coomber¹, Charlie Lloyd², Kate Brown², Chris Devany², Tobias Kammergaard², Laura Bainbridge³

1 Department of Sociology, Social Policy & Criminology, University of Liverpool, UK

2 School for Business and Society, and ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, University of York

3 School of Law, and ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre, University of Leeds

Keywords: Policing vulnerability; vulnerability conceptualised; self-image

Abstract

Background Policing vulnerable populations can take up to 80% of police time in countries such as the UK. One newly recognised vulnerable population relates to those caught up in drug supply. In the 'County Lines' drug supply of drugs such as heroin we have a situation where children (-18) are commonly groomed, forced or enticed into drug supply activity and consequently then subject to varying forms of exploitation. As such, it is increasingly recognised that many, if not all, sellers under the age of 18, are vulnerable/exploited individuals first and criminals second and that they should be processed as such by the police and the criminal justice system. Discretion however exists in the criminal justice system and in policing in particular. Whilst many vulnerable children/people are labelled as vulnerable early in the policing encounter, various others are not as they are perceived to be sufficiently self-aware of their acts and thus criminally culpable. In addition to police decisions (which can involve varying forms of bias) attributing culpability rather than vulnerability, many young County Lines involved individuals would not view themselves as vulnerable nor exploited. This presentation will explore the issues contained around the attribution of vulnerability to populations and why they may be partially or wholly rejected by those in key positions to attribute (or not) the label and those to whom the label might be applied (or not). The consequences of these decisions will also be considered.

Methods Multi-phase, mixed methods national study involving all UK police forces and three Rapid Appraisals of select police force areas to gain depth insight from police, multi-agency partnerships and people with lived experience of County Lines drug selling and police interaction.

Results This research is wide ranging on the issue of policing vulnerability. This presentation will focus on discussing how and in what ways vulnerability is conceptualised and operationalised by both police (varyingly) and those involved (varyingly).

Conclusions Improved clarity around vulnerability and its application is necessary for vulnerability policing to be appropriately targeted. Improved conceptual applicability of the concept needs to develop such that it resonates with, and is acceptable to, those it is being attributed to.

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Funding sources: ESRC (Economic & Social Research Council) through the ESRC funded Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre at the universities of York and Leeds. .

Contact Details: Prof Ross Coomber, Dept. of Sociology, Social Policy & Criminology, University of Liverpool, UK.

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Biography: Ross Coomber is Professor of Criminology and Sociology at the University of Liverpool. He has more than 30 years research experience in the drug and alcohol field and has written extensively and broadly in this area, particularly on the nature and the machinations of illicit drug markets. He is currently heading up the County Lines Policing and Vulnerability project at the new £10m ESRC Vulnerability and Policing Futures Research Centre at the universities of York and Leeds. He was previously Professor and Director of the Griffith Criminology Institute at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia, and Professor of Sociology at the University of Plymouth, UK.

Policing in the dark?: innovation and uncertainty in digital drug markets and law enforcement responses

Presenter: Meropi Tzanetakis^{1,2}, Nigel South³

1 University of Manchester, United Kingdom; 2 University of Vienna, Austria; 3 University of Essex, United Kingdom

Keywords: cryptomarkets, digital transformation, digital drug markets, drug control, law enforcement

Abstract

Background Cryptomarkets or darknet drug markets have been understood as a ‘transformative criminal innovation’ (Aldridge & Décary-Héту 2014) that makes use of encryption technologies to separate the exchange of illicit drugs from user identities and frustrate law enforcement interventions. Thus, cryptomarkets enable digitally mediated drug transactions which do not always correspond to a higher risk of being pursued by the police. In our earlier collaboration (Tzanetakis & South 2023) one of our concluding questions about such developments was as follows: ‘Do the responses from policy and policing represent new ways of thinking about drugs consumption and distribution or are they remarkably familiar with a technological twist?’ It is this question, with a particular focus on law enforcement, that we begin to explore in this paper.

Methods This paper is based on the evaluation of scholarly publications estimating the ‘success’ of law enforcement operations and official reports as well as online announcements of law enforcement bodies involved in international operations aimed at disrupting the infrastructure of cryptomarkets, seizing drugs and assets, and arresting drug vendors and customers.

Results We found two prevailing policing strategies. The first strategy aims at shutting down cryptomarkets and prosecuting operators, vendors and customers, and has been pursued in multiple operations since 2013, often as a joint international law enforcement effort. The results have included significant short-term effects but cryptomarkets have also proved to be resilient in the longer term with drug exchanges being displaced to new digital platforms and with vendors and customers following. The second law enforcement strategy represents a rather new countermeasure, namely a so-called honeypot approach. With this tactical shift the aim is primarily to destroy trust instead of ‘just’ closing cryptomarkets. Although this strategy has also had some success, the ecosystem’s community has adapted to sophisticated undercover operations, once again demonstrating resilience.

Conclusions Our analysis suggests that law enforcement operations can be successful, but this can be short-lived and as in offline drugs law-enforcement, displacement effects unfold in digital realms. This leaves open the question of which drug control and policing strategies are best suited to minimise harm?

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Biography: Meropi Tzanetakis is Assistant Professor (Lecturer) in Digital Criminology at the University of Manchester and affiliate of the Research Platform Governance of digital practices at the University of Vienna. Her research interests include online drug markets, digital criminology and platformisation. Meropi is editorial board member of the *Kriminologisches Journal* and elected board member of the Economic Sociology Research Network, ESA. Meropi has edited together with Nigel South *Digital Transformations of Illicit Drug Markets: Reconfiguration and Continuity* (Emerald, 2023). Nigel South is Emeritus Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Essex and has published widely on drugs, crime, cultures and controls, including co-authoring *Traffickers: Drugs Markets and Law Enforcement*, *Eurodrugs*, and editing *Drugs: Cultures, Controls and Everyday Life*.

Session 9: Drug-related implications of Covid-19

Hysteresis in addictive consumption trajectories after lockdown: the power of time-preferences

Presenter: Sophie Massin¹, Phu Nguyen-Van², Bruno Ventelou³, Marc Willinger⁴

1 University of Lille, LEM, France 2 University Paris Nanterre, Economix, France 3 Aix Marseille School of Economics, France 4 University of Montpellier, CEE-M, France

Keywords: tobacco, alcohol, hysteresis, time preferences, lockdown

Abstract

Background The Covid-19 pandemic led most countries in the world to implement lockdowns, which caused variations in health lifestyle behaviours in general, and substance use in particular. These changes can be explained by changes in the availability of products, in the contexts of consumption and in the motivations for use. Our goal is twofold. First, we want to test whether the changes induced by an exogeneous shock such as the Covid-19 lockdown have long lasting effects in consumption habits, a phenomenon that we describe as a 'hysteresis' effect. Second, we want to determine whether individuals' time preferences play a role in these consumption trajectories.

Methods We conducted an online survey on a representative sample of the French population (N=1038) in September 2021 and asked the respondents to quantify (retrospectively) their consumption of tobacco and alcohol at three moments: January 2020 (before the lockdown), May 2020 (during the lockdown) and September 2021 (after the lockdown). To test for the hysteresis effect, we use an econometric method based on a panel data approach that controls for unobserved inter-individual heterogeneity. Concretely, we regress the level of consumption of the third period (after the lockdown) on the level of consumption of the first and second period and their interaction. The persistence in behaviour is estimated by a linear combination of coefficients corresponding to the derivative of the consumption level at the third period on the consumption level at the second period. In a first step, we stratify the regressions by consumption profiles (increase during lockdown vs decrease during lockdown). In a second step, we stratify the regressions by time-preference profiles (time-consistent, present-biased, future-biased), elicited thanks to the Andreoni-Sprenger task (properly incentivized).

Results About 10% of smokers have decreased their use during the lockdown and 30% have increased it. For alcohol, figures are about 20% both for increase and decrease. When testing for the existence of a hysteresis effect, we find that it exists for smokers who have increased their use, as well as for drinkers who have decreased their use. Taking into account time-preferences profiles, we find a significant hysteresis effect for time-consistent and present-biased individuals, but not for future-biased individuals.

Conclusions The Covid-19 lockdown had long lasting effects on certain types of addictive consumptions and time-preferences play an important role in the ability of individuals to cope with these changes. This could be taken into account in the design of health policies in the event of exogenous shocks modifying addictive consumption behaviours.

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Funding sources: The French National Research Agency provided funding for this research (ANR-17-EURE-0020 and ANR-21-COVR-0041).

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Biography: Sophie Massin is a full professor of economics at the University of Lille and a member of LEM UMR 9221 (Lille Economie Management). She holds a PhD from the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. She was an associate professor at the University of Artois from 2013 to 2022. She works on issues relating to addictive behaviours, drug policy and, more generally, the role of attitudes to risk and time in health behaviours.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on help measurements for drug-using detainees in a German prison

Presenter: Franziska Schneider

IFT Institut für Therapieforschung gGmbH

Keywords: prison, COVID-19, help measurements

Abstract

Background Detainees in the custody setting were particularly affected by various stresses during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the pandemic had an impact on daily life in detention. On the one hand, many detainees were released earlier due to the changed situation as well as protection from overcrowding and the associated rapid transmission of the virus, and substitute prison sentences were partially waived. On the other hand, both visiting and recreational arrangements in prisons were significantly curtailed due to contact restrictions. The extent to which this has affected the perceptions of drug-using detainees regarding the situation in terms of support measures and psychological as well as physical stress during the period of imprisonment was analyzed using guided interviews

Methods Adult, incarcerated, (former) drug-using men of a German correctional facility were determined as the target group. A total of 22 guided interviews with inmates were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. The interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis according to Udo Kuckartz.

Results The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were still very present among the detainees during the time the interviews were taken and, in some cases, continued to determine everyday life. In the analyses of the interviews, it is evident that there were restrictions concerning offers of help for substance-using detainees. A deterioration in general medical care and a reduction in contact with the extramural setting were also mentioned. In addition, strict isolation rules and contact prohibitions were applied in the intramural setting. The lack of contact in both the extramural and intramural settings reduced the supply of substances during the pandemic and increased their cost. This situation led to an increased need for mental health support among substance-using detainees.

Conclusions Overall, the impacts that arose due to the COVID-19 pandemic affected the availability of substances, the personal contacts of the incarcerated, and the support services. In addition, the entire issue surrounding the pandemic was perceived by some detainees as an additional burden in their daily prison life. It is unclear whether the measures and services that were restricted due to the pandemic were resumed.

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Biography: Franziska Schneider works at the Institute for Therapy Research in Munich. Her working group, the German Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction, is assigned to the phenomenon of the consumption of illegal substances in Germany. Franziska Schneider works in particular on the topics of drug markets and drug use in prisons. She is writing her dissertation on the tension between help and punishment in the context of imprisonment.

Problem drug users as victims of crime in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic

Presenter: Michaela Roubalova ¹

¹ Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention, Namesti 14. rijna 12, Prague, Czech Republic

Keywords: problem drug users; victimisation; service providers; Czech Republic

Abstract

Background People who use drugs, especially problem drug users are mostly seen as criminals. However, problem drug users are also burdened with significantly higher rates of victimisation than the general population. At the same time they are victims who remain almost completely hidden. They have minimal motivation to report victimisation to the police and are also outside the focus of most victimology research. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this situation is expected to worsen.

Methods In the spring of 2022 we conducted an online questionnaire survey with staff from various social service providers. One of the target groups was problem drug users (N=53). We conducted this survey with two main aims. Firstly, in order to get a more complex view of victimisation, we wanted to capture the patterns of victimisation among hard to reach victims, who are usually omitted from "traditional" victimisation surveys. Secondly, we wanted to reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related measures on the clientele and functioning of services. The survey of different service providers should provide a comparative perspective.

Results The survey confirmed a higher burden of victimisation among drug users compared to clients of other services, especially in relation to violent crime. With the regard to the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, professionals working with this group reported, the highest negative impact on their clients.

Conclusions Drug users face multiple barriers and most victim focused services are not available to them. Mutual distrust is the biggest problem. The general negative image of drug users prevents them from gaining a status of victim. The situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem; on the other hand, it has helped to highlight more urgent problems and hasten some solutions.

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Biography: Michaela Roubalova, is a researcher at the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention in Prague. Previously she worked at the Department of Addictology at the First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University, Prague. She obtained her PhD in criminal law and criminology. Her research interests focus on drug-related crime, drug policy and other drug use-related topics, and victimology.

Session 10: Methods, ethics and vulnerable populations

Assembling Recreational Settings – Drugs, Harm Reduction and Youth

Presenter: Rebeca Marques Rocha

Central European University (CEU), Quellenstraße 51, 1100 Wien (Austria)

Keywords: harm reduction, nightlife, recreational drug use, polydrug use, youth

Abstract

Background Scholars engaged in studying recreational drug use among youth have adopted different premises related to the influence of cultural structures and agency in drug-taking decisions and knowledge sharing. Traditionally, researchers tend to differentiate drug objects from cultural consumption practices, choosing one or another as their unit of analysis. By doing so, these approaches engage with the challenge of explaining how these factors mediate drug consumption in particular instances and risk to result in a probabilistic logic in which factors are more or less likely to mediate drug use.

Methods Through assemblage thinking, this research identifies different forces, factors and actors operating in the rave subcultures and their strategies in light of the social phenomena connected to drug use. This study combines diverse interpretive research methods. It gathered ethnographic evidence between 2016 and 2022 for a number of projects, such as qualitative in-depth and open-end interviews with party goers, party organizers and harm reduction NGOs staff collected for producing the short documentary "Every Party Matters" (Karabajakian, I. & Marques Rocha, R. 2020) and the author's master thesis (Marques Rocha, 2020); participatory action research as a harm reduction technician for a drug checking and nightlife harm reduction NGO Kosmicare in Lisbon, Portugal; netnography of social media and online presence of party collectives; and autoethnography, reflecting on the author's own experiences as a party-goer in nightlife events organized by different party collectives in different countries and cities.

Results Overall, assemblage thinking can help researchers understand recreational drug use as a complex phenomenon that is shaped by a wide range of factors. By examining the relationships between these factors, researchers can gain insights into the subjective experiences of young people who use drugs, the broader social and cultural contexts of drug use, and the larger systems that influence drug use at the population level (Keane 2019; Lenton 2018; Rose 2007; Sheller and Urry 2006).

Conclusions The evidence outlined in this discussion indicates that practices taking place within recreational settings in subcultures are a co-construction process that involves party organizers and party-goers. These dynamics are also influenced by factors, actors and forces, such as the practices of other party collectives, the local legal framework, the drugs market, and the physical features of party spaces. The interplay of these forces results in a complex and context-situated social phenomenon. Understanding the roles each of these aspects have on the behaviors observed in such context is the first step to understand how these settings can be modified to operate differently and unleash positive and safer outcomes.

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Biography: Rebeca, a doctoral candidate at Central European University in Vienna, focuses her research on youth activism, nightlife, and drug policymaking for harm reduction. With extensive experience as a practitioner and consultant, she has volunteered with [IDDD](#), advocating against police violence and gendered impacts of drug legislation. Rebeca has also worked as a harm reduction technician with [Kosmicare](#) in Lisbon and as a Policy Coordinator at [Unite](#) Parliamentarians Network for Global Health, leading advocacy for drug policy reform. She remains active in various organizations, including [Portugal's Treatment Action Group](#), the [Citizens' Initiative for Cannabis Regulation](#), and [Youth RISE](#). Rebeca is a co-founder and current director of the [CEU Student Think Tank](#).

Identifying Social Norms & Rules using Serious Case Reviews of Child Criminal Exploitation and County Lines drug dealing

Presenter: Luke Parkinson

Lancaster University

Keywords: County Lines, Child Criminal Exploitation, Social Norms & Rules

Abstract

Background In the UK, “County Lines” defines a model of drug dealing that involves drugs being transported from an urban hub to be sold in smaller satellite towns by organised crime gangs, which are controlled remotely by dedicated mobile phone lines. “County Lines” has also become a term which is synonymous with a form of criminal exploitation which utilises young and primarily vulnerable people, to transport, sell and hold drugs. This exploitation can take the form of coercion, intimidation, violence, debt bondage and sexual abuse.

Methods The initial part of my PhD research draws on Firmin’s (2018) idea of Contextual Safeguarding, utilises Bourdieu’s (1990) work, and analyses social norms and rules within 20 cases of child criminal exploitation relating to County Lines drug dealing. These cases are available as public documents in Serious Case Reviews from the NSPCC.

Results The initial analysis suggests that the different social fields in which children are exploited may perpetuate harmful social norms and rules directly relating to the concept of exploitation, which can be reinforced by professional and adult responses to incidents found in the cases, such as the normalisation of “turning a blind eye” or disregarding information and an absence of care for the Other.

Conclusions The initial results need further exploration through planned qualitative research for my PhD.

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Funding sources: NWSSDTP

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Biography: I am a first-year PhD student at Lancaster University. I have a background in social work and an interest in illicit drug research, social work, psychoanalysis, attachment theory and creative qualitative methods. My PhD is focused on criminal exploitation and county lines drug dealing.

Session 11: Drug markets: transitions and psychedelics

Marijuana Entrepreneurs: in transition from Illegality to legal markets

Presenter: Alejandro Sáez Carretero

University of Granada, Cuesta del Hospicio s/n, Granada (Spain)

Keywords: entrepreneurs, marijuana, grounded theory, comparative qualitative analysis, drug markets.

Abstract

Background The clandestine marijuana market has been repeatedly depicted as controlled pervasively by a few powerful criminal underworld actors. Nonetheless, this archetypical image is being energetically contested due to the undergoing research: It is suggested that, in reality, many hands are intervening in the process of configuration of the new legal cannabis economy in an array of countries throughout Europe.

Regarding research purposes, the main goal of this project is to build a fresh theory about the process of the emergence of a new market, that is, the marijuana economy, as well as its transition from illegality to legality. In that case, the attention is focused on the cannabis sector, which has the characteristic of being considered illegal in most European countries. Nonetheless, legislation is being modified in certain member states, for instance, in Germany. Besides, the theoretical production will shed light on entrepreneurs' trajectories in the marijuana economy. Traditionally, it is believed that illegality has been the gate of entrance to the cannabis market for newcomers. Nonetheless, some entrepreneurs could potentially evolve to legality at certain stages of their careers. Otherwise, Grounded Theory is the methodological backbone of the project. Through the implementation of the Qualitative Comparative Analysis, it is expected to offer a clarifying explanation of how an illegal economic sector could potentially evolve to legality if appropriate circumstances operate in due time.

Through both gathering data and inductive analysis, it is expected to assemble a theory capable of explaining the circumstances that allow the emergence of a new market. Besides, interviews will be conducted with legal or illegal actors in this economic sector. Mainly, fieldwork will be implemented in Spain, which is one of the most robust producers of cannabis in Europe, but not only. Other marijuana economic actors from different European nationalities could take part in the research. As part of the project, I have applied for a short Erasmus + stay at Maynooth (Ireland) where I would continue the interviewing process with local cannabis entrepreneurs.

Nevertheless, scaling up the research to other member states offers a paramount vision of the ongoing situation in Europe and a methodological bias due to the difficulty of building an applicable theory for quite different contexts. Finally, even though the research project is in a preliminary phase, appropriate results are expected at the end of September 2023. Currently, I am in the process of gathering data, implementing interviews with entrepreneurs...etc.

Methods Grounded Theory, semi-structured interview, Comparative Qualitative Analysis.

Results preliminary results are expected at the end of next September.

Conclusions preliminary conclusions are expected at the end of next September.

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Biography: Currently, I'm a Social Sciences Ph.D. candidate at the University of Granada, where I was awarded a doctoral grant by the Ministry of Education. Regarding my academic background, I was awarded a Sociocultural Anthropology degree at the same University in 2018. Previously, I was awarded a Journalism degree at the University of Málaga. Regarding my research interests, my thesis is consecrated to shed light on drug markets, specifically on marijuana. More precisely, I'm interested in entrepreneurs' influence over the configuration of emergent markets.

Liminal spaces, seasonal faces: Challenging drug market assumptions via an exploration of naturally occurring magic mushroom markets in rural Kent.

Presenter: George Simpson, Caroline Chatwin

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Keywords: Magic Mushrooms, Markets,

Abstract

Background This article presents an exploration of naturally occurring Class-A magic mushroom markets in the UK. It aims to challenge some of the mainstream narratives about drug markets and to identify features of this specific market, which will extend our understanding of how illegal drug markets operate and are structured more generally.

Methods The research presented comprises a three year ethnography of sites of magic mushroom production in rural Kent. Observations were conducted at 5 research sites over three consecutive magic mushroom seasons and interviews were conducted with 10 (8 male; 2 female) key informants.

Results It finds that naturally occurring magic mushroom sites are reluctant and liminal sites of drug production, distinct from other Class-A drug production sites due to their: open and accessible nature; lack of invested ownership or evidence of purposeful cultivation; and lack of law enforcement disruption efforts, violence or organised crime involvement. Seasonal magic mushroom picker participants were found to be a sociable group, often acting in a cooperative nature, and without evidence of territoriality or violent dispute resolution. These findings have wider application in challenging the dominant narrative that the most harmful (Class-A) drug markets are homogenous in their violent, profit driven, hierarchical nature, and most Class-A drug producers/suppliers are morally corrupt, financially motivated and organised.

Conclusions A greater understanding of the variety of Class-A drug markets in operation can challenge archetypes and discrimination in understanding drug market involvement, will allow the development of more nuanced policing and policy strategies, and contributes to the presentation of a fluidity of drug market structure that permeates beyond bottom level street markets or social supply.

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Funding sources: ESRC

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Biography: ESRC funded PhD student at the university of Kent. I am currently a lecturer at the University of Kent. My research project investigates the ways in which drug dealers sculpt identity and uses immersive ethnography to explore markets and actors through a dramaturgical lens. More widely my research interests are around niche alternative styles of production and supply that challenge the idea of a homogeneous drug dealer typology.

Psychedelic sessions: Challenging the boundaries between ‘criminal entrepreneurship’ and ‘alternative medicine’ in Denmark

Presenter: Margit Anne Petersen & Thomas Friis Sjøgaard

Centre for Alcohol and Drug Use, Aarhus University

Abstract

Objectives The aim of this paper is to investigate the distribution of psychedelic substances, through a focus on facilitators of psychedelic sessions such as ceremonies, retreats or therapy. In Denmark, as elsewhere, we are currently witnessing a growing interest and increase in the use of psychedelic and related substances for spiritual or therapeutic purposes. This increase is partially related to what has been termed ‘the psychedelic renaissance’, namely, the renewed clinical interest in substances such as Psilocybin, Ayahuasca, LSD and MDMA as potential medicines of the future. As such, this paper aims to build on and contribute to criminological and sociological research on social supply, criminal entrepreneurship and emerging drug markets.

Methodology The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out between 2017-2023 within psychedelic communities involving participant observation of sessions as well as interviews and informal conversations with 30 users and 15 facilitators in Denmark.

Significant results None of the facilitators view their psychedelic sessions as a form of ‘drug dealing’, and often they do not charge money for the actual substances used in these sessions, due to both legal and spiritual matters. As such, this form of drug supply can be characterized as 1) focusing on services rather than substances 2) being illegal but (somewhat) legitimized as alternative medicine or spiritual guidance and 3) challenging dominant understandings of drug suppliers and drug markets.

Conclusions With this paper, we draw attention to a new aspect of what in research on drug supply has been termed ‘the unusual suspects’ and ‘the silent majority’. While the facilitators of psychedelic sessions mostly go unnoticed as ‘drug offenders’, they nevertheless run an illegal business which involves the supply of illicit drugs. While some promote their business very silently through trusted networks and word of mouth only, others advertise their services more openly to emphasize the importance and legitimacy of their work.

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Session 12: Psychedelics and harm reduction

Evaluation of the Psychoactive Substance Testing Service in Lithuania: Challenges and Opportunities

Presenter: Linas Tavaras

Keywords: substance use, harm reduction, drug-testing, NPS, NGO

Abstract

Background in 2020 psychoactive substance testing service (PSTS) as a drugs harm reduction practice in Lithuania was started by Young Wave - a local non-governmental youth organisation. The study examines how the PSTS in Lithuania provided by Young Wave has evolved over the years and how it is perceived by both users and stakeholders in the country.

Methods the analysis is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with 25 PSTS users and 10 semi-structured interviews with representatives of other groups (such as: the representatives of the drug policy in Lithuania, the representatives of the nightlife culture and the experts of drugs harm reduction). The work also presents key issues identified from statistics presented in Young Wave annual reports and empirical observations of PSTS in action.

Results according to Young Wave's annual reports, from 2020 to 2022 the number of people who used provided harm reduction services increased 4 times. All PSTS users and most of the interviewees emphasized the relevance and necessity of this testing service. It was noted that the vast majority of PSTS users before or after the testing process were eager to have consultations with harm reduction experts, consider risks more consciously and learn more about harm reduction methods.

Conclusions PSTS offered by Young Wave in Lithuania is still in early stage and in many cases it is a relatively new harm reduction practice among drug users of Lithuania. Over 4 years of consistent work by Young Wave volunteers, PSTS has expanded and gradually helped to spread harm reduction awareness. The steps for PSTS improvement would include inter-institutional cooperation, financial support, necessary changes in legislation and legal service regulation.

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Funding sources: Young Wave, Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA).

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Biography: Linas Tavaras is currently studying Modern Asian studies at Vilnius University where he research drug history and culture of South Asian countries. He is a member of Young Wave – Lithuanian non-governmental youth organisation where he provides harm reduction services and trainings. He is a representative of Young Wave in YODA.

Psychedelic harm reduction: practices, procedures, and personal agendas

Presenter: Oskar Enghoff, Margit Anne Petersen & Nina Tvede Korshøj

Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research

Abstract

Objectives Most studies of illicit drug harms and harm reduction have focused on the perspectives of “users” or public health institutions. In this paper, we examine a broader range of actors within the field of psychedelic harm reduction, including also activist NGOs, private therapists, clinical therapists, healers/facilitators, dealers and licit commercial actors. We focus specifically on psychedelic drugs, which - more so than other illicit drugs - are entangled in a multitude of differing applications, interpretations, agendas, and policies in both official and unofficial contexts. As such, we use psychedelic drugs as a useful case study for exploring a wide spectrum of illicit drug harm interpretations and the varying agendas in which they are enveloped.

Methodology The paper analyzes systematic procedures for psychedelic harm reduction (i.e. written guidelines, manuals, apps, sets of rules) each originating from a distinct type of stakeholder in the field of psychedelics. Inspired by Carol Bacchi’s WPR approach, we pose a set of questions to the material, in order to elicit varying approaches to reduce harm and, by extension, varying interpretations of what is (or is not) a psychedelic harm. In this comparative analysis, we also consider where the creators are positioned within the psychedelic field, and the specific underlying agendas of which their procedures are both a product and a means.

Significant results The analysis reveals several differing and sometimes conflicting notions of psychedelic harms, how to reduce them, who is responsible for doing so, and, importantly, significant differences in their proposed context, i.e. when, where and to whom harms apply. For example, the data included harms arising both before, during and after consumption, as well as harms to both the person consuming and others. These notions of harms, and the proposed strategies for reducing them, were closely related to the role of the creators in the act of consumption, and thus their wider agenda in relation to psychedelics and harm reduction.

Conclusions This paper shows that while (psychedelic) harm reduction procedures typically highlight individual safety, they also evoke other agendas, such as creating changes in the understandings and uses of psychedelics, or maintaining a good reputation as dealer or facilitator. Our findings related to the psychedelic policies of primarily unofficial (i.e. non-government), but relevant, stakeholders in the psychedelic field contribute to policy analysis by highlighting agendas which are often ignored or missed in discussions on harm reduction.

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A three-level epidemiology of Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) use and health-related harms from an international perspective

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Abstract

Background This communication presents main findings from doctoral research on an ever-evolving group of substances known as Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS) that pose a threat to public health due to the risks and health harms they may involve (e.g., drug dependency, acute intoxications/poisonings and fatal overdoses). The general objective is to provide relevant knowledge on individual, socioeconomic and structural factors associated with NPS use and related exposure to risks and harms. To this purpose, a three-level (positive, social, and legal) drug epidemiology approach was developed. The overall aim of this research was to contribute to a debate on drug policy that goes beyond mere normative considerations.

Methods A mixed-methods approach was adopted. It combined descriptive and correlational analysis of secondary data (population-based surveys, health, and surveillance data) along with systematic and scoping reviews of NPS-related legal acts and policy documents produced by a selection of Western countries.

Results While levels of NPS use remain low, high-risk consumption results from a combination of individual's characteristics, socioeconomic status, and policy-induced structural factors. Control measures aimed at reducing NPS supply and demand are likely to partially and temporary reduce prevalence of use while inducing shifts in drug use patterns that often involve greater probability of intoxications and fatal overdoses. When available, targeted harm reduction services mitigate the negative consequences of NPS use. Nevertheless, health services (emergency rooms, psychiatric wards, sexual health and drug services) are not well prepared to treat NPS-related severe adverse episodes and long-term deleterious effects on health.

Conclusions The public health and regulatory challenges posed by NPS bring an opportunity to rethink the punitive approach to drug use by considering motivations along with positive and negative outcomes of psychoactive substances on individuals' health and wellbeing. Besides, a better understanding of the way individual, social and structural factors interact to produce or mitigate exposure to risks and harms is crucial. All this may be possible through the incorporation of drug users, community-based service providers and healthcare professionals into the design and implementation of drug policy and public health programmes.

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Biography: Sociologist specialised in public policy and health, the author of this research has occupied several positions in the field of social policy in Chile and France. She conducted her PhD research on NPS use and implications for drug policy and public health at Maastricht University between 2019-2022. She is currently working as a post-doctoral researcher at the CRCHUM in Canada, where she coordinates a community-based research project aimed at improving access to health services for homeless Indigenous peoples. She also collaborates on research projects on patterns of drug use, health harms and linkage to care among a cohort of injection drug users.