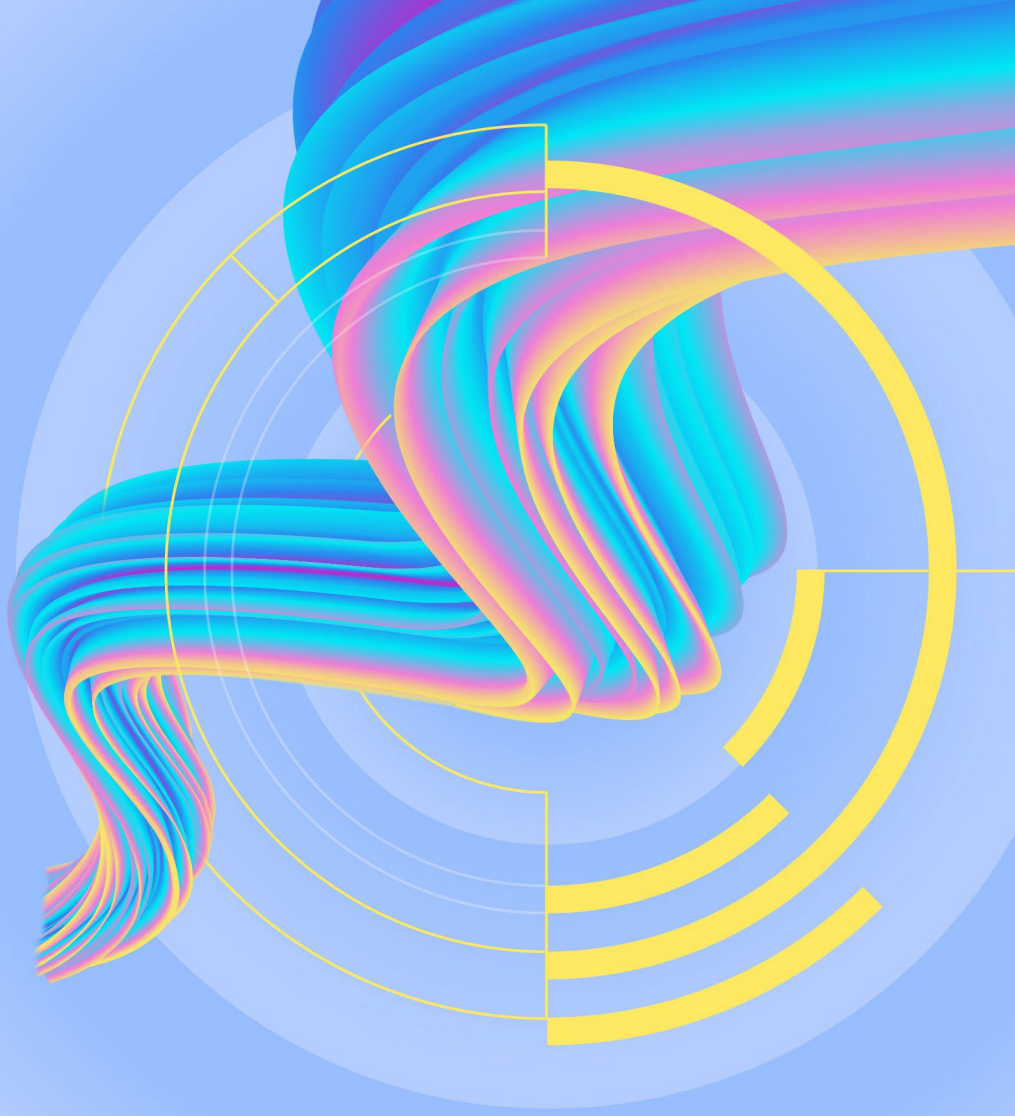


European Society for Social Drug Research 36th Annual Conference

1st–3rd October 2025,
Prague Czech Republic

Book of Abstracts

Úřad vlády České republiky
IKSP Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci
ESSD European Society for Social Drug Research

Programme

Tuesday, September 30	Meeting room BEZO (1st floor), Rytířská 31, Prague 1	
13:30–14:00	Workshop registration	
14:00–16:00	Pre-conference workshop	Facilitators: Torsten Kolind and Karen Duke
18:00	Get-together in a restaurant	Olympia Kolkovna Vítězná 619/7, Prague 5

Wednesday, October 1	Lichtenstein Palace, U Sovových mlýnů 506/4	
8:30–9:00	**Registration**	
9:00–9:45	**Conference welcome, general information, and housekeeping**	**Chairs: Gary Potter and Michaela Roubalová**
Kateřina Horáčková	Deputy Director of the Drug Policy Department, Government Office of the Czech Republic	
Petr Zeman	Director of the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention	
Gary Potter	President of the ESSD	
9:45–10:45	**Session 1: Women's Experiences in Drug Environments**	**Chair: Zsuzsa Kaló**
Mette Kronbæk	How Do Female Victims Experience Violence and sexual abuse in drug environments - Experience A Lack of Social Justice In Their Everyday Life	
Sarah El Guendi	Sexual Violence and Belgian Criminal Law: Consent, Proof, and Drug-Facilitated Assault	
Linda Montanari	Women, drugs, prison. Profile and pathways of women incarcerated in Italy and in Portugal	
10:45–11:15	**Coffee Break**	
11:15–12:15	**Session 2: Families Affected by Drug Use**	**Chair: Gary Potter**
Emma Smith	"I don't think they realise being a parent is already difficult": Using Photovoice to understand the postpartum experience of women engaged with drug treatment during pregnancy	
Serena Garbolino, Marie Dos Santos	Rethinking Shelter Practices in Europe: An Ethnographic Study on Women Who Use Drugs, Motherhood, and Harm Reduction in a Post-Covid Context	
Aisling McLaughlin	A trauma-informed approach for children and parents living with parental drug use in Dublin, Republic of Ireland.	
12:15–13:15	**Lunch break**	
13:15–14:15	**Session 3: Drug Checking in Practice: Market Trends and Harm Reduction**	**Chair: James Morgan**
Teemu Kaskela	Qualitative analysis of the usefulness of the paraphernalia-based drug checking model	
Alexandra Karden	User Perspectives on Drug Checking in Vienna: A Qualitative Study on Harm Reduction Impact	
Maria Hunter	CK, Calvin Klein: A dangerous new fashion?	
14:15–14:30	**Break**	
14:30–15:30	**Session 4: Psychedelic Practices**	**Chair: Caroline Chatwin**
Kristina Čufar	Another Kind of Trip: Perspectives of Facilitators and Users of Unofficial Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy in Slovenia	
Evgenia Fotiou	Integration and Psychedelic Therapies	
Margarida Dias Lobato	Harm Reduction Practices in Psychedelics use: Perspectives on Healing	
15:30–16:00	**Coffee Break**	
16:00–17:00	**Session 5: Needs Assessment and Access to Care**	**Chair: Julie Harris**
Kryštof Hanzlík	Assessing the need for harm reduction services: A mixed methods approach	
Jonas Strandholdt Bach	Brittle relations – ageing drug and alcohol users and care services	
James Morgan	Lifestyle, heroin and assertive outreach: Helping people who use heroin to improve their health	
18:00	**Guided tour: Pragulic**	**Meeting place to be announced during the conference**

Thursday, October 2	Lichtenstein Palace, U Sovových mlýnů 506/4	
9:00–10:00	**Session 6: Changing Drug Policy**	**Chair: Tom Decorte**
Bernd Werse	The greening of Germany – results from an online survey on the effects of the partial legalisation of cannabis	
Mindaugas Lankauskas	Punishing Drug Users? A Sight at Lithuanian Drug Control Policy in a European Value-System Context	
Matyáš Lucký	Psychomodulatory Substances: The New Regulation of Psychoactive Substances in the Czech Republic	
10:00–10:30	**Coffee Break**	
10:30–11:30	**Session 7: Cannabis Markets**	**Chair: Bernd Werse**
Rob Ralphs	The risks associated with THC vaping products in an unregulated cannabis market	
Nina Žnidaršič	Social Dimensions of Illicit Cannabis Use Among Medical Patients: Exploring Access, Social Control, and Stigma in Everyday Life	
George Simpson	'The Cannasseurs': Contemporary Meanings of Substance Use and Style from the 'Dank of England'	
11:30–11:40	**Break**	
11:40–12:40	**Session 8: New Trends in Drug Use**	**Chair: Rob Ralphs**
Eva Devaney	University students, a new or renewed focus of drug policy? The Irish experience	
Lisa Williams, Victoria Beere	'A Side Order of Stigma': How and why people who use weight loss drugs keep it secret from others	
Cosimo Sidoti	"When I got lean the sun is shining": A global perspective on the worldwide spread of lean culture	
12:40–13:40	**Lunch break**	
13:40–14:20	**Session 9: European Society for Social Drug Research**	**Chairs: Gary Potter and Zsuzsa Kaló**
Zsuzsa Kaló	ESSD Oral History Project: Launch and First Results	
Gary Potter	ESSD info	
14:20–15:20	**Session 10: Dilemmas in Research and Clinical Work**	**Chair: Lisa Williams**
Alfred Uhl	The Illusion of Clinicians vs. the Illusion of Epidemiologists	
Zacharoula Kasseri	Studying the familiar: Emotions and challenges for qualitative researchers who have dual roles in the field of substance use treatment	
Luke Parkinson	"They tell me, and then I say, I'm not the right person to help you with this trauma" – The possibilities, limits and ethics of speech in child criminal exploitation	
15:20–15:50	**Coffee Break**	
15:50–16:35	**Session 11: Drug Markets**	**Chair: Thomas Friis Søgaard**
Ákos Szigeti	Technological features and power dynamics: a qualitative analysis across Western darknet drug markets	
Julie Harris	Exploring Systemic Drug-Related Intimidation in 'Post-Conflict' Northern Ireland	
19:00	**Dinner: Café Therapy**	**Školská 30, Praha 1**

Friday, October 3	Lichtenstein Palace, U Sovových mlýnů 506/4	
9:30–10:30	**Session 12: Drug-Related Pathways**	**Chair: Alfred Uhl**
Thomas Friis Søgaard	Drug market exploitation and vulnerability: A six-nation comparison of its recognition and management in criminal justice systems	
Lígia Parodi, Linda Montanari	Co-Producing Drug Policy: Meaningful Participation of Women Who Use Drugs in Public Health and Human Rights Frameworks	
Thomas Solgård Svendsen	The same and different: Context, change and brighter futures in stories of long-term recovery in Norway and UK	
10:30–11:00	**Coffee Break**	
11:00–12:00	**Session 13: Drugs in Contexts of Vulnerability**	**Chair: Victoria Beere**
Ráhel Vermes	Self-Monitoring Barriers for Recreational Use	
Arturo Alvarez-Roldan	Family Networks and Indoor Cannabis Cultivation in a Marginalized Spanish District	
Michał Wanke	Transnational social worlds of drugs - exploring migration as context of use and stigma	
12:00–12:15	**Break**	
12:15–12:45	**Session 14: Announcement of the winner of the Early Career Researcher Award**	**Chair: Gary Potter**
12:45–13:00	**Closing words and end of the conference**	

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About the authors

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Family Networks and Indoor Cannabis Cultivation in a Marginalized Spanish District

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Keywords:
cannabis cultivation, marginalized communities, social disorganization, family structures, Spain

Abstract:

This study examines the socioeconomic and organizational dynamics of indoor cannabis cultivation in a marginalized district of a Spanish province with one of the highest per capita rates of marijuana seizures nationwide. The objective is to understand how poverty, social exclusion, and community structures facilitate the establishment and persistence of commercial cannabis cultivation.

Methodologically, we selected a province that stands out as an outlier in cannabis seizures and conducted ethnographic research in a district of seven vulnerable neighborhoods subject to a special police plan. Data collection included interviews with key informants, residents, officials, and local experts; analysis of press reports and police records; and the review of 184 court rulings on indoor cultivation (2005–2020). Data were coded thematically with intercoder agreement achieved through consensus.

Findings show that cultivation is primarily organized around nuclear and polynuclear families, which form decentralized but resilient criminal networks. Families provide trust, protection, and secrecy, while youth coalitions engage in cultivation and related crimes as a source of income and reputation. Community resources—such as poorly monitored social housing, widespread electricity fraud, and local grow shops—enable growers to establish and conceal operations. The marijuana market is highly competitive, with low entry costs and frequent violent disputes over clients and prices acting as informal regulation.

Conclusions highlight that indoor cannabis cultivation in this district is embedded in broader processes of poverty, marginalization, and informal survival strategies. Family structures, community infrastructure, and weak law enforcement jointly sustain a local illicit economy, while the district's isolation and reputation both constrain expansion and protect illegal actors.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Brittle relations – ageing drug and alcohol users and care services

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Keywords:
ageing, marginalization, care, alcohol, drugs, welfare systems

Abstract:

With an ageing body comes other health issues than the risk of overdosing and getting into fights and accidents, and addiction itself. The body can deteriorate swiftly, and cognitive abilities can weaken with a multiplicity of ailments directly or indirectly following from long-term addiction to alcohol or drugs. Both in Denmark and other Scandinavian (and European) countries the universalist extensive welfare care services in principle cater equally to everyone based on their needs. However, both in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark studies point to particular challenges in regards to delivering services to substance using older people with care needs, related to coordination, stigma and training. Denmark has been termed an "exception" in Scandinavia due to liberal alcohol regulations and historically relatively liberal attitudes to drug use. This also has implications for the ageing population in Denmark, where the +55 have overtaken the young in terms of alcohol intake. In this presentation I focus on dilemmas and challenges municipal care needs assessors encounter when working with heavy drug or alcohol users who are becoming age-impaired.

This presentation builds on interviews with municipal needs assessors who decide which services ageing citizens with care needs are entitled to and coordinate these services, ideally in cooperation with the citizen and his/her next-of-kin. However, social and family networks have a tendency to shrink or entirely dissolve for this group, rendering long-term addicted individuals dependent on public or charity services and/or brittle social networks. In this presentation I suggest that we understand not only the ageing substance users social relations as brittle, but that we include the relations to welfare systems and professionals as something that cannot be disentangled from the social and how these relations affect (in)equality in services for age-impaired substance users not only in Denmark but likely also in other European countries.

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Funding: The project on municipal assessors has been funded by Helsefonden (The Danish Health Foundation).

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Another Kind of Trip: Perspectives of Facilitators and Users of Unofficial Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy in Slovenia

Author:
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[1] The Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law

Keywords:
unofficial psychotherapy, psychedelic-assisted therapy, shamanic rituals, classic psychedelics

Abstract:

The recent resurgence of interest in psychedelic-assisted therapy coincides with a massive mental health crisis, sensationalist media reporting, and shifts in public perceptions. Classic psychedelics (like LSD, psilocybin, DMT, and mescalin) are still classified as the most dangerous illicit substances without medical application in most jurisdictions. Yet, they are often described as posing little risk to physical health, low potential for development of chemical addiction, and huge (if insufficiently researched) potential to treat a variety of mental health disorders (depression, eating disorders, PTSD, etc.). Against the backdrop of such narratives, psychedelics are no longer confined to the psychonautic niche and are attracting new groups of users. In the context of restrictive legislation that precludes clinical trials with psychedelics, low accessibility of mental health support services, and an unregulated psychotherapy market in Slovenia, a variety of unofficial psychedelic therapeutic and shamanic practices are taking place. While providing positive experiences for some, these clandestine practices also present various risks and ethical considerations. Such psychedelic practices remain undetected in the official statistics and thus merit an investigation that takes into account the particular experience, risks and motivations for engagement in, as well as general societal attitudes towards shamanic and therapeutic use of psychedelics and their regulation. The paper presents ongoing research into various forms of unofficial psychedelic-assisted therapies and shamanic rituals in Slovenia. While the empirical research presented in this paper focuses on the local context, the research conducted does not neglect the fact that the changing trends in psychedelic use are similar across the Global North, nor does it ignore the problematic implications for the indigenous communities of the Global South stemming from the Global North's fascination with traditional shamanic practices and substances.

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Funding: Unofficial psychedelic-assisted therapy in Slovenian legal framework: Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency project no. J5-50170

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University students, a new or renewed focus of drug policy? The Irish experience.

Author:
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Keywords:
university students, policy analysis, substance use, harm reduction, sociology

Abstract:

Drug use in the university population has recently gained interest in the Irish drug policy landscape. While not getting much attention in the current national 2017-2025 drug strategy, a personal experience of a then Minister and a series of high publicity drug-related deaths in 2019 triggered a reactive governmental response: a 'Rapid Response Group' resulting in a strategic framework document designed to support institutions to address 'illicit substances within higher education' in 2019; a state funded research intervention comprising a national survey of drug use in the student population (DUHEI) in 2021; and, a state funded intervention project (ESHIELD) being rolled out in 2025.

This paper will initially critically trace and examine these developments using discourse analysis. Next, it will compare the recent Irish experience with concurrent policy and research in the UK. Following this, a brief case study will be presented, based on the author's two years' experience in a bespoke role, underpinned by the strategic framework, and a first to be established in Ireland. This section will also present a 'best practice' model of a collaborative and regional intersectoral and interagency approach in addressing student substance use, emphasising health and safety, in a city location with over 30,000 students expanding the local population by 30% during the academic year. Challenges and successes will be presented, and recommendations for policy and practice in similar European settings and contexts will be proposed.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Sexual Violence and Belgian Criminal Law: Consent, Proof, and Drug-Facilitated Assault

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Keywords:
sexual violence, drug, consent, Belgian criminal law

Abstract:

This paper examines how the new Belgian criminal law addresses sexual violence when such acts are facilitated by the use of psychoactive substances. The focus is particularly on the concept of consent, the conditions under which it is valid, and the evidentiary challenges linked to the administration or consumption of drugs. The main aim is to assess whether the reform introduced by the law of 21 March 2022 offers effective protection to victims, without unduly limiting their sexual autonomy in situations of temporary vulnerability.

The method used is based on a critical reading of legal texts, preparatory works, recent case law, and circular COL 05/2022. The approach is purely legal and relies on doctrinal interpretation tools to highlight the tensions between the legislator's protective intentions and the need for legal clarity.

The study shows that although the introduction of a legal definition of consent marks an important symbolic step forward, certain parts of the text—especially those dealing with altered free will—remain vague. This lack of clarity becomes even more apparent when the victim's vulnerability results from the voluntary use of substances such as alcohol. This creates a risk of inconsistent interpretations and uneven protection in judicial practice.
The analysis suggests that the protection of individuals under the influence of substances still depends on case-by-case assessment by the judge. While this flexibility allows for adaptation to different situations, it may also weaken victims' rights. Therefore, stricter guidelines around the notion of incapacity appear necessary to ensure both legal certainty and respect for sexual self- determination.

SLIDES NOT AVAILABLE

Funding: This study was supported by internal operational resources of service.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Integration and Psychedelic Therapies

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Keywords:
psychedelic drugs, integration, psychedelic therapy

Abstract:

Psychedelic integration is becoming increasingly discussed as a necessary adjunct to the therapeutic use of psychedelics, which is gaining ground globally. While numerous graduate programs on psychedelic studies are being created, curricula seem to focus on psychological and pharmacological aspects of psychedelic therapy. This presentation is based on long-term ethnographic research on shamanic tourism and the traditional use of ayahuasca, a psychedelic mixture that has been used by Amazonian peoples and is now used around the world. I will discuss some of the ways that psychedelic experiences are integrated in the context of shamanic tourism in numerous retreats in Peru. Alluding to a lack of socially sanctioned spaces for altered states of consciousness (ASCs) in western cultures, contemporary seekers find structure and intentionality in ayahuasca rituals specifically geared towards westerners. I argue that the way that these rituals are framed assists in the integration of participants' experiences, something that was not necessary in a more "traditional" setting. I will show that contemporary ayahuasca rituals attended by westerners are designed to be liminal, transformative, meaningful experiences that aim to heal the body through emotional modulation. This framing not only separates the ritual space as liminal but also frames the way that the experience is conceptualized by participants, ultimately increasing its meaningfulness and therapeutic potential. By discussing the concept of integration from an anthropological perspective this presentation will offer valuable insight into the importance of extrapharmacological factors in psychedelic therapies.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Drug market exploitation and vulnerability: A six-nation comparison of its recognition and management in criminal justice systems

Author:
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Non-presenting authors:
Paul Andell; Ross Coomber; Piotr Chomczyński; Matt Bowden; Helene Oppen Ingebrigtsen Gundhus; Przemysław Frąckowiak; Michał Szykut; Katharina Tollin; James Windle; Cecilia Hansen Löfstrand; Mike Seal

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Keywords:
drug markets; exploitation; policy framing; criminal justice; Europe

Abstract:

Background: Illicit drug markets have long been characterised by unequal and sometimes exploitative relationships between those who organise and those who undertake retail sales. This presentation explores how potential victims of drug market-related criminal exploitation (DMCE) are situated discursively and in criminal justice processing systems across six European countries.

Methods: Data derives from individual and team research stemming from Denmark, the Republic of Ireland, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the UK supported by expert reflection on research evidence and analysis of criminal justice processing and media reporting. In each context, we mapped to what extent DMCE is recognised as a problem of concern; how the problem of DMCE is discursively framed; what laws are used to prosecute DMCE offenders; and to what extent DMCE victimhood is acknowledged in legal frameworks and sentencing practices.

Results: Findings suggest that DMCE is present in all contexts, that its degree of socio-legal visibility varies and that "offender" versus "victim" narratives continue to dominate the extent to which DMCE victims are accommodated as such. Most notably, we found that national differences in applied legal frameworks (human trafficking laws vs. anti-recruitment statutes), structures both the discursive framing of the DMCE problem, and the recognition of victimhood and experiences of harm by e.g. exploited minors.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, we discuss how the implementation of different penal approaches has profound consequences for vulnerable groups who are victims of drug market exploitation, and how we might develop policies that move beyond a normative dichotomization of "victim" and "offender" identities.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Rethinking Shelter Practices in Europe: An Ethnographic Study on Women Who Use Drugs, Motherhood, and Harm Reduction in a Post-Covid Context

Author:
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Non-presenting authors:
Fabienne Orsi[6, 2, 3,] Perrine Roux[1, 2, 3, 4]

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Keywords:
women who use drugs, residential precarity, harm reduction, participatory governance, children, ethnographye

Abstract:

This paper presents the preliminary findings of an ongoing ethnographic study conducted in a shelter in France, hosting women who use drugs and are experiencing severe social marginalization. A significant proportion of the residents are also women with a migration background. The shelter provides accommodation for women and their children, raising complex questions at the intersection of drug policy, parenting, and institutional care.

Objectives: This research explores the tensions that emerge when harm reduction (HR) principles are introduced into a shelter environment traditionally framed by social assistance and child protection paradigms. While HR is increasingly recognized as essential in addressing the needs of women who use drugs, its integration into housing facilities remains uneven across Europe, and often contested. The Covid-19 pandemic has further highlighted the necessity—and challenges—of inclusive housing models, particularly those capable of accommodating children.

Methodology: The study combines classical ethnography (over 12 months), photovoice techniques, and semi-structured interviews with six women, six children, and eleven professionals including institutional actors and frontline workers. The approach aimed to capture both lived experiences and structural dynamics.

Results: This study shows how cultural differences among residents – especially around parenting norms and drug use – generate micro-conflicts and negotiations within the shared space. It also considers how institutional expectations around motherhood and childrearing intersect with the lived experiences of the women, many of whom face simultaneous stigma for their drug use, migration status, and poverty.
Discussion: The paper argues that hosting women who use drugs together, with their children, requires a rethinking of support models that go beyond the binary of protection vs autonomy. In a European context where post-Covid housing and care systems are being reconfigured, such hybrid settings open up new possibilities – and raise critical questions – for policy innovation and inclusive, harm-reducing practices.

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Funding: ISSPAM, Institut des Sciences de la Santé Publique d'Aix-Marseille.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Assessing the need for harm reduction services in six regions of the Czech Republic

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Non-presenting authors:
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[1] Department of Addictology, First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University

Keywords:
needs assessment, mixed methods, rapid assessment & response, harm reduction, addictological services

Abstract:

In this paper we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the methods we used to estimate the gap in the provision of the harm reduction services for drug users in six different studies we conducted in six regions of the Czech Republic. The purpose of these studies was to inform the future decisions regarding the regional drug policy, especially the regional networks of addictological services. Here we use the example of harm reduction services to demonstrate the necessity of using both quantitative and qualitative to achieve an adequate insight into the existing need.

Considering the policy-oriented purpose of the studies and the limited resources we had on hand, we employed a mixed methods methodology inspired by the Rapid Assessment & Response approach, suitable for a quick extraction of information on a local level. In all six studies we worked with secondary data from the national studies, healthcare registries or the yearly reports from the services and used semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups to obtain the primary data. In three of the studies we conducted quantitative surveys, in two of them we used Delphi method to estimate the gap in the provision of the services.

The gap in the provision of the harm reduction services was primarily derived from the quantitative secondary data, i. e. the unmet demand for the services (the problem drug use indicator) and the number of the clients and the capacity of the services (included in the yearly reports provided by the services). But to interpret these data correctly and to get a sense of how they manifest in a specific, local environment, it proved necessary to get more information “on site”, most prominently from the multiple semi-structured interviews with the providers of the services and other key actors.

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Funding: The presented studies were funded either from the budget of the regional drug policy related department (Ústecký kraj, Olomoucký kraj) or the budget of the Ministry of interior. The work on this was also supported by Charles University Cooperatio programme, scientific field Health Sciences (HEAS).

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Exploring Systemic Drug-Related Intimidation in 'Post-Conftict' Northern Ireland

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Keywords:
successional drug-related intimidation; disciplinary drug-related intimidation; drug markets; multi- agency responses; post-conflict societies

Abstract:

Background: European and international research has highlighted that post-conflict regions often constitute unique risk environments for drug market-related violence and associated harms. Consequently, these regions may also experience elevated levels of systemic drug-related intimidation (DRI) dependent on the context. However, limited research has explored the specific nature and dynamics of systemic DRI within transitional settings.

Objectives: This presentation contributes to this knowledge gap by exploring: (1) perpetrator profiles;(2) key dynamics of successional and disciplinary systemic DRI; and (3) implications for theorising systemic DRI and policy responses.

Methodology: The research forms part of a wider scoping review on systemic DRI in Northern Ireland. A mixed methods content analysis was conducted on 407 news articles published between September 2019-October 2024. The study combined descriptive frequency analyses with a qualitative thematic analysis of article content to construct perpetrator and victim profiles and to understand DRI dynamics.

Results: Findings identified six main perpetrator groups who were interlinked with the regions socio- political context. Successional DRI was widespread and aimed to maintain or gain control over territory, drug markets, and forcibly recruit victims into drug distribution roles. Disciplinary DRI was also pervasive and associated with enforcing internal control and compliance within drug supply networks. These two forms of DRI often overlapped to operate as a wider strategy which aimed to consolidate and expand power within or over the drug trade. Reverse forms of systemic DRI were also identified due to differing views within and between paramilitary organisations regarding drug market involvement.

Conclusion: Systemic DRI is complex and predominantly used by paramilitary organisations to exert and consolidate social control and power over competitors, individuals and communities. Theoretically, existing definitions of systemic DRI require expansion to capture nuanced dynamics within post-conflict settings. Policy responses must adopt a multi-agency approach and localised interventions targeting perpetrators and wider socio-economic inequalities.

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Funding: Public Health Agency, Northern Ireland

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CK, Calvin Klein: A dangerous new fashion?

Author:
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Keywords:
harm reduction, cocaine, ketamine, drug checking service, polysubstance use

Abstract:

Background and Objectives: Over the past decade, the EMCDDA/EUDA have reported rising use of cocaine and ketamine. However, limited research has explored their combined use—commonly referred to as 'CK'. This study investigates the prevalence, motivations, and risks associated with CK use, aiming to inform targeted harm reduction strategies.

Methodology: An interdisciplinary approach was used, combining chemical analysis and qualitative interviews. Drug samples were tested by MANDRAKE (Manchester Drug Analysis and Knowledge Exchange), a Home Office-licensed facility at Manchester Metropolitan University. Using Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GCMS), samples of cocaine and ketamine were analysed. These were collected from amnesty boxes in night-time venues and police custody stores. Interviews with CK users explored whether awareness of drug contents influences consumption behaviour.

Results: MANDRAKE data from January 2022 to December 2024 shows a rise in cocaine purity and a decline in adulterants. Ketamine purity also increased, but with the concerning emergence of xylazine as an adulterant. These findings are supported by a recent evaluation of the MANDRAKE/W.E.L.Safe Night-Time Economy Pilot, which included interviews on drug policy challenges and stigma. The combined data will inform harm reduction messaging and demonstrate how local insights can support international drug policy.

Conclusions: The growing popularity of CK use, alongside increasing purity levels, underscores the need for tailored harm reduction efforts. The detection of xylazine in ketamine highlights the urgency for expanded drug checking services. While this study focuses on one UK city, further research is needed to assess the prevalence and risks of CK use across the UK and Europe.

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Funding: Manchester Community Safety Partnership Board and Greater Manchester Combined Authority

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User Perspectives on Drug Checking in Vienna: A Qualitative Study on Harm Reduction Impact

Author:
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Keywords:
harm reduction, drug checking, people who use drugs

Abstract:

Objective: The evolving landscape of illicit drug markets necessitates effective approaches to harm reduction and addiction prevention for people who use drugs (PWUD). In response, integrated drug checking services - combining chemical analyses with psychosocial interventions - have been implemented in Austria and other countries. While prior research has shown to contribute to safer drug use behaviour, particularly in festival settings, little is known about its impact specific to stationary setting and how specific service components contribute to the overall impact.

Methodology: This study evaluated Vienna's multi-modal drug checking program, which offers mobile services at music events and in clubs, stationary services at a counseling center, and a pharmacy- based service. In 2024, a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews was conducted involving 23 PWUD: 12 current users of at least one drug checking modality and 11 without prior experience.Interviews explored risk reduction strategies, service accessibility and the impact of service design, psychosocial interventions, and communication of results, and were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results: Preliminary findings indicate that drug checking influences several dimensions of behavior and knowledge among PWUD, including substance use, purchasing decisions, and knowledge on substances. Importantly, the influence often extends to the social network of service users, with the nature of this influence being strongly shaped by the specific results of the chemical analysis. The study also revealed individual variability in service use and that situational contexts and current needs shape the depth and engagement with these services.

Conclusion: Drug checking services can considerably affect behavior and knowledge among PWUD. To be effective as tool for early intervention and addiction prevention, services must allow for varying degrees of engagement, considering the important role of peers in building trust and facilitating access. Especially given limited resources acknowledging the value of both, direct and peer-mediated contacts, highlights the crucial rool of social relations in extending harm reduction impacts.

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Funding: The study was conducted within the first authors' employment at the Vienna Addiction Services.

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Qualitative analysis of the usefulness of the paraphernalia-based drug checking model

Author:
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Keywords:
drug checking, drug paraphernalia, qualitative analysis

Abstract:

Objectives: The legal obstacles constrain the implementation of drug checking in many countries. The aim of this presentation is to evaluate the usefulness of paraphernalia-based drug checking protocol that bypassed the legal challenges for drug checking in Finland. Drug checking was conducted between April 2022 and July 2024 in nine harm reduction services in Helsinki, Finland. The samples were analysed once a month in the laboratory and results were communicated using pseudonyms.

Methodology: The data was collected by conducting six thematic pair interviews for service staff members and two internet questionnaires (professionals and people who use drugs). Data was analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Significant results: The participant returned to discuss about the result only in 208 samples out of 503 samples. The primary issue for low returning rate was slow speed for getting the results: clients had already used the patch or forgot that they had submitted a sample. Staff perceived that the results should be almost immediately available for the protocol to be useful in pre-use decision-making. Also, information on the concentration rates would have been useful, but was impossible to analyse from paraphernalia. The moments of sample submission were viewed beneficial for harm reduction talks. The public information, such as the posters on recent results in the service points, was perceived useful. The important information spread to a larger group than only clients of the service points. The posters also acted as icebreaker for staff to open conversations with clients.

Conclusions: The drug checking providers and clients acknowledged the shortcomings related to legal obstacles of the drug checking model, however, they perceived it as “better than nothing” solution. Although, the used protocol was not suitable for pre-consumption decision-making, the interviews revealed several benefits related to having harm reduction discussions and raising awareness on the current market situation.

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Funding: This study was funded by the Kone Foundation, project From street to lab – new methods to gather information on the changing drug situation.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Studying the familiar: Emotions and challenges for qualitative researchers who have dual roles in the field of substance use treatment

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Keywords:
qualitative research, dual roles, emotional labor, ethics

Abstract:

Background: Conducting qualitative research in the field of substance use treatment is a challenging endeavor. The presentation utilizes the sociology of emotions as a theoretical framework to highlight the emotional and ethical challenges that qualitative researchers face when, for the needs of their study, they approach individuals they already know from their professional practice or conduct their research in a treatment setting that is familiar to them through other roles, such as that of a therapist, postgraduate student, or volunteer.

Methods: The presentation is based on a qualitative study that includes semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with researchers who have conducted qualitative studies in the field of substance use treatment in Greece. In the present study, participants were mainly individuals with a dual role (e.g., therapist-researcher) as well as researchers who approached the field for the first time, being less familiar with it. Interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Results: Conducting a qualitative study by researchers who have a dual role in the field has several advantages, including increased readiness to manage intense emotions, deep knowledge of the target group and its communication codes, and easier access to the field. The disadvantages include over familiarity and role conflict. Ethical dilemmas may arise when researchers conduct studies within the agency they work for. Such dilemmas, for instance, may come up when the findings of the study cause concerns and invite researchers to reconsider well-established assumptions they have cultivated over time or prompt them to critically examine the practices of the agencies they work for to provide more just responses for people with substance use problems.

Conclusion: Emotional labor and constant reflexivity are required on the part of the researchers to manage the boundaries between different roles.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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How Do Female Victims Experience Violence and sexual abuse in drug environments - Experience A Lack of Social Justice In Their Everyday Life

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Keywords:
Violence, sexual violence, Gender, Social Welfare, Substance Use

Abstract:

Women whose everyday lives take place in marginalized drug environments are significantly more often victims of violent and sexual crimes than the general population (Kronbæk et al. 2022; Deen et al. 2018). This research project focuses on physical violence and sexual abuse that women living in marginalized drug environments are exposed to.

This presentation is based on qualitative interviews with 30 women who have been victims of violence and sexual crimes. The preliminary research results show that the interviewed women are exposed to violence and rape on a large scale. The perpetrators are both people in close relationships, but also people they meet through drug use, sex sales and on the streets. Due to the risks of violence and sexual assaults the women frequently avoid the health care and social services for drug users that almost exclusively are gender neutral.

The presentation concludes that women have difficulties getting help when they have been the victim of a crime, and they experience that reporting perpetrators is futile. In addition, the women experience that reporting other drug users for sexual assault may harm their safety and status in the drug environment.

The purpose of the project is to create a knowledge base that creates visibility about the women's situation as victims, as well as to improve women's opportunities to report the crimes and thus make use of their rights as victims of violent and sexual crimes.

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Funding: The project is founded by the Victim fund/ §OFFERFONDEN, Ministry of Justice in Denmark.

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Punishing Drug Users? A Sight at Lithuanian Drug Control Policy in a European Value-System Context

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Keywords:
drug policy, value systems, drug offences, incarceration

Abstract:

This presentation explores the punitive foundations of Lithuania's drug control policy and situates them within the broader context of European value systems and penal cultures. Despite relatively low levels of drug use, Lithuania imposes some of the harshest penalties for drug offences in the EU. Drawing on legal analysis, statistical data, and recent policy developments, the presentation shows how drug-related crime is primarily addressed through incarceration—even in cases involving low-level distribution or cannabis-related offences. In 2024, over 20% of Lithuania's prison population was incarcerated for drug offences.

One explanatory lens comes from value-system research. According to Inglehart and Welzel's World Cultural Map, there are two major dimensions of cross-cultural values: traditional values versus self-expression values and survival values versus self-expression values. On this cultural map, Lithuania belongs to the cluster of "Catholic Europe" countries, displaying a relatively higher emphasis on secular-rational values compared to traditional ones. On the other hand, Lithuania places a strong emphasis on survival values at the expense of self-expression. In this context, Lithuania is very far from "Protestant Europe"and is instead closely aligned with "Orthodox Europe" countries such as Bulgaria, Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus (Inglehart, 2023). Accordingly, when discussing drug policy or attitudes towards illicit drug use, Lithuania may share more similarities with these countries than with those of Western Europe.

The Lithuanian legal approach to the drug problem can be defined as punitive rather than health-oriented. The possible root of this approach lies in the idea that drug use is a moral issue; therefore, drug users are solely responsible for their acts and should be punished harshly.

Ultimately, the presentation argues that stigma, moralising narratives, and survivalist value orientations remain key obstacles to reform. Recent failed attempts to decriminalise personal drug possession in Lithuania's Parliament further reinforce this conclusion.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Harm Reduction Practices in Psychedelics use: Perspectives on Healing

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Keywords:
psychedelics; recreational use; harm reduction; self-care; healing crisis; integration; qualitative research

Abstract:

Background: Humanity's interest in altered states of consciousness induced by psychedelics is long-standing and is currently reflected in renewed scientific research and recreational demand. These substances have shown therapeutic potential in the area of mental health, but their use outside of clinical contexts also reveals diverse motivations, such as self-knowledge, expanding consciousness and emotional regulation. However, challenging experiences can arise, requiring self-care and integration practices to avoid maladaptive effects. This study investigates the subjective experiences of recreational consumers, analysing harm reduction strategies and the psychosocial impacts associated with integrating these experiences.

Method: This qualitative and phenomenological study explores the subjective experiences of 28 individuals (19-55 years old) who have consumed psychedelics recreationally in Portugal. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, with inclusion criteria of ≥5 previous experiences. Data collection took place between January and March 2025 through semi-structured interviews lasting an average of 90 minutes. The script covered details about harm reduction practices, challenging experiences, self-care strategies and integration.

Results: The analysis will identify the motivations, patterns of use and rituals associated with the consumption of psychedelics in recreational settings and in non-clinical contexts, such as alternative therapies. It will also address spontaneous harm reduction reduction strategies and those derived from proactive information seeking, as well as the sources of this information. The research will also explore the integrative challenges faced by participants, with an emphasis on how they manage these difficulties and integrate challenging experiences, guided by Stanislav-Grof's concept of the 'healing crisis'.

Conclusions: This study will contribute to the definition of more effective practices and public policies adapted to this growing phenomenon, focusing on individual needs, combating stigma and facilitating the adaptation of professional and political interventions.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Psychomodulatory Substances: The New Regulation of Psychoactive Substances in the Czech Republic

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Keywords:
legal framework, new psychoactive substances, evidence-based policy

Abstract:

This Background: For years, the Czech Republic has faced challenges in regulating the so-called "grey zone" of psychoactive substances, where products, often marketed as "collectibles," eluded established food safety and drug-control legal frameworks. The lack of effective oversight allowed the rapid replacement of banned substances with their newer, often more dangerous alternatives. This unregulated market posed significant risks, including unrestricted access for minors, often via vending machines and in a form of potent edibles.

Regulatory Framework: As of January 1, 2025, a transformative legal framework (Act No. 321/2024 Coll.) seeks to address these issues. The new regulatory system enables the government to swiftly respond to emerging trends without penalizing end-users disproportionately. This is achieved by the catch-all 'quarantine' category of scheduled psychoactive substances, that once identified, will be confined to scientific research, barring their sale and production, although possession for personal use in small quantities will not be criminalized. Psychomodulatory substances, on the other hand, may be permitted for adult use under stringent conditions if deemed low-risk following expert evaluation. Their sale will be restricted to specialized stores, with a blanket prohibition for minors and strict controls on online purchases. Moreover, advertising, sponsorship, and vending machines will be banned, and violators face severe penalties, including fines and imprisonment.

Implementation Mechanisms & Expected Impact: With the specific control measures, the new law broadens the regulatory scale available to the Czech government allowing for a regulation based on the level of harm, as opposed to the regulatory dilemma – to prohibit or to ignore. It enhances regulatory flexibility, allowing the government to swiftly respond to emerging substances without disproportionately penalizing end-users.

Conclusions: The Czech Republic's new psychoactive substance regulation represents a pioneering model in European drug policy. By replacing outright prohibition with a risk-proportionate regulatory framework, it seeks to create a controlled, safer environment while addressing both public health and social concerns. This presentation will provide an in-depth analysis of the legislation, its mechanisms, and its potential implications for international drug policy reform.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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A trauma-informed approach for children and parents living with parental drug use in Dublin, Republic of Ireland

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Non-presenting authors:
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Keywords:
trauma-informed; parental drug use; parenting; parent-child relationship; intergenerational cycles; self-regulation

Abstract:

Background: A significant proportion of children live with parental drug use and outcomes may include child maltreatment, abuse and neglect; mental health difficulties and academic underachievement. Stigmatisation, shame and secrecy are often major challenges that families face when seeking support. Recent evidence suggests trauma informed approaches may be effective while working with families living with parental drug use.

Objectives: 1) To explore how services provided by a children's charity in Dublin Ireland (Barnardos) respond to the individual needs of children and families living with problematic parental drug use; 2) to understand the trauma-informed approach to service delivery and 3) to explore the impact for children and parents.

Methodology: The study adopted a mixed-methods approach consisting of secondary analysis of routine administrative data and twenty-one semi-structured interviews with children/young people (n=4), parents/carers (n=5), Barnardos staff (n=7) and external practitioners (n=5). Ethical approval was granted via Ulster University research ethics committee and the qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Significant results: Families reported a range of complex socio-economic and community challenges. Trauma informed and child-centred approaches were vital in addressing the needs of the families. The identification of safety networks was also central to providing support to families. Parents reported feeling safe, secure & non-stigmatised while engaging with the services. Primary needs for children and parents included parenting (parent-child relationship) and child behavioural difficulties and a desire to break intergenerational cycles of trauma. Self-regulation was a key outcome for both parents and children. Families were satisfied that the services helped to maintain the safety of the child, helped parents to understand the impact of their drug use on children; and strengthened parenting capacity.

Conclusions: The long-term aim of the service was to break intergenerational cycles of trauma and drug use. The findings suggest the services may help families to address intergenerational cycles through strengthening both parenting capacity and self-regulation.

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Funding: Barnardos

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Women, drugs, prison. Profile and pathways of women incarcerated in Italy and in Portugal

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Keywords:
gender, drugs, Europe, stigma, gender responsiveness

Abstract:

Objective: This study explores the profiles, risk factors and life trajectories of women incarcerated in four prisons in Italy and Portugal. It aims to understand the intersection between gender, drugs and prison through the lens of feminist criminology, particularly the life pathways theory. The research seeks to identify key factors in women's criminal and drug use trajectories, their prison experiences, and the challenges they face in reintegration.

Method: A mixed-methods approach was employed. 309 structured questionnaires were administered in four prisons in Italy and Portugal in 2021-2022 and analysed throughs descriptive statistical analysis. Cluster analysis was used to identify typologies of women. In addition, 48 semi-structured interviews were conducted with incarcerated women and nine with prison staff. Thematic analysis was conducted using MAXQDA. Findings were supported by direct field observation.

Key Findings: Participants were in their early forties, with low level of education, poor socio-economic backgrounds; many experienced gender-based violence (GBV) throughout their life. The majority of women were mothers, and many foreign nationals or from Roma community. Drug-related issues were prevalent, with 60% of women imprisoned for drug law offences or drug related crimes. Mental health disorders, self-harm, and suicide attempts were also common. Four inmate typologies were identified: drug-connected women, vulnerable women, Roma women, and those convicted of violent crimes. The prison experience was traumatic, particularly due to child separation and poor conditions. Important turning points were identified in the pathways of the women involved in the research.

Conclusions: This research offers insights into an often-invisible population group—women in prison—highlighting the key role of: gender, gender-based violence, drugs use and social vulnerability in their life trajectories. Although many commonalities were found, also four different women's typologies were identified. The study highlighted the need to address health and social needs of incarcerated women through gender-responsive drug and prison policies. More research is needed on the interplay between women, drugs and prison life.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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Lifestyle, heroin and assertive outreach: Helping people who use heroin to improve their health

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Keywords:
heroin, health, lifestyle, outreach, harm reduction

Abstract:

The research focused on healthcare-related help-seeking among people who use heroin (PWUH). Specifically, we sought to investigate the use and usefulness of outreach programmes in supporting PWUH to address their health problems and engage with professional healthcare services.

Semi structured biographical interviews were conducted with 18 PWUH in a city in South Wales, United Kingdom. The interviews focused on health, help-seeking behaviour, and access to healthcare.

Our interviewees revealed that during periods of intensive drug use, seeking healthcare and managing wellbeing were not a priority. Experiences of outreach fell into two broad groups: outreach by drug workers and outreach relating to homeless services.

Outreach efforts by drugs workers took two forms: (1) triaging and transporting those with urgent health problems to hospital, and (2) nudging those admitted to hospital towards drug treatment and recovery from addiction.

Outreach efforts within homeless services also took two forms: (1) hostel staff acting as advocates, and (2) more traditional outreach that involved external professionals attending the hostel to provide healthcare in situ.

Our findings show that effective outreach involves diverse efforts that extend above and beyond traditional drug and hostel worker roles. It is therefore important that the role of the third sector in facilitating access to healthcare for people who use heroin is recognised, valued and promoted.

In addition, our findings highlighted the role of lifestyle, in that while periods of intense drug use can prove challenging for outreach programmes, the subsequent periods of 'burnout', are critical moments ripe for intervention. The fatigue, ill health, and existential crises that characterise 'burnout' create an opportunity for intervention that might not otherwise be successful.

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Funding: Research was funded by an internal grant from the University of South Wales.

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“They tell me, and then I say, I’m not the right person to help you with this trauma” – The possibilities, limits and ethics of speech in child criminal exploitation

Author:
Luke Parkinson[1]

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Keywords:
child criminal exploitation; trauma-informed practice; safeguarding; therapeutic speech; surveillance; ethics of presence; relational practice; qualitative research; victimhood; multidisciplinary work

Abstract:

Safeguarding professionals working in the newly developed field of child criminal exploitation (CCE) face a paradox at the heart of trauma-informed practice. Tasked with supporting young people (mostly adolescents) who are involved in the sale or use of illicit drugs, practitioners must facilitate speech that is both therapeutic in nature, building trust while simultaneously imposing narratives of risk and extracting information from within the therapeutic relationship. This research draws on qualitative interviews with practitioners across statutory and third-sector services in North West England, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. It explores how professionals work hard to create relational spaces where pockets of “true speech” might emerge, speech that allows young people to process experience and construct subjectivity, while also navigating institutional demands that impose educational or extractive speech. Findings reveal the fragility but importance of therapeutic communication, which is frequently disrupted and undermined by the disciplinary logic of safeguarding systems. This study argues that truly trauma-informed practice in CCE must move beyond surveillance and extraction and the imposition of fixed narratives of exploitation, toward an ethics of “true speech” that respects young people’s own ways of speaking and making meaning whilst involved in drug markets.

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Funding: NWSSDTP

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Co-Producing Drug Policy: Meaningful Participation of Women Who Use Drugs in Public Health and Human Rights Frameworks

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Keywords:
women who use drugs (WWUD), human rights and drug policy, peer-led harm reduction, stigma and gender-based exclusion, participatory drug policy reform

Abstract:

Women Who Use Drugs (WWUD) face layered forms of exclusion—from punitive drug laws and stigma to systemic neglect in harm reduction and gender-based violence services. Despite being disproportionately affected by drug policy, WWUD remain largely invisible in research, services, and decision-making spaces. This presentation explores the impact of current drug policies on the rights of WWUD and the transformative potential of their participatory engagement in policy and practice.

Drawing on a cross-national review (France, Norway, Italy, Czech Republic), and case studies of community-led initiatives (e.g., MANAS, SisterWUD), this research highlights how WWUD-led advocacy—through mechanisms like CEDAW shadow reports and peer-led harm reduction—has begun to shift institutional responses. It employs a rights-based and intersectional feminist lens to analyse these developments and the co-production of drug policy.

Findings show that meaningful engagement of WWUD leads to more responsive harm reduction strategies, yet major barriers persist: fragmented policy approaches, funding precarity, and hidden stigma embedded in service provision. Notably, policy documents across most European countries still fail to reflect WWUD's lived realities, with Norway as a rare example of inclusion.

Moving from tokenistic consultation to genuine power-sharing is essential to uphold human rights and enhance public health outcomes. Ultimately, the participation of WWUD is not only a human rights imperative but a practical strategy to develop more effective, inclusive, and sustainable drug policies across Europe and beyond.

SLIDES NOT AVAILABLE

Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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The risks associated with THC vaping products in an unregulated cannabis market

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Keywords:
THC vapes, synthetic cannabinoids, cannabis regulation

Abstract:

Background: Over the past decade, the international cannabis market has diversified significantly, driven by the emergence of regulated commercial markets. In North America, THC vape use has notably increased, particularly among young people (Lim et al., 2022). However, in the UK and other European countries, data on the prevalence of THC vape use remains limited. This paper presents findings from one of the first UK-based studies examining THC vape prevalence and product content.

Methods: The Greater Manchester Testing and Research on Emergent and New Drugs (GMTRENDS) is the UK's only annual mixed-method regional drug trend survey. In its 2023/24 cycle, the study included 84 professional interviews, online surveys with 400 young people (aged 12–21), and 132 professionals. THC vape use was selected as the youth trend focus, leading to 21 in-depth interviews with young people aged 14–24 and forensic analysis of vape products purchased as 'THC vapes'.

Results: Professionals reported a rise in THC vape use among young people. Survey data supported this, with 48% of respondents reporting use in the past year. Of these, 54% said THC vapes were easier to obtain, and 39% believed they had become stronger. Products, often sourced via social media, varied in price (£20–£90) and content. Forensic testing revealed THC concentrations ranging from 18% to 90%, with two-fifths of products containing synthetic cannabinoids or harmful additives like vitamin E acetate.

Conclusions: Young people face increased risks from unregulated THC vape products, highlighting the need for better product information and harm reduction messaging.

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Funding: Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

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“When I got lean the sun is shining”: A global perspective on the worldwide spread of lean culture

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Keywords:
lean culture; trap and drill music; social media platforms; drug aesthetics; sensory experiences

Abstract:

This research is an exemplar study in the relationship between contemporary drug cultures, music, and technology by examining the role imitation and contagion plays in the spread of criminal (or deviant) subcultures. It aims to explore the socio-cultural factors that lead to the worldwide spread of new recreational youth drug trends such as ‘lean’ culture. It utilises cutting-edge virtual and sensory ethnographic methods to generate thick, rich qualitative data on newly emergent youth drug cultures centring around trap music and the recreational use and supply of ‘lean’ – a mixture of prescription codeine-based (opioid) cough syrups and soda drinks. In doing so, a long-term immersion on Instagram and 25 online interviews with members of lean culture, among trap artists, consumers, and dealers, spanning over 25 countries across all continents were conducted. Preliminary findings provide a global perspective on the distinctive features of lean culture, which is culturally encountered and transmitted through the vehicles of trap music and social media. Lean has become an exclusive and expensive status symbol adopted by individuals who adapt such practice to their own cultural contexts. The aesthetic and sensory dimensions of lean – such as its colours, tastes, and smells, as well as the ritualised process of preparing the concoction – captivate the imaginations of contemporary youth cultures worldwide. Further, this research demonstrates the interplay between legal and illegal markets in accessing cough syrups in different parts of the world. As young people forge transnational connections to obtain these products, it highlights the active involvement of pharmaceutical companies, doctors, and pharmacies within this culture. The findings emphasise the relevance of aesthetic and sensory frameworks within cultural criminology in the study of contemporary drug cultures that are often neglected in drug cultural studies.

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Funding: School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research (SSPSSR) Next Generation Research Scholarship.

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‘The Cannasseurs’: Contemporary Meanings of Substance Use and Style from the ‘Dank of England’

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Keywords:
cannabis, cali pack, weed, market

Abstract:

Background: Capitalism, consumerism and the freedom to choose have become intertwined symbiotically with ideals of democracy. Whilst global commodification enables different lifestyles and statuses to be expressed, it has engrained many symbols of American pop culture, like Mickey Mouse or McDonalds, into western capitalism as desirable products. The Disneyfication of cannabis is no different and becomes amplified by the internet which acts as a ‘broker of new trends and established forms of symbolism and narratives’ (Wanke et al, 2022, p318). The desirability and demand for ‘Cali pack cannabis’, shown in the data set, extends from domestic markets (Goodwin, 2024), marking the ‘Cali pack’ out as a culturally significant symbol within global cannabis cultures and markets, symbolically representing successful legalisation within global cannabis cultures (Sandberg, 2012 and 2013) (Wanke et al, 2022). The demand for Cali products outside the USA is intrinsically linked to the prohibited consumers desire to perform as up to date, on trend consumers, who are able to sample the latest fashion or in this case flavour (Goffman, 1959). Like a French wine or an Irish Whiskey, Californian cannabis are consumer products that enhances the users cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997). These personal collections of ‘Cali packs’ ooze cultural capital, resembling treasured sets of Pokémon cards or football stickers, sitting ready, to be wielded as evidence, of their trendy performances by todays sophisticated stoners. The users of Cali Pack products have been coined ‘Cannasseurs’ being; cannabis connoisseurs who hunt specific high quality strains.

Methods: Follow up interviews with participants from the visual ethnography of 200 premium cannabis packets supplements visual findings to build out framework for ‘Cannasseur’ typology and contemporary meanings of cannabis use.

Results: The legality of recreational cannabis in California has lead the state to become significant for global cannabis cultures. Documented by an array of replica ‘Cali’, distinctive ‘UK Cali’ and bespoke ‘Local Cali’ cannabis packets, the demand for Californian esc cannabis products by Cannasseurs shows the symbolic significance of these products.

Conclusions: Ultimately this paper will make the argument that not only does California set the trend for legal cannabis prices in other American states (Goodwin, 2024) but also effects the trends for prices and products in the illegal cannabis markets in the UK. Legalisation has placed Californian cannabis products at the heart of global cannabis culture (Sandberg, 2012) with these products sort out by a new type of ‘Cannasseur’.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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“I don’t think they realise being a parent is already difficult”: Using Photovoice to understand the postpartum experience of women engaged with drug treatment during pregnancy

Author:
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Keywords:
substance use, perinatal period, postpartum, photovoice, visual research methods

Abstract:

Pregnant women in treatment for substance use often face complex health and social care needs, yet their experiences of postpartum care remain under-explored. In many European contexts, retaining custody of infants frequently depends on achieving abstinence—even from prescribed opioid replacement therapies—and complying with intensive scrutiny within clinical and residential assessment settings. This study explores postpartum care experiences through a maternal feminist lens, which critiques rigid, punitive definitions of “good motherhood” and highlights the need for compassionate, individualized support. A Photovoice methodology was used to document the experiences of three women who had received perinatal substance use treatment. Photovoice, an arts-based research method, allows participants to use photography and narrative to convey their lived experiences. Participants received digital cameras and training, took part in individual interviews to discuss their photographs, and engaged in a focus group where they shared their photographs with each other and a peer researcher with lived experience.

The use of photographs highlighted the impact of stigma, surveillance, and institutional control over their maternal identity. While participants identified aspects of care that were supportive, such as clear and non-judgmental communication from professionals, they also reflected on restrictive practices that reinforced feelings of judgment and disempowerment, including intense surveillance and criticism of individual parenting choices. Findings underscore how maternal care policies often operate within rigid moral frameworks that define who is deemed a “fit” mother, disproportionately disadvantaging women with substance use histories. A maternal feminist perspective calls for a shift toward care models that prioritises non-judgmental, coordinated, and flexible support, respecting women’s autonomy and lived experiences. This study highlights the need for postpartum care approaches that move beyond surveillance and abstinence mandates to support maternal and infant well-being and allows women to shape their narratives for themselves visually.

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Funding: Internal King’s College London funding.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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The same and different: Context, change and brighter futures in stories of long-term recovery in Norway and UK

Author:
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Keywords:
long-term recovery, PWUD, identity, temporality, development, courses

Abstract:

Objectives: This presentation brings together two original empirical qualitative studies from Norway and UK to explore people who use drugs (PWUD) experiences of long-term recovery (LTR) courses. It problematises time-bound substance use treatment and presents original LTR narratives in Norway and UK to significantly question dominant LTR conceptualisations. It asks, how useful are dominant LTR concepts in informing harm reduction policy and substance use treatments in Norway and the UK?

Methodology: Qualitative investigation of two original empirical qualitative studies from Norway and UK. Developmental systems theory and its concept of relative plasticity (Ford and Lerner, 1992) is an original framing to LTR research and is introduced to frame PWUD experiences of LTR in both countries and capture the dynamic of context, human change and developmental processes.

Significant results: Drawing on existing research and literature of stigma, identity construction and maturation of PWUD, this presentation makes the case that policy and practice have ceased to fully embrace the notion that LTR occurs within a contextual and spatial-temporary framework where PWUD need to feel both autonomous and supported.

Conclusions: The presentation concludes by raising a call to action for further longitudinal research on LTR to grow evidence across geographical boundaries to support new visions of LTR policy and practice which recognises the dynamic recovery trajectories of PWUD over time.

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Funding: Internally funded.

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Technological features and power dynamics: a qualitative analysis across Western darknet drug markets

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Keywords:
dark web, cryptomarkets, drug trade, qualitative content analysis

Abstract:

Drug trafficking via darknet markets is shaped by platform affordances and thus by the interplay between technological and human factors. The social dynamics among darknet market operators, vendors, and customers are affected by the encryption techniques and other technological tools used to run these platforms. We collected data and conducted qualitative content analysis across Western darknet drug markets (n = 34) from October to November 2024. We analysed the co-occurrence of content related to power dynamics and technological features in textual and visual data retrieved from the web pages (n = 822) of these platforms. Results show how encryption techniques, reputational systems, cryptocurrency and mixing services, escrow systems, and delivery and stealth methods contribute to the operation of darknet drug markets. By leveraging these technological features, these digital platforms can offer a more secure means of purchasing drugs compared to illicit street markets. However, these same features may reinforce a hierarchical structure, placing operators at the top and relegating customers to the bottom. Although markets differ in this respect, overall, they do not seem to be able to make a significant difference to the vulnerability and marginalisation of people who use drugs. Future research should incorporate the perspectives of drug customers into the evaluation of these findings to inform the development of better drug policies.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Úřad vlády České republiky
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The Illusion of Clinicians vs. the Illusion of Epidemiologists

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Keywords:
bias in addiction research, clinicians' illusion, epidemiologists' illusion, spontaneous remission

Abstract:

Background: We are frequently confronted with highly contradictory findings regarding treatment-induced and spontaneous remission among individuals with addiction. These range from very low remission rates among those receiving treatment to strikingly high remission rates over short periods among untreated individuals.

Methods: To better understand these discrepancies, several well-known studies were analysed, and theoretical explanations were explored to account for the contradictions.

Results: There are significant methodological artifacts – readily explained in probabilistic terms – that systematically underestimate remission rates in clinical settings and overestimate them in epidemiological studies. The underestimation is largely due to a version of Berkson's bias, which Cohen and Cohen (1984) referred to as "the clinician's illusion." Conversely, the overestimation is primarily a result of regression to the mean, as described by Campbell and Kenny (1999), and can be termed "the epidemiologist's illusion." Although both artifacts have been recognized for decades, they are often overlooked when interpreting remission data. This issue is compounded by questionable interpretive assumptions commonly made in the field (e.g., Winick, 1962; Robins et al., 1974).

Conclusion: The above problems should be given much greater focus in empirical studies focusing on assessing remission. Some biases can be mitigated or prevented when designing the study, and some can be partially or fully compensated when analysing the data. In existing studies that show enormous remission rates, it is usually not possible to assess the extent to which these reflect real changes and the extent to which they reflect artifacts.

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Funding: Not applicable.

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Self-Monitoring Barriers for Recreational Use

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Keywords:
harm reduction, psychedelics, psychopolitics, recreational substance use

Abstract:

In the summer of 2024 I executed an anthropological fieldwork among a group of harm reduction volunteers at a Hungarian psychedelic transformational festival. The aim of my research was to examine how a community could sustain their recreational substance use: what are their core motivations and regulatory forces not to engage in problematic behaviour regarding drugs. Besides participant observations I conducted interviews with the group I closely observed.

The results of my research are separated into three parts: First I presented the festival based on St John's idea of describing transformational festivals through Turner's liminality. This interpretation shows the festival as a place disconnected from the outer world where officially permitted deviant behaviour like substance use is still not legal but more tolerated than outside. Secondly I analysed the provided harm reduction service as an incursive tool of the outer world that pulls out festivalgoers from their experienced ecstatic state of being and reminds them to stay within a socially accepted framework of mental and physical condition. The third examined part became the motivations and attitudes of volunteers regarding substance use in their life and in wider societal context. Following the ideas of biopolitics and psychopolitics of Foucault and Han, I concluded that psychological paradigms are more important as tools that assist in balancing and keeping substance use at a non-problematic level than legal prohibition.

Although I do not imply exact suggestions on policing substances, my research highly confirms the beneficial impact on education and explores means that, if strengthened, could be used as agentive barriers that limit harmful substance use.

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Transnational social worlds of drugs - exploring migration as context of use and stigma

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Keywords:
transnational drug use, social remittances, social worlds of use, migrations and use

Abstract:

This study explores transnational drug use within social worlds of people who use drugs and migrate. As migrations produce a double frame of reference for people who are mobile - the cultural, social and legal context of their origin as well as the one of the destination - they navigate societal expectations and reactions, as well as transmit meanings and attitudes in the form of social remittances. This study aims at illuminating the consequences of transnational drug use, and the remittances brought back to the region of origin. Using the construct of social worlds, and combining qualitative data from two studies: one conducted among people who use cannabis in Poland (N=25) and Turkiye (N=17) and another conducted among mental health support services providers for Ukrainian forced migrants in Poland (N=14) I explore the construction of symbolic boundaries against the hosting society with the special focus on stigma as the barrier to access prevention or intervention. Combining the study of cannabis users who keep their use discrete and react to different liberalization contexts, and the reports of MHSS providers on the refugees' reluctance to reach out for help, this study finds that on one hand, people who migrate from legally and socially conservative contexts, bring their social worlds' bound use together with them and tend to detach themselves from local norms or use patterns. On the other hand, however, they remit social attitudes of the host society back to the origin region, becoming potential agents of change.

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Funding: N/A

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The greening of Germany – results from an online survey on the effects of the partial legalisation of cannabis

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Keywords:
drug policy, cannabis, legalisation, decriminalisation, cannabis cultivation

Abstract:

Objectives: In June 2024, Germany introduced new cannabis legislation (the Cannabis Act/CanG), which falls between full legalisation and decriminalisation. It is permitted to carry up to 25 grams of cannabis (50 grams at home), and to cultivate up to three cannabis plants within certain limits. Medical prescriptions have been made easier, and cannabis cultivation clubs with strict regulations have been introduced. However, the direct sale of recreational cannabis is still not possible. This study investigates the effects of these regulations on regular users in terms of procurement and other factors.

Methodology: A quantitative online survey was designed to reach as many people who use cannabis as possible. The data were analysed using standard statistical procedures. Additionally, the presentation uses other available data sources to assess the CanG.

Results: More than 11,000 people completed the questionnaire, primarily regular users, with nearly half of them using cannabis daily. Almost half of the participants use home cultivation as their main source of supply, followed by private prescriptions for medical cannabis. Very few respondents still rely on illegal sources. The majority of respondents stated that partial legalisation had a positive effect on their personal lives.

Conclusion: While opponents of the cannabis law expected no significant disruption to the illegal market due to the limited availability of legal sources, the opposite seems to be the case. Many regular users have embraced home cultivation as a relatively easy way to obtain legal cannabis. One questionable issue is how the medical market — the second most important source of cannabis — will develop in the future.

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Funding: The survey is funded by Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences (internal funding for small research projects).

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‘A Side Order of Stigma’: How and why people who use weight loss drugs keep it secret from others

Author:
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Keywords:
weight loss drugs, secrecy, stigma

Abstract:

Background: Ozempic and similar pharmaceuticals (e.g. Wegovy), originally prescribed for diabetes and obesity management, have recently gained global popularity for their off-prescription use as weight loss aids. This trend has been widely promoted and debated across social media and other public platforms. While existing research has examined users’ awareness of risks, their motivations, and experiences with both prescribed and non-prescribed use, no attention has been paid to the social dynamics of secrecy surrounding the use of these drugs.

Objectives: This paper addresses this gap, building on the first author’s previous work presented at the ESSD conference in 2023, applying the sociology of secrecy to drug-related practices in the home – the storing and concealing of illegal substances. The paper aims to extend this framework by examining how users manage secrecy around pharmaceutical drug use.

Methods: Qualitative content analysis of all subreddits, for example, r/ozempic, r/diabetes, from the past three years involving discussion about keeping the use of weight loss drugs secret from others will be presented. The analysis focuses on what is kept secret, how secrecy is maintained, from whom, and why.

Results: The findings reveal how users hide their weight loss drug use from family, friends, and colleagues, and explore the anticipated social consequences - such as judgement and social stigma - should their use be discovered. In addition, to the sociology of secrecy, and contributing to the ESSD’s recent focus on stigma, theories of internalised stigma and shame around ‘taking the easy option’ or not being able to manage weight loss without medication or wider support are applied to the data.

Conclusion: The paper concludes by drawing parallels between the findings and broader debates on the stigmatisation of illicit drug use, highlighting how secrecy itself becomes a strategy of self-protection within moralised health discourses.

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Funding: School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester.

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Social Dimensions of Illicit Cannabis Use Among Medical Patients: Exploring Access, Social Control, and Stigma in Everyday Life

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Keywords:
illicit use, medical cannabis, patients' experience, access, social stigma, social control, prosecution

Abstract:

This paper presents preliminary findings from a qualitative study on the illicit use of cannabis for medical purposes in Slovenia. The research explores the experiences (lifeworld) of individuals who use cannabis as an integrative or complementary treatment despite legal barriers preventing access to the cannabis plant. Medical cannabis remains largely inaccessible, with only a small number of cannabinoid-based pharmaceuticals registered and available (i.e. "controlled substance"). Consequently, many patients' seeking symptom relief from the cannabis plant resort to the black market or engage in illicit cultivation. These users also often face social stigmatisation and prejudice, although the discourse on the use of cannabis for medical purposes has become much more democratic and open over the past decade.

The study is guided by three primary research questions: (1) How do patients access illicit cannabis, and what role do social networks and informal information-sharing play in this process? (2) What legal, social, cultural, and political consequences do these individuals face, and how are mechanisms of social control applied? (3) What are the broader societal and public health implications of criminalizing cannabis use for self-medication?

The research methodology involves 15 to 20 semi-structured interviews with medical cannabis users, selected using an intersectional framework that considers variables such as age, gender, education, social class, occupation, region, and place of residence. This allows for a comprehensive understanding of how individuals from different sociodemographic backgrounds navigate the illicit cannabis market and the risks associated with it.

The study draws on Erving Goffman's concept of social stigma, as well as theories of social harm and social control. These frameworks provide insights into how individual experiences of criminalized self-treatment reflect broader tensions within Slovenian society, particularly regarding the intersection of health rights, legality, and social marginalization. Ultimately, the findings contribute to the ongoing debate on drug policy, public health, and the legal framework surrounding medical cannabis.

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Funding: Social and public health dimensions of cannabis regulation and use (research project is funded by Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency)

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Arturo Alvarez-Roldan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Granada, Spain. His research is currently focused on three related topics: dual cannabis-tobacco use, cannabis policy, and illicit drugs markets. His latest publications in this field: (2023) Attitudes toward cannabis of users and non-users in Spain: a concept mapping study among university students, International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 21: 3952–3970; (2023) Differentiating people who use cannabis heavily through latent class analysis, Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy, 18: 31.

Jonas Strandholdt Bach holds a PhD in Anthropology and works as an assistant professor at the Center for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University, Denmark. His research interests include marginalization and inequality in health, open drug and alcohol scenes, ageing and alcohol and drug use, youth binge-drinking, and alcohol policy.

Victoria Beere is a PhD candidate from the University of Manchester. Her work is inspired by the framework of narcofeminism and interests include women, harm reduction and co-design. Her PhD examines the impact of neoliberalism on the drug and alcohol treatment sector in the UK. She has a 23-year history of working delivering harm reduction services and was until 2024 the CEO of Project 6 – a harm reduction rooted regional charity in the UK. She is Vice Chair of Transform Drug Policy Foundation and a trustee of Collective Voice – the national charity working to improve England's drug and alcohol treatment system.

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Eva Devaney currently works as a substance use and gambling officer in a higher education institution. Eva holds a PhD in sociology (drug policy) and a MA in health promotion. Eva's experience includes research, publications, academic course leadership and lecturing in substance use and education fields, combined with several years of civil sector experience. Recently, Eva has focussed on policy and practice in the substance use and gambling areas in the higher education sector, with a strong focus and interest in collaborative interagency and intersectoral practices.

Marie Dos Santos is a health sociologist specializing in the study of drug use. By combining critical health studies with a situated knowledge approach, she analyzes how different types of knowledge — experiential, academic, and institutional — circulate, are transformed, and interact with public health norms, care systems, and the lived experiences of the people concerned.

Sarah El Guendi holds a PhD in Criminology, with research at the intersection of clinical victimology and gender studies. Her work focuses on power dynamics, coercive control, and gender-based violence. After her PhD, she pursued a research stay in Paris at the Centre for Research on Social Movements (CEMS – EHESS/CNRS/INSERM), where she contributed to the international Gender-ARP project on drug-using women survivors of violence. Now a permanent researcher at the University of Liège, she investigates drug-related social dynamics and public security policies, while maintaining a strong focus on gendered violence, both nationally and internationally.

Evgenia Fotiou is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Crete. She is a cultural anthropologist researching Indigenous Knowledge Systems, which often encompass both medical and religious knowledge. Specifically, her work examines the ways that psychedelics used in Indigenous cultures are reconceptualized within an increasingly medicalized framework as they become globalized. She has a PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she completed doctoral research on Amazonian shamanism in Peru and its transformation through globalization and shamanic tourism.

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Maria Hunter is an MA Applied Criminology student at Manchester Metropolitan University. She holds a BSc in Criminology and Sociology with Quantitative Methods. Alongside her studies, she teaches on the BSc Criminology programme at MMU and works as a research assistant with the Drugs Policy and Social Change (DPSC) research group. Her academic interests focus on emerging drug trends and harm reduction strategies.

Alexandra Karden is responsible for research and evaluation at the addiction prevention and drug checking organsation checkit!, at Suchthilfe Wien in Vienna, Austria. With a background in psychology, she works at the intersection of psychology, psychopharmacology and public health focusing on substance use patterns and motives of people who use drugs (PWUD) and monitoring the local drug market. Additionally, she is currently pursuing a PhD in Public Health at the Medical University of Vienna, investigating the impact of drug checking services on drug use behaviours and safer use practices as well as overall drug checking service accessibility and utilization.

Teemu Kaskela works as a postdoctoral researcher in A-Clinic Foundation. He has worked in various research projects regarding illegal drug markets, drug checking, opioid substitution treatment, criminality and drugs, prison-based drug treatment, and harm reduction services.

Zacharoula Kasseri, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at Hellenic Mediterranean University in Greece. Her research interests are focusing on social work in the field of addiction (social work theory and methodology, treatment policies and advocacy for people with substance use problems, gender issues and recovery) and qualitative research methodology.

Mette Kronbæk, cand.pæd.soc. PhD, Assistant Professor, has worked on various projects on factors such as body, gender, and age in the everyday life of marginalized drug users. She work primarily qualitatively, using interview forms, participant observations, mapping, and developing new data collection methods in relation to the users' own perspectives on their everyday life within and outside institutional offerings. In her research, she focuses on the interactions between individuals and welfare professionals, power dynamics, and organizational barriers. In addition to the gender perspective, her researcher is focusing on aging, drug use and marginalization.

Mindaugas Lankauskas is a lawyer, criminologist, and an expert on drug policy and drug-related crime. He has conducted interdisciplinary research in criminology, drug policy, and legal studies for over 20 years. His academic work focuses on the criminal justice system's response to drug use and distribution, the human rights implications of drug control measures, and the socio-legal dimensions of incarceration. He has authored multiple monographs and peer-reviewed articles in national and international journals. He is committed to advancing evidence-based, humane drug policy reform in Lithuania.

Margarida Lobato is a social worker with a degree from the ISSSP and a Master's student in Psychology of Justice and Deviance at the University of Porto (FPCEUP). She holds postgraduate qualifications in Forensic Social Work, Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, and Migration and Social Intervention. Her professional background includes work with vulnerable populations, particularly in the fields of addictive behaviours and mental health. In 2023, she presented her first paper at the European Conference on Social Work Education, addressing the ethical challenges of harm reduction. Her current research explores psychedelic use, harm reduction practices, and perspectives on healing

Matyáš Lucký is a legislative lawyer working for the Drug Policy Department of the Government Office of the Czech Republic. His specialization lies in criminal law, particularly in drug-related offences. He has contributed to current legislative initiatives in the Czech Republic aimed at reshaping the regulation of psychoactive substances, including the regulation of new psychoactive substances and the legalization of possession and cultivation of small amounts of cannabis for personal use. Currently, he is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Addictology, First Faculty of Medicine, Charles University.

Aisling McLaughlin is a Lecturer in Criminology & Criminal Justice at Ulster University. Aisling is a mixed methods researcher and is experienced in systematic reviews, secondary analysis of longitudinal cohort studies, feasibilty studies and randomised controlled trials. Her research interests focus on child and adolescent development particularly the impact of parent/carer drug use on family dynamics/parenting and child/adolescent outcomes (psychological, social, educational).

Linda Montanari is a health sociologist, working at the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) as a principal scientist since 2000. Within the centre, she coordinates the areas of drugs and: prison, mental health and gender. She has set up and coordinated the European Drugs and Gender Group (EDG) and tries to integrate a gender perspective in the drug field. In 2018 she has started a PhD (defence foreseen in July 2025) on women, drugs and prison in her country of origin -Italy - and her country of adoption– Portugal aiming at improving her knowledge on her main working areas.

James Morgan is senior lecturer of psychology at London Metropolitan University and researches issues relating to substance, especially in terms of heroin use and lifestyle. Since first attending in 2016 James has been a regular speaker at ESSD conferences and has contributed to three ESSD output books both and author and editor.

Luke Parkinson is a PhD candidate at Lancaster University, UK, researching the role of therapeutic relationships in safeguarding work with young people affected by criminal exploitation. My work explores the possibilities, necessities and ethical limits of the therapeutic relationship within systems that also demand surveillance and risk management. Drawing on qualitative research with practitioners and families, my project examines how speech is used both to build trust and to fulfil institutional requirements, and how professionals navigate these tensions. I am particularly interested in trauma-informed practice, relational ethics, and the boundaries of therapeutic support in welfare contexts.

Lígia Parodi is a feminist, harm reduction activist, psychologist, mother and drug user. Based in Porto, Portugal, she is a member of CASO, the Portuguese association of people who use drugs, where she contributes to peer-led harm reduction and human rights initiatives, especially with a focus on women. She currently coordinates the Advocacy Team of the European Network of People Who Use Drugs (EuroNPUD). She is a member of the advisory bodies of the Women Harm Reduction International Network (WHRIN) and the International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC).

Rob Ralphs is a Professor of Criminology and Social Policy and Deputy Director of the Drugs, Policy and Social Change (DPSC) Research Group at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has over 25 years of drug focused 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.

Cosimo Sidoti is a Ph.D. candidate in Criminology and Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Kent. He holds a Bachelor's in Criminology at the University of Sunderland and a Master's in Global Criminology at Utrecht University. His research focuses on the intersection of online and offline criminal and deviant behaviours within youth street cultures. Previously, he conducted a virtual ethnography on the meanings of crime within trap culture in Italy. His current Ph.D. project explores the global spread of lean in trap and drill cultures using virtual and sensory ethnography.

George Simpson is a Criminology Lecturer from the University of Kent. His research predominantly explores drug market structure and dealer typologies.

Emma Smith is a Research Associate at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. Emma joined King's in November 2021 as a Research Associate on The Stepping Stones Study. She completed her PhD at the University of Worcester where she also taught as an Associate Lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery. Emma holds a Master of Public Health from the University of Dundee and a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from the University of Georgia.

Thomas Solgård Svendsen is a PhD candidate at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has been responsible for following up and assessing 140 candidates in a 10-year longitudinal follow-up study in Norway, with several published papers on retention strategies for longitudinal studies and qualitative investigations of long-term recovery aspects. His PhD focuses on long-term recovery trajectories for people with problematic substance use. His supervisors, Gemma Anne Yarwood and Lucy Webb, are co-authors on the ESSD book chapter used for this conference presentation.

Ákos Szigeti is a sociologist and postdoctoral researcher in the field of cybercrime. His PhD work combined qualitative content analysis with machine learning to better understand the operation of darknet drug markets. Currently he is extending this work by implementing cross-platform exploration of markets, vendor shops, and forums. His research focuses on how technological transformations affect criminal behaviour and aims to inform criminal justice and drug policy discussions.

Alfred Uhl is a psychologist in Addiction Research since 1977. Deputy head of the Addiction Competence Centre of the Austrian Public Health Institute and Professor in 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.

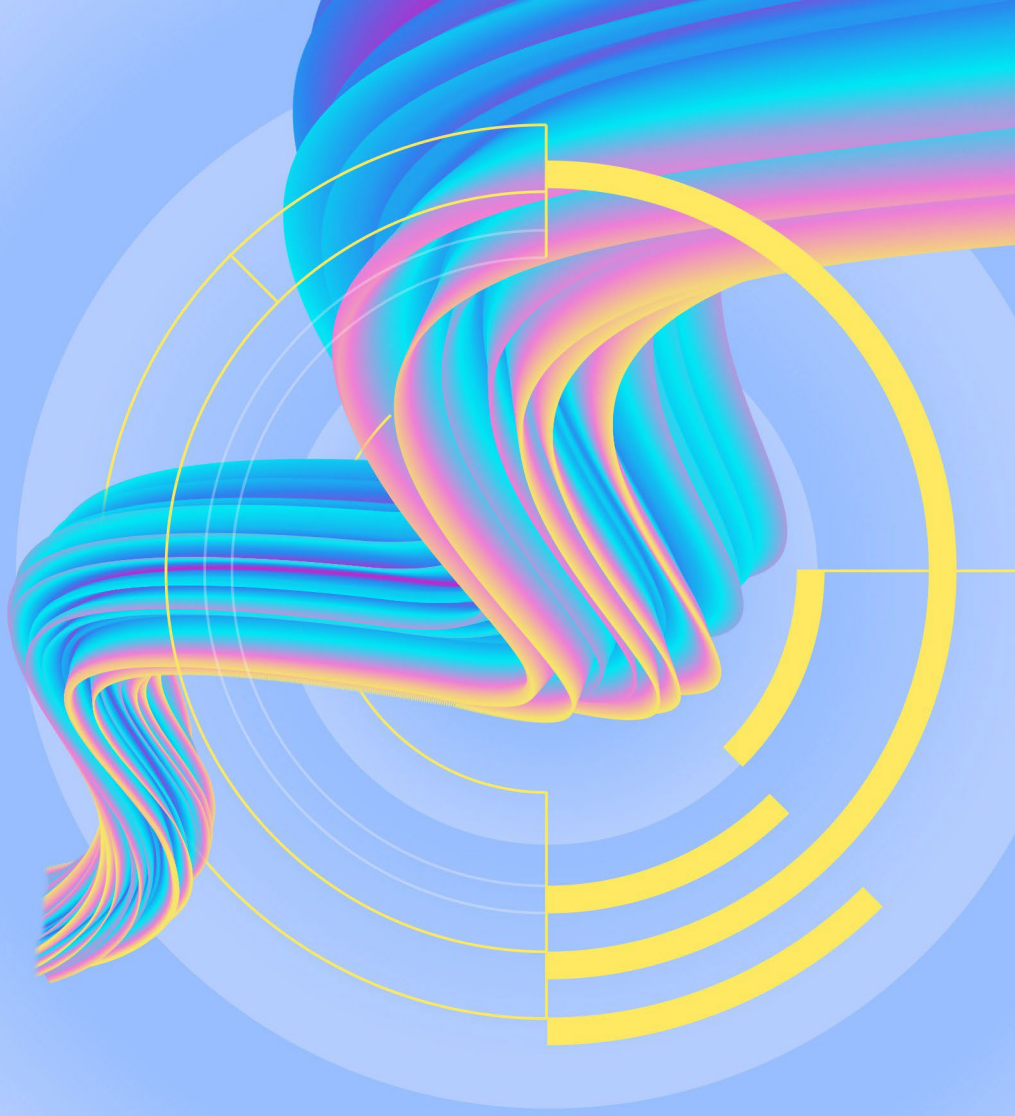
Ráhel Vermes is a cultural anthropologist and PhD candidate at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary. Her research topics focus on normalisation and integration of behaviours and costumes that used to be - or are still - labelled as deviant. Currently she focuses on the therapeutic application of psychedelic substances, executing fieldwork in European clinics that provide psychedelic-assisted therapy with qualitative methods like participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

Michał Wanke is a sociologist acting as a head of the Department of Cultural Studies of the University of Opole, Poland. He is a qualitative researcher and studies people who use drugs, especially cannabis in non-western contexts. He also conducts research on migration related phenomena, most recently as a postdoc in the Horizon Europe PREMIUM_EU project exploring migration benefits for remote regions in Europe. He published in and guest edited international and Polish journals; he received funding from Erasmus+, National Centre of Science in Poland and the Polish National Bureau for Drug Prevention (now: National Centre for Addiction Prevention).

Bernd Werse is professor for social work with focus on social scientific drug and addiction research since 2024. He has worked on multiple research projects on subjects such as NPS, social supply and small-scale drug dealing, cannabis use and cultivation, open drug scenes and new drug trends. He is an elected member of the ESSD board.

Lisa Williams has researched drugs for over 25 years. Her work focuses on recreational drug use, including the Illegal Leisure study exploring why people take drugs and how their drug taking changes during the life course, and creative research methods, particularly how arts-based and visual techniques can engage diverse publics. Recent projects include a material methods and visual ethnography about illegal drug storage strategies in the home and a public engagement project using cross-stitch to create empowering and harm reduction messages. She is a Trustee for Portraits of Recovery, a visual arts charity changing the conversation around recovery.

Nina Žnidaršič (1993) is a research assistant at the Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law – Ljubljana. Between 2020 and 2025, she was a junior researcher at the Social Communication Research Centre at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. She is currently completing her doctoral thesis Autonomy of Journalism and the Journalist's Action in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia at the Faculty of Social Sciences. She completed her undergraduate studies in Journalism and her postgraduate studies in Sociology at the same faculty; she also studied Sociology and Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana.



Úřad vlády České republiky

IKSP Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci

ESSD European Society for Social Drug Research