

**ILLEGAL DRUG USE AND CRIME:  
A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP**

**PREPARED FOR THE SPECIAL SENATE COMMITTEE  
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## ILLEGAL DRUG USE AND CRIME: A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

### INTRODUCTION

Illegal drug use is “almost automatically”<sup>(1)</sup> associated with criminal behaviour. The statistical relationship between illegal drug use and crime is convincing at first glance, but it is not possible to draw a conclusion regarding a definite cause-and-effect link between the two phenomena. The suggestion that drugs lead to crime ignores the impact that living conditions can have on an individual and takes no account, according to Serge Brochu (an expert in this field), of a body of data showing that most illegal drug users in Canada and elsewhere will never be *regular users*. It bears repeating that drug use is still, for the most part, a sporadic, recreational, exploratory activity. Most people are able to manage their drug use without any difficulty. Very few will become regular users, and even fewer will develop a drug addiction.<sup>(2)</sup>

Studies of the link between drug use and crime are currently going through a paradigmatic crisis:

[Translation] The problem stems from three elements: the limits of our current knowledge; practice that does not respect our expertise; and mislabelling of users. Contemporary conceptual models are not based on a cohesive empirical body (e.g., our unrepresentative samples usually comprise drug users heavily involved in crime and very few regular users who hold important positions in society, even though they do exist; we then make broad generalizations based on those studies). It is also extremely difficult to incorporate knowledge that conflicts with our deeply

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- (1) The expression is used by Serge Brochu in *Drogue et criminalité. Une relation complexe*, Collection perspectives criminologiques, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1995.
  - (2) “Misleading presuppositions about the way people use drugs are built into contemporary language, which, for example, presupposes that most people who use ‘addictive drugs’ like heroin and cocaine are addicted, or will shortly become so. For this reason the term ‘heroin user’ is often used interchangeably with ‘heroin addict.’ But this presupposition is false [...] all psychoactive drugs can be used in many ways, of which addiction is only one, and that the ‘addictive drugs’ do not necessarily carry a higher risk of addiction than the rest.” B.K. Alexander, *Peaceful Measures. Canada's Way Out of the War on Drugs*, University of Toronto Press, 1990, p. 102.

held beliefs (e.g., the prospect of careful or controlled use of illegal psychoactive substances). Finally, we continue to apply negative labels to illegal drug users who in the end would rather be known as drug addicts than criminals.<sup>(3)</sup>

All that aside, the scientific studies conducted over the past two decades provide evidence which tends to show that drug use is one of a number of factors that may explain why some people commit criminal acts. For example, many people who have developed an addiction to expensive drugs such as heroin and crack/cocaine and cannot afford their habit will commit crimes to buy drugs. However, they do not represent all or even most illegal drug users, especially in the case of marijuana users. In other words, illegal drug use does not necessarily lead to an increase in crime, even among people who are regular users or have developed an addiction. The research shows that a number of social, psychological and cultural factors can be used to identify people who are at risk of becoming delinquents and/or drug users. Factors that may explain both drug use and criminal activity include poverty, lack of social values, personality disorders, association with drug users and/or delinquents, and loss of contact with agents of socialization.<sup>(4)</sup>

Indications are that it is wrong to think that eliminating drugs from a person's day-to-day life will definitely put an end to criminal activity. This realization is important in terms of intervention and policy development, because any explanation of crime which attributes a high importance to drugs may lead to the implementation of ineffective intervention policies.

Today, although the exact nature of the link between drugs and crime remains uncertain, the scientific literature shows that the drugs-crime connection is much more complex than originally believed.<sup>(5)</sup> This paper contains a review of a number of Canadian and foreign studies dealing with the link between illegal drug use and criminal behaviour.<sup>(6)</sup> It also presents

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(3) S. Brochu, "Drogues et criminalité : Point de vue critique sur les idées véhiculées," *Déviance et société*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1997, pp. 307-308.

(4) For Brochu, however, human behaviour cannot be reduced to a set of risk factors. In other words, the mere presence of such risk factors does not necessarily put a person on a path toward drug use and crime. In Brochu's view, it is important to give the individual his or her rightful place in the drug-crime equation and to recognize the significance the individual ascribes to the actions that shape his or her life. S. Brochu, 1997, p. 310.

(5) D.N. Nurco, T.W. Kinlock and T.E. Hanlon, "The Drugs-Crime Connection," in James A. Inciardi, ed., *Handbook of Drug Control in the United States*, Greenwood Press, 1990; M. Tonry and J.Q. Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*, University of Chicago, 1990, p. 73.

(6) Although much work done in the 20th century focused on the relationship between drug use and crime, those who have considered this literature contend that the vast majority of studies published prior to the 1970s contain little reliable information for the purpose of understanding the mechanisms linking drugs to crime. Considerable methodological problems appear to be responsible for this situation. For further information, see J.A. Inciardi, "Drugs and Criminal Behavior," in J.A. Inciardi, ed., *The Drugs-Crime Connection*, Sage Publications, 1981, p. 9; D.N. Nurco *et al.*, 1990, p. 4.

a study of regular marijuana users that establishes a profile of the lives of regular users and their involvement in crime. The goal of this paper is to briefly examine the various links between illegal drug use and crime.

## **ILLEGAL DRUG USE AND CRIME**

This section of the paper briefly presents the various kinds of links between drugs and crime that may explain the coincidence of these two behaviours. The types of crime associated with the legal status of certain drugs are discussed, including possession, production and purchase of illegal drugs – all of which are indictable offences. Three theoretical models, originally proposed by Goldstein<sup>(7)</sup> to explain the drugs-violence nexus in the United States, are then examined; these models have since served as a framework to analyze the relationship between drugs and crime. The first model suggests that crime is linked to the psychopharmacological effects of certain drugs; in other words, it refers to intoxication by drugs which are recognized as undermining judgment and self-control, causing paranoid thoughts or distorting inhibitions and perceptions. The second model refers to economic-compulsive crime and suggests that drug users commit crimes in order to get money to buy drugs. Thirdly, the systemic model suggests that crime among illegal drug users is linked to the drug market. Goldstein acknowledged that this tripartite conceptual framework represents possible relationships between drugs and violence and that many other factors may contribute to a person's drug use and criminal activity.<sup>(8)</sup>

### **A. Link Between the Legal Status of Certain Drugs and Crime**

#### **1. Canadian data**

In Canada, it is an offence under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*<sup>(9)</sup> to possess, produce, traffic in, or import or export certain drugs. Persons who engage in these

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(7) P.J. Goldstein, "The drugs/violence nexus: A tripartite conceptual framework," *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol. 15, Fall 1985, pp. 493-506.

(8) H. Harwood, D. Fountain and G. Livermore, *The Economic Costs of Alcohol and Drug Abuse in the United States – 1992*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Drug Abuse, NIH Publication Number 98-4327, September 1998, Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3. Available online at <http://165.112.78.61/EconomicCosts/Chapter6.html>.

(9) S.C. 1996, c. 19.

activities face legal consequences linked directly or indirectly to their drug use. Consequences directly linked to drug use are simple possession offences, while those indirectly linked are all offences related to the production of or trafficking in illegal drugs.

In 2000, Canadian police departments reported a total of 87,945 offences under the *Act* <sup>(10)</sup> (see Table 1). Three-quarters of those offences involved marijuana, 68% of them possession. The number of police-reported incidents involving marijuana also increased from 47,234 in 1996 to 66,171 incidents in 2000.

**TABLE 1**  
**NUMBER OF POLICE-REPORTED INCIDENTS**  
**BY TYPE OF DRUG, 1996 TO 2000**

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Marijuana	47,234	47,933	50,917	60,011	66,171
Cocaine	11,478	11,468	12,183	11,963	12,812
Heroin	1,287	1,235	1,323	1,323	1,226
Other drugs*	5,730	5,957	6,509	6,845	7,736
Total	65,729	66,593	70,922	80,142	87,945

\* “Other drugs” include other illegal substances such as PCP, LSD and Ecstasy as well as controlled substances such as barbiturates and anabolic steroids.

Source: R. Logan, “Crime Statistics in Canada, 2000,” *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 85-002-xie, Vol. 21, No. 8, 2001, p. 11.

Although the figures confirm the existence of crime directly and indirectly related to the use of illegal drugs (possession versus trafficking, importing and production), there are nevertheless certain significant limits as a result of which the number of offences associated with illegal drug use is underestimated.

For example, in Canada, the number of incidents determined through the *Uniform Crime Reporting Survey* reflects only the most serious offence committed at the time of a criminal incident. Consequently, if a criminal incident involves a robbery and a drug possession offence, only the robbery will be entered in the database.<sup>(11)</sup>

Research has also clearly shown that a large percentage of crime is never reported to or investigated by police. This is all the more likely to occur with crimes related to illegal drug use. Individuals involved in these types of activities are usually consenting; as a result, they

(10) R. Logan, “Crime Statistics in Canada, 2000,” *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 85-002-xie, Vol. 21, No. 8, 2001, p. 11.

(11) *Ibid.*

are generally not inclined to report the incidents to police. Moreover, police do not necessarily investigate incidents reported to them. It is not enough for police authorities to be aware of the incident; officers on duty must establish that the situation in question is a criminal justice matter. Briefly put, the police can choose various interpretations and actions; these can include: deciding to do nothing because they believe the situation does not require legal intervention; forwarding the case to a social assistance agency; arresting the individual involved; etc.<sup>(12)</sup>

Although statistical fluctuations may in some instances indicate changes in the number of crimes committed, the research shows that police resources and strategies adopted in the fight against drugs very much influence official crime statistics. For example, there is every reason to believe that the sharp decline in the number of drug-related offences observed in Canada between 1981 and 1983 may be explained in part by the introduction of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982. By restricting police search and seizure powers, the Charter appreciably reduced the number of police actions related to drug possession. Similarly, the introduction of alternative measures in 1997 that police officers could use when dealing with adult offenders instead of laying formal charges appears to have had a downward effect on the number of charges laid by police.<sup>(13)</sup>

Many studies which compare data obtained through self-revealed crime surveys<sup>(14)</sup> and arrest statistics as well as drug testing programs and surveys of arrestees have shown that only a small percentage of all offences reported by drug users have resulted in arrests.<sup>(15)</sup> In a Canadian study conducted in Toronto in 1994, only 5% of cocaine addicts interviewed said they had been arrested for cocaine possession.<sup>(16)</sup> That percentage is very similar to the percentage recorded in *Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey 1994*, in which

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(12) For a detailed analysis, see P. Robert and C. Faugeron, *Les forces cachées de la justice*, Paris, Le Centurion, 1980.

(13) S. Tremblay, "Illicit Drugs and Crime in Canada," *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 85-002-xie, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1999.

(14) The self-revealed crime surveys consist of asking people whether they have committed an offence.

(15) See, *inter alia*, D.E. Hunt, "Drug and Consensual Crimes: Drug Dealing and Prostitution in Drugs and Crime," Michael Tonry and James Q. Wilson, eds., The University of Chicago Press, 1990; T. Makkai, J. Fitzgerald and P. Doak, "Drug use among police detainees," *Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice*, No. 49, March 2000; National Institute of Justice, *1999 Annual Report on Drug Use Among Adult and Juvenile Arrestees*, Research Report, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Program, July 2000.

(16) The sample consisted of 100 cocaine addicts. P.G. Erickson and T.R. Weber, "Cocaine Careers, Controls and Consequences: Results from a Canadian Study," *Addiction Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1994, pp. 37-50.

only 7.7% of respondents who reported that they had previously used illegal drugs indicated that they had been in trouble with the law.<sup>(17)</sup>

Finally, the figures in Table 1 pertain solely to offences under the *Controlled Drugs and Substances Act*; they do not include other types of crime also associated with illegal drug use, such as violent crimes resulting from disputes between dealers and drug buyers, wars waged among criminal organizations over control of the drug trade, and acquisitive crimes committed primarily by hard drug addicts to pay for illegal drugs and maintain their lifestyle.

## 2. Foreign data

Statistics similar to those gathered in Canada on crime related to drug use, trafficking and the production of illegal drugs are published the world over. In 1998, marijuana was the substance most commonly cited in drug-related arrests in member states of the European Union.<sup>(18)</sup> That year in France, 85% of drug arrests involved marijuana.<sup>(19)</sup> It should be noted, however, that in 1997, a little less than one-half of those arrested for drug use in France were retained for questioning, and the vast majority of users were released.<sup>(20)</sup>

In Australia, 80% of drug arrests between 1993 and 1996-1997 were for marijuana offences. The vast majority of cases involved possession of illegal drugs rather than trafficking (71% in 1996-1997).<sup>(21)</sup> It should also be noted that the majority (78%) of people imprisoned for a drug offence in 1996 were convicted of trafficking, not possession or use.<sup>(22)</sup>

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(17) P. MacNeil and I. Webster, *Canada's Alcohol and Other Drugs Survey 1994 – A Discussion of the Findings*, Health Canada, 1997, p. 70.

(18) European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), *2000 Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in the European Union*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2000, p. 21. Available online at <http://www.emcdda.org>.

(19) *Ibid.*

(20) Observatoire français des drogues et des toxicomanies (OFDT) [French Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addictions], *Drugs and Drug Addictions: Indicators and Trends*, 1999, pp. 112-113. Available online at <http://www.drogues.gouv.fr/uk/index.html>.

(21) H. Higgins, M. Cooper-Stanbury and P. William, *Statistics on Drug Use in Australia 1998*, AIHW Cat. No. PHE 16, Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Drug Statistics Series), March 2000, p. 59. Available online at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/inet/publications/health/sdua98/index.html>.

(22) *Ibid.*, p. 60.



According to 1998 British statistics on drug-related offences, 76.1% of those convicted, released on bond, fined or charged with multiple drug offences were involved with marijuana; most were arrested for possession.<sup>(23)</sup>

In the United States, although 80.5% of all drug arrests were for possession,<sup>(24)</sup> 40.5% were related to marijuana.<sup>(25)</sup>

Finally, in the Netherlands, 81% of all arrests for drug offences in 1996 were related to hard drugs (any drug other than hashish and marijuana), and in 1998, all offences were related to trafficking, because the Netherlands does not normally prosecute people for using drugs.<sup>(26)</sup> These data show that, with the exception of users in the Netherlands, many drug users have come in contact with the justice system without necessarily committing an offence other than an offence directly related to their drug use (i.e., possession or use of narcotics).

The caution regarding the reliability of the Canadian statistics stated above also applies to foreign data. According to some studies in France, statistics on arrests of drug users must be used with caution, as it is difficult to determine with any certainty the extent to which observed changes reflect changes in the drug user population and whether the changes are in fact linked to changes in police and gendarmerie activities. For example, the data on arrests for drug use between 1993 and 1998 show significant increases of 30% in 1997 and 9% in 1998.<sup>(27)</sup> Many factors may explain that increase, among them changes in the approaches used by police and gendarmerie, reorganization of police departments, and normalization of marijuana use. One possible explanation is that a 1995 circular on court-ordered treatment issued by the Ministry of Justice led public prosecutors to instruct the police to “systematically report users.”<sup>(28)</sup> Perhaps those instructions led to the sharp increase in the number of drug-use arrests recorded in 1997.

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(23) *U.K. Drug Situation 2000 – The U.K. Report to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)*, DrugScope, November 2000, p. 25. Available online at <http://drugscope.org.uk>.

(24) According to the Uniform Crime Reporting Program, an arrest is deemed to occur whenever a person is taken into custody, warned or cited. The reported figures therefore do not measure the number of people arrested, because a person may be arrested more than once during the year.

(25) *Crime in the United States 1999: Uniform Crime Reports*, U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, October 2000, Section IV, Persons Arrested, Table 4.1. This document is available online at [http://www/fbi/gov/ucr/Cius\\_99/99crime/99c4\\_04.pdf](http://www/fbi/gov/ucr/Cius_99/99crime/99c4_04.pdf).

(26) EMCDDA, Complementary statistical tables to the *2000 Annual Report on the state of the drugs problem in the European Union*. Available online at [http://www.emcdda.org/infopoint/publications/annrepstat\\_00.shtml](http://www.emcdda.org/infopoint/publications/annrepstat_00.shtml).

(27) EMCDDA, 1999, p. 112.

(28) *Ibid.*, p. 114.

The link between drugs and crime highlighted in this section pertains directly to drug use and drug possession. Trafficking in, importing and producing illegal drugs are forms of crime driven by different motives, such as the need to get money to buy drugs to satisfy a drug addiction. This point is discussed in greater detail in section C.

## **B. Theoretical Models**

### **1. Psychopharmacological link**

Many people associate drug intoxication with crime, sometimes even violent crime. This so-called psychopharmacological link implies that people may commit crimes or sometimes violent crimes after using certain substances recognized as undermining judgment and self-control, generating paranoid ideas and/or distorting inhibitions and perceptions.<sup>(29)</sup>

Although all drugs that have an impact on the nervous system may cause these kinds of reactions, the scientific literature suggests that some drugs are more strongly associated than others with violence of this type. Those drugs include alcohol,<sup>(30)</sup> PCP (phencyclidine), cocaine, amphetamines<sup>(31)</sup> and barbiturates. Inversely, heroin and cannabis are generally associated with a weaker desire to use violence to resolve disputes.<sup>(32)</sup>

The following table is a summary of the main properties of illegal drugs that have been analyzed in relation to violence.

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(29) E. Single, "The Economic Costs of Illicit Drugs and Drug Enforcement," *Policy Options*, Vol. 19, October 1998.

(30) Although alcohol is beyond the scope of this paper, it is nevertheless important to note that this legal drug is the most commonly recognized psychopharmacological link between drugs and violence. Research on this issue has shown that drinking precedes nearly half of all violent offences including homicides, sexual assaults and incidents of spousal abuse. See, among others, S. Tremblay, 1999; P.J. Goldstein, 1985, pp. 493-506; M.-M. Cousineau, S. Brochu and P. Schneeberger, *Consommation de substances psychoactives et violence chez les jeunes*, Comité permanent de la lutte à la toxicomanie, Ministère de la Santé et des services sociaux, Québec, August 2000; S. Brochu, 1995; M. De La Rosa, E.Y. Lambert and B. Gropper, eds., "Introduction: Exploring the Substance Abuse-Violence Connection," in *Drugs and Violence: Causes, Correlates, and Consequences*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990.

(31) S. Wright and H. Klee, "Violent Crime, Aggression and Amphetamine: what are the implications for drug treatment services?" *Drugs: education, prevention and policy*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2001, pp. 73-90.

(32) H.R. White, "The Drug Use-Delinquency Connection in Adolescence," in *Drugs, Crime and the Criminal Justice System*, R.A. Weisheil, ed., Highland Heights, 1990, pp. 215-256; M. De La Rosa, E.Y. Lambert and B. Gropper, 1990, pp. 1-7; P. Erickson, *Drugs, Violence and Public Health: What Does the Harm Reduction Approach Have to Offer?* Paper prepared for a conference in Vancouver, *Sensible Solutions to the Urban Drug Problem*, The Fraser Institute, 21 April 1998.

**TABLE 2**  
**MAIN EFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH**  
**THE USE OF CERTAIN ILLEGAL DRUGS**

Marijuana	Marijuana is generally associated with a reduced desire to use violence.
Heroin	Like marijuana, heroin generally has the effect of lowering the desire to use violence. In some cases, however, it appears that disturbed or impulsive behaviours may occur during a period of withdrawal.
Cocaine	Cocaine's main property is that it stimulates the central nervous system. Cocaine abuse can cause paranoia, although that reaction appears to be infrequent among cocaine users as a whole. Some report that cocaine use can also cause irritability and anxiety in users, especially at the end of a period of intoxication.
PCP	PCP is recognized for its many properties (hallucinogenic, analgesic and anesthetic). Like cocaine, it stimulates the central nervous system. Empirical studies are particularly incomplete for this drug; however, PCP is second to alcohol as the drug most often associated with violence.
LSD	Like PCP, LSD is known for its hallucinogenic properties. It can therefore cause strange and violent behaviour.
Amphetamines	The main property of amphetamines is that, like cocaine, they stimulate the central nervous system. Amphetamine abuse can thus cause paranoia, irritability, anxiety and even toxic psychosis.

Sources: S. Brochu, "La violence et la drogue," *L'intervenant*, Vol. 16, No. 3, April 2000; D.C. McBride, "Drugs and Violence," in J. Inciardi, ed., *The Drugs-Crime Connection*, Sage Publications, 1981; N. Boyd, *High Society. Legal and Illegal Drugs in Canada*, Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1991.

However, evidence supporting this model is limited. The few empirical elements are drawn from research which presents numerous methodological problems and does not really help to understand the specific effects of certain drugs.<sup>(33)</sup> Indeed, many recent studies have challenged the notion that psychoactive drugs stimulate violent behaviour in any systematic manner.<sup>(34)</sup>

This psychopharmacological model of the link between drug use and crime is based in particular on research data showing that a large number of arrestees and inmates had used drugs on the day they committed the crimes for which they were incarcerated. The following paragraphs

(33) Some researchers, among them S. Brochu (1995) and P. Erickson (1998), thus contend that the samples used in studies very often have significant methodological problems. In particular, the researchers mention the size of the samples and the inclusion of individuals with long-standing problems of psychological instability, which make it impossible to verify the effect of the drug itself.

(34) See, *inter alia*, L.D. Harrison and M. Backenheimer, "Editors' Introduction: Evolving Insights into the Drug-Crime Nexus," *Substance Use & Misuse*, 33(9), 1990, pp. 1763-1777.

present research findings which show that many criminal acts, some of them violent, are committed in Canada each year under the influence of a drug.

According to data from Statistics Canada's 1997 survey *Homicide in Canada*, 50% of accused persons had used alcohol or illegal drugs before committing their crimes.<sup>(35)</sup> Another Canadian study conducted in 1999 – based on a questionnaire distributed to all new inmates incarcerated in federal penitentiaries<sup>(36)</sup> – showed:

- slightly more than half (50.6%) of the inmates had used drugs and/or alcohol on the day they committed the offence for which they were incarcerated;
- among this group, approximately 16% had used illegal drugs only and 13% had used a combination of the two<sup>(37)</sup>; and
- significant differences in the types of crimes committed by type of drug used (i.e., alcohol and illegal drugs).

There was a rather clear distinction between acquisitory crimes and violent crimes in the prevalence of use of drugs and alcohol. While homicides and, more pronouncedly, assaults and wounding were predominantly alcohol-related, crimes such as thefts and break and enter showed a higher prevalence of drug use on the day of the crime.<sup>(38)</sup>

Similarly, self-report surveys in the United States have also indicated a link between criminal activity and the use of alcohol and illicit drugs.

According to self-reports from a 1991 survey with a sample of 14,000 State and 6,600 Federal prison inmates, 24% of Federal inmates and 49% of State inmates reported that they were under the

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(35) O. Fedorowycz, "Homicide in Canada, 1997," *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 85-002-xie, Vol. 18, No. 12, 1998.

(36) The survey in question – entitled *Computerized Lifestyle Screening Instrument* – is an assessment tool for gathering detailed information on the relationship between crime and substance abuse. It specifically covers such areas as drug use, emotional states, interpersonal problems and adjustment problems related to substance abuse. For more information, see S. Brochu, L.G. Cournoyer, L. Motiuk and K. Pernaen, "Drugs, Alcohol and Crime: Patterns among Canadian Federal Inmates," *Bulletin on Narcotics*, Vol. LI, No. 1 and 2, 1999, pp. 57-73.

(37) A similar study conducted in 1994 also established drug use prevalence rates of about 50% – 29% having used illegal drugs only and 27% a combination of drugs and alcohol. L. Wolff and B. Reingold, "Drug Use and Crime," *Juristat*, Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Vol. 14, No. 6, 1994.

(38) S. Brochu *et al.*, 1999, p. 66.

influence of alcohol or illicit drugs at the time of their current offence. In State prisons, 32% of inmates reported they were under the influence of alcohol, and 31% reported they were under the influence of drugs (including 14% who were under the influence of both) when they committed their current offence.<sup>(39)</sup>

This closer link between alcohol use and violent crime has been demonstrated in a number of studies.<sup>(40)</sup> In 1991, the Research and Statistics Branch of Correctional Service Canada pointed out that “violent offences were more often committed under the influence of alcohol or both alcohol and drugs, rather than under the influence of drugs alone.”<sup>(41)</sup> In one of the analyses on drug-related homicides in New York, Goldstein contended that very few murder victims are killed by people driven mad by illegal drugs and that homicide related to psychopharmacological factors is generally committed by people under the influence of alcohol.<sup>(42)</sup> An analysis of 218 homicides in New York, committed in 1998 and presumed to be related to drugs, showed that only 14% involved the psychopharmacological factor and that 74% were related to systemic violence resulting from the illegal drug market and related drug trafficking.<sup>(43)</sup>

The 1999 study by Brochu *et al.* also gathered useful information for analyzing the link between the psychopharmacological effects of certain drugs and criminal behaviour. The study, which dealt specifically with illegal drug use and crime, produced the following main findings:

- 28% of the inmates questioned said they had committed all or at least most of their crimes under the influence of an illegal drug;<sup>(44)</sup>

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(39) H. Harwood *et al.*, 1998, Chapter 6, Section 6.2.3.

(40) See, *inter alia*, D. Farabee, Y. Joshi and M.D. Anglin, “Addiction Careers and Criminal Specialization,” *Crime & Delinquency*, Vol. 47, No. 2, April 2001, pp. 196-220.

(41) D. Robinson, F. Porporino and B. Milison, *Patterns of Alcohol and Drug Use Among Federal Offenders as Assessed by the Computerized Lifestyle Screening Instrument*, Research and Statistics Branch, Correctional Service of Canada, 1991. Available online at <http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/r11/r11.e.shtml>.

(42) P.J. Goldstein and H.H. Brownstein, “Drug-Related Homicide in New York: 1984 and 1988,” *Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 38, No. 4, 1992, downloaded on 31 July 2001, from the Library of Parliament databases (Academic Search Elite).

(43) *Ibid.*

(44) S. Brochu *et al.*, 1999, p. 65.

- nearly 44% of inmates who reported that they had previously used illegal drugs believed that their drug use had increased their criminal activity, whereas 51% thought their drug use had had no effect on their criminal activity and nearly 5% contended that it had contributed to a decline in their criminal activity;<sup>(45)</sup> and
- nearly 80% of inmates who used illegal drugs on the day they committed the crime for which they were incarcerated (16% of inmates in the study) stated that their drug use had facilitated their acting out. Of those, 83.1% reported that their drug use had altered their judgment, 33.6% that it had made them more inclined to fight, and 37% that it had made them more aggressive and violent.<sup>(46)</sup>

Although some of these findings offer invaluable information for understanding the meaning that inmates attach to their drug use and crimes, such as the data on drug use on the day of the crime, they are insufficient to show a causal relationship between drug use and criminal activity. In other words, nothing in these findings clearly demonstrates that the criminal act would not have been committed if the individual had not been under the influence of drugs. Moreover, the findings based on the link that the offender sees between his or her drug use and his or her crimes should be significantly clarified. In the view of various researchers,<sup>(47)</sup> some inmates prefer to associate their criminal behaviour with their drug use. This enables them to attribute responsibility for their actions to an outside cause, i.e., drugs. Although for many inmates this association is indisputable, research has shown that some individuals use it as an excuse for their behaviour and to unburden themselves of part of the weight of the offence.<sup>(48)</sup> A 1998 study of the entire Canadian population also tends to show that this view of the matter is widespread. According to the survey results, three-quarters of respondents admitted that drinking could serve as a pretext for using violence.<sup>(49)</sup>

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(45) *Ibid.*, p. 69.

(46) *Ibid.*

(47) See, *inter alia*, J. Fagan, "Intoxication and Aggression," in *Drugs and Crime*, Michael Tonry and James Q. Wilson, eds., The University of Chicago Press, 1990; S. Brochu, 1995; W. Loza and P. Clément, "Incarcerated Alcoholics' and Rapists' Attributions of Blame for Criminal Acts," *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1991, pp. 76-83.

(48) Serge Brochu devotes a chapter in the appendix of his book to an analysis of the reliability of self-revealed crime reports. One of the questions he raises directly concerns intoxication and substance abuse as an excuse. S. Brochu, 1995, pp. 211-217.

(49) A. Paglia and R. Room, "Alcohol and Aggression: General Population Views About Causation and Responsibility," *Journal of Substance Abuse*, Vol. 10, 1998, pp. 199-216.

According to Brochu, “while the general pharmacological characteristics of the most common [drugs] are quite well known, understanding of the specific mechanisms promoting violent behaviour appears extremely deficient.”<sup>(50)</sup> This may be explained by the complex nature of the variables involved, which include:

- type of drug used (simultaneous use of more than one drug must also be considered);
- method of use;
- dosage (drugs are recognized as having variable effects depending on the user’s weight, height, sex and other characteristics);<sup>(51)</sup>
- the user’s predisposition (moods, expectations of drug use, general health, etc.)<sup>(52)</sup>; and
- social environment (local atmosphere, companions, etc.).<sup>(53)</sup>

The psychopharmacological model is powerless to explain why most drug users do not commit crimes of violent offences. This deficiency forces a recognition of the fact that the reasons for violence and criminal activity go beyond the properties of the drugs themselves.

Although many studies indicate that some people used illegal drugs the day they committed their crime, there is little empirical evidence in the scientific literature to establish a direct link between crime, violence and the psychopharmacological effects of drugs.<sup>(54)</sup>

## **2. Economic-compulsive link**

### **a. Substance abuse and criminal activity**

Before moving on to crime and violence caused by the illegal drug market, this section examines another aspect that may explain the link between drug use and crime, i.e., the economic-compulsive link, which assumes that drug users commit crimes to finance their drug

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(50) S. Brochu, 1995, p. 87.

(51) C. Giroux, “Les substances psychoactives : repères pharmacologiques et physiologiques,” in *L’usage des drogues et la toxicomanie*, P. Brisson, ed., Gaëtan Morin, 1988, vol. 1.

(52) According to Brochu (1995), “Very often these drugs merely catalyze already present aggressive energies.”

(53) P. Paquin, “La violence, une drogue qui fait mal à tout le monde,” *L’intervenant*, Vol. 16, No. 3, April 2000, pp. 41-44.

(54) S. Brochu, 1995; J.J. Collins, “Summary Thoughts About Drugs and Violence,” NIDA, Research Monograph Series, *Drugs and Violence: Causes, Correlates and Consequences*, Rockville, National Institute of Drug Abuse, Vol. 113, 1990, pp. 265-275; J. Fagan, 1990; P. Erickson, 1998.

use. More specifically, according to this explanatory model of the drug-crime relationship, the compelling and recurrent need for drugs and their high price lead some users to commit crimes to obtain the money they need to buy drugs. This model focuses on individuals who have developed a dependence on expensive drugs and assumes that the large amounts of money associated with frequent use of certain illegal drugs constitute an incentive for criminal action.

This explanation of the relationship between drugs and crime is well supported in the literature and the media. Many people attribute a great percentage of crime to this economic-compulsive link. According to Brochu:

[Translation] This belief, deeply rooted in people's minds, is fostered by the police and the media, which seize every opportunity to dig up the drug-using past of persons arrested for theft. The offenders themselves promote this association by swearing to anyone who will listen that the single cause of their involvement in crime is their heavy [drug] use. For many, this statement is indisputable. For others, some doubt persists because, in some instances, there is a clear benefit to be gained in accepting the label of addict: referral to a treatment centre instead of incarceration.<sup>(55)</sup>

Many statistical studies support the theory of a link between addiction to illegal drugs and criminal activity. Some Canadian and foreign studies have shown that the rate of use of illegal drugs is much higher among people who have been in contact with the criminal justice system than among the general population.<sup>(56)</sup>

In his 1994 report, the Chief Coroner of British Columbia stated that law enforcement agencies generally admit that many chronic drug users commit crimes to support their dependence. At the time, police officers in British Columbia estimated that 60% of crimes committed in the province were motivated by, although not directly linked to, drugs.<sup>(57)</sup> Furthermore, a report published in 1995 by the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police stated

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(55) S. Brochu, 1995, p. 78.

(56) S. Brochu, 1995, p. 17; E. Single, 1998, p. 3; H. Harwood *et al.*, 1998, Chapter 6, section 6.2.3; T. Makkai *et al.*, 2000; T. Bennett, *Drugs and Crime: The Results of Research on Drug Testing and Interviewing Arrestees*, Home Office Research Study 183, London: Home Office, 1998, p. 30.

(57) J.V. Cain, *Report of the Task Force into Illicit Narcotic Overdose Deaths in British Columbia*, Ministry of Attorney General, 1994, p. 66.



that most crimes against property (such as theft, break and enter, and fraud), as well as prostitution, are committed by drug users in order to feed their habit.<sup>(58)</sup>

Some Canadian research conducted among inmates also provides empirical evidence supporting the economic-compulsive model. According to one study conducted by Forget in 1990,<sup>(59)</sup> more than one-third of the individuals interviewed at the Montreal Detention Centre said that they had committed their crimes for the purpose of buying drugs. Similarly, the 1999 study by Brochu *et al.*<sup>(60)</sup> showed that nearly two-thirds of federal inmates who had used drugs on the day of the crime for which they were incarcerated reported having committed their crime in order to get money to buy drugs. That was the case for inmates who had committed the following crimes: theft (more than 83%); robbery (78%); fraud (70%); and break and enter (68%). The study also appears to confirm a strong link between the use of expensive drugs and the commission of criminal acts. Approximately 68% of cocaine users who answered the questionnaire reported that they had committed their crimes in order to get the money they needed to buy drugs.<sup>(61)</sup> Once again, it is important to interpret this information carefully. As discussed above, some offenders (consciously or not) use this strategy to justify their behaviour and reject responsibility for their actions.

Regular use of illegal drugs such as heroin and cocaine is expensive. The amount spent by addicts on drugs varies from report to report. However, researchers agree that drug addicts have three main sources of income: social assistance, acquisitive crime, and the illegal drug market.<sup>(62)</sup> A study conducted in Quebec in the 1990s found that expenses related to daily cocaine use could amount to \$43,000 a year.<sup>(63)</sup> In a more recent study of opiate users in Toronto, a sample of heroin users reported spending an average of \$3,133 on heroin in the

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(58) Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, *Canadian Drug Perspective – 1995*.

(59) C. Forget, “La consommation de substances psychoactives chez les détenus du Centre de détention de Montréal,” Université de Montréal, unpublished Master’s thesis, 1990.

(60) This study provides invaluable information for the analysis of the economic-compulsive model through a specific question inserted in the *Computerized Lifestyle Screening Instrument* distributed to all new federal inmates. The question is: “Was this crime committed to get or while trying to get drugs for your personal use?” S. Brochu *et al.*, 1999, p. 10.

(61) Note that this is again the most serious crime for which they had been incarcerated.

(62) B. Fischer *et al.*, “Illicit Opiates in Toronto: A Profile of Current Users,” *Addiction Research*, Vol. 7, No. 5, 1999, p. 382.

(63) M. Lecavalier, in S. Brochu, 1995, p. 66.

30 days preceding the study.<sup>(64)</sup> Most respondents (89.7%) in the sample who had already been arrested said that they were arrested primarily for illegal activities either related to their drug use or activities in which they were trying to get drugs or get money to buy drugs.<sup>(65)</sup>

In a British study based on four regions of the United Kingdom, the majority of arrestees who said that they thought that their drug use and crime were connected also said that the two were connected because they needed money to buy drugs (70%).<sup>(66)</sup> Another study of heroin addicts in Amsterdam found that some heroin users do commit crimes in order to buy drugs but that acquisitive crime accounts for only about one-quarter of their total income. Heroin addicts in Amsterdam derive most of their income from social security.<sup>(67)</sup> Social assistance is also the main source of income, apart from illegal activities, for opiate users in Toronto.<sup>(68)</sup>

Research has also shown that drug users' criminal activity varies greatly with the relationship they have with drugs.<sup>(69)</sup> The periods when users are dependent on a drug are often accompanied by increased criminal activity, whereas periods when they have no such dependency see an appreciable decline in such activity.<sup>(70)</sup> Studies of arrestees in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have shown a strong relationship between illegal drug use and illegal income. For example, the findings of the NEW-ADAM (New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring) study group showed that:

Arrestees who reported spending £100 or more on drugs reported ten times the number of offences as those who reported no expenditure on drugs. They also reported four times the mean number of offence types committed in the last 12 months, eight times more than the mean illegal income, and almost twice as many arrests.<sup>(71)</sup>

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(64) B. Fischer *et al.*, 1999, p. 396.

(65) *Ibid.*, p. 405.

(66) Trevor Bennett, *Drugs and Crime: The Results of the Second Developmental Stage of the NEW-ADAM Programme*, Home Office Research Study 205, London, Home Office, August 2000, p. 80.

(67) M. Grapendaal, E. Leuw and H. Nelen, *A World of Opportunities: Life-style and Economic Behavior of Heroin Addicts in Amsterdam*, State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 132.

(68) B. Fischer *et al.*, 1999, p. 377.

(69) See, *inter alia*, E.P. Deschesnes, M.D. Anglin and G. Speckart, "Narcotics Addiction: Related Criminal Careers, Social and Economic Costs," *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1991, pp. 383-411.

(70) P. Erickson, 1998; D.N. Nurco *et al.*, 1990, p. 83; M. Grapendaal *et al.*, 1995, p. 121; T. Bennett, 1998, p. 44; E. Leuw and I.H. Marshall, eds., *Between prohibition and legalization: the Dutch experiment in drug policy*, Kugler Publications, 1994, p. 248.

(71) T. Bennett, 2000, p. x.

The relationship that users are likely to have with drugs and crime is thus influenced to a large degree by their drug use profile. To afford a better grasp of these subtle points, researchers have proposed a typology consisting of three categories of users: experimenters or occasional users; regular users; and dependent users.

With regard to occasional users, the research tends to show that most will never use illegal drugs regularly. In the vast majority of cases, moreover, they will never adopt a deviant lifestyle and will generally choose legal ways of financing their illegal drug use. In most cases, crime will be a means of last resort.<sup>(72)</sup> Instead, it is the amount of available money that will dictate the purchase and use of drugs by these individuals.<sup>(73)</sup> Many studies suggest that only occasional users who have already adopted a deviant lifestyle prior to using drugs will likely commit offences to meet their needs.<sup>(74)</sup> These offences may help finance their drug use, but most will do it for the adrenaline rush and because they want a taste of life on the edge. This explanation of the relationship between drugs and crime seems particularly appropriate for young people.

For dependent users, dependency will very often have the effect of increasing their involvement in crime. However, it must be understood that this involvement will to a large extent be determined by their circumstances, the drug they use, their lifestyle, their attraction to certain types of activities, and their economic and social resources.<sup>(75)</sup> Research on the lifestyle and economic behaviour of heroin addicts in Amsterdam has indeed shown that 21% of the study sample reported not committing any crime prior to or during the research.<sup>(76)</sup> Furthermore, among the group of drug users who said they were involved in criminal activities, it was found that “[i]n total, acquisitive crime accounts for 24% of the total income. The most important source of income is social security.”<sup>(77)</sup> Although few studies have focused on the criminal involvement of more affluent addicts, research has nevertheless shown that users who were not

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(72) S. Brochu, “Drogues et criminalité : Point de vue critique sur les idées véhiculées,” *Déviance et société*, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1997, p. 305.

(73) S. Brochu, 1995.

(74) See, *inter alia*, S. Brochu, 1995; N. Brunelle, S. Brochu, and M-M. Cousineau, “Drug-crime relations among drug-consuming juvenile delinquents: A tripartite model and more,” *Contemporary Drug Problems*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Winter 2000, pp. 835-866.

(75) S. Brochu, 1995, p. 36.

(76) M. Grapendaal *et al.*, 1995, p. 190.

(77) *Ibid.*, p. 132.

involved in any form of crime at the time they became dependent and who have enough money to pay for their drug habits generally do not resort to criminal activities.<sup>(78)</sup> Criminal activity is thus not an inevitable outcome of drug use, even for individuals who have developed a dependency on a high-cost drug.

Furthermore, crime is not the only means by which dependent users pay for drugs.<sup>(79)</sup> Users may increase their usual money-earning activities while reducing their overall spending. Some occasional users will work overtime to make up the shortfall, while others will moonlight. They may also borrow money from friends or family members and even use resources intended for people in need (e.g., soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless) in order to reduce the amount they spend on their own meals and accommodation and thus free up money for drugs.<sup>(80)</sup> According to Brochu, many users prefer to stop using drugs rather than get involved in crime, and few fall into a form of crime that conflicts with their basic moral values<sup>(81)</sup> (e.g., prostitution or selling drugs to minors).

#### **b. Types of crime committed by drug users**

A number of studies have shown that the type of crime which stems from the need for money created by dependence on certain drugs is generally acquisitive and non-violent.<sup>(82)</sup> Although addicts who need money may at times engage in violent crime, the research tends to show that this type of crime is quite rare and that when it does occur, it very often springs from the context in which the crime is committed.

While some of these acts may be intrinsically violent, e.g. muggings or armed robbery, the violence may often result as the by-product of other factors in the social context in which the crime is perpetrated, e.g. when a victim returns home or wakes up during

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(78) See, *inter alia*, P.J. Goldstein, "Getting Over: Economic Alternatives to Predatory Crime Among Street Drug Users," in J. Inciardi, ed., *The Drugs-Crime Connection*, 1981.

(79) See, *inter alia*, S. Brochu, 1995, pp. 34-37.

(80) *Ibid.*

(81) *Ibid.*, p. 306.

(82) J.A. Inciardi, *The War on Drugs: Heroin, Cocaine Crime and Public Policy*, Palo Alto, Mayfield; Steven Duke and Albert Gross, *America's Longest War: Rethinking Our Tragic Crusade Against Drugs*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1993, p. 53; S. Brochu, "La violence et la drogue," *L'intervenant*, Vol. 16, No. 3, April 2000. In general, U.S. research tends to show that violent crime represents a very small portion (less than 3%) of crimes committed by illegal drug users. See, *inter alia*, D.N. Nurco *et al.*, 1990.

a break and enter, the resistance of the intended victim, the intercession of bystanders; such unanticipated occurrences may lead to an escalation in what could have been completed as a non-violent crime.<sup>(83)</sup>

The crimes most often committed by individuals who have developed an intense dependency on a drug and who do not have the financial and social means to obtain it are drug trafficking, prostitution, theft of property, break and enter, and fraud.<sup>(84)</sup> In general, the crimes favoured by users are those not requiring any particular expertise and for which there is a minor risk of prosecution. It should therefore not be surprising that the crimes they most often commit are theft within the family or in the workplace, shoplifting, and the theft of small items (e.g., bicycles and contents of automobiles).<sup>(85)</sup> Nor will it be surprising that most major drug users get involved in reselling illegal drugs in exchange for either money or drugs.<sup>(86)</sup> Women tend to engage in prostitution to a greater degree than do men. The difference may be attributable in particular to “the fact that it is difficult for women to gain access to other types of crime (e.g., trafficking) and the fact that they are economically dependent” as well as by the “traditional role of women as perceived by men.”<sup>(87)</sup>

That being said, beyond these figures and the impressions conveyed by the police and others, there is no existing empirical data that researchers can use to determine the percentage of crimes committed out of a need for money caused by drug dependence. Furthermore, the economic-compulsive model largely disregards some research findings, including the fact that: a number of drug users, even those who are dependent users, do not commit crimes other than those directly related to their drug use; and many drug users got involved in crime before they used drugs.

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(83) P. Erickson, 1998, p. 8.

(84) For a detailed analysis of the types of crime committed by drug addicts, see S. Brochu, 1995 and 1997.

(85) C.E. Faupel, *Shooting Dope: Career Pattern of Hard-core Heroin Users*, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991.

(86) D.E. Hunt, 1990, p. 194.

(87) S. Brochu, 1997, p. 308.

### 3. Systemic link

Violence is an integral part of the illegal drug distribution market.<sup>(88)</sup> It exists mainly because the drug market affords no legal way of obtaining justice when rules are violated. According to this explanatory model of the relationship between drugs and crime, the profit opportunities perceived by the various players in the market and the fierce competition in this illegal environment encourage involvement in crime, such as: disputes between dealers, problems involved in recovering debts, protection rackets, etc. On this point, Erickson contends that:

While legally regulated markets, such as those in alcohol or pharmaceuticals, have recourse to legitimate authority to resolve disputes and set standards for fair competition, those involved in an illegal, high profit market resort mainly to force.<sup>(89)</sup>

Crime in the drug world is often caused by rivalries among individuals attempting to corner the market. This violence may involve various players – including traffickers, importers, merchants or dealers – and may be intended to control various territories, such as a neighbourhood, street or school. Violence is then used as an organizational management strategy.<sup>(90)</sup> Its use is easily understood when one thinks of the high economic stakes involved in the illegal drug market.<sup>(91)</sup>

A Canadian study of drug dealers on probation provided an updated view of the frequent use of violence in the context of the drug trade. According to the study's findings, slightly more than half of the drug dealers interviewed (56%) admitted they had used violence in their activities.<sup>(92)</sup> These figures are not surprising in view of the context in which the dealings take place because:

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(88) C.E. Faupel, 1991; D.E. Hunt, 1990.

(89) P. Erickson, 1998, p. 13.

(90) S. Brochu, 1995, p. 92.

(91) D.C. McBride, "Drugs and Violence," in J. Inciardi, ed., *The Drugs-Crime Connection*, 1981, p. 113; M. Joubert, "Les toxicomanes dans la ville. Marché et lien social," *La revue Agora*, Paris, No. 27-28, Fall 1993, p. 116.

(92) P. Erickson, 1998.

Buying and selling drugs requires a face-to-face interaction in which the dealer is trying to sell the lowest quality at the highest price, while presenting the drug as the highest quality at the lowest price.<sup>(93)</sup>

Some Canadian statistics provide an overview of the extent of this type of crime. In 1997, the police reported that 12% of homicides with a known motive were linked to drugs.<sup>(94)</sup> This extremely violent crime once again represents only a portion of total crime in the drug world. According to Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, a number of these violent crimes result from wars between criminal organizations involved in drug smuggling in Canada.<sup>(95)</sup> The data collated by the Service suggest that:

As of the end of 1998, the war between the *HELLS ANGELS* and the *ROCK MACHINE*, which began in July 1994, has resulted in 103 homicides, 124 murder attempts, 9 missing persons, 84 bombings and 130 incidents of arson, for a total of 450 violent incidents.<sup>(96)</sup>

Apart from these incomplete data, however, it is impossible to quantify all the crime stemming from the illegal drug market in Canada. The same statement applies to the United States, as there are very few studies on the topic. However, as noted earlier, one study of drug-related homicides in New York in the 1980s did find that the most common type of drug-related homicide was systemic, accounting for 74% of drug-related homicides in New York City in 1988.<sup>(97)</sup> Although few experts question the assertion that violence is an integral part of that market, it is difficult to get a clear handle on this type of crime:

[Translation] Apart from media accounts, very few studies have attempted to verify this model empirically. One factor that might explain researchers' lack of interest in this approach lies in the fact that few victims appeal to police departments. Resellers definitely have no interest in reporting thefts of drugs and money which they have suffered. If they do, they have every interest in concealing certain information. They may report an amount of money stolen, taking care not to disclose its source. Thus it becomes very difficult to identify the systemic crime with any accuracy and to distinguish it from general crime.<sup>(98)</sup>

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(93) D.C. McBride, 1981, p. 112.

(94) S. Tremblay, 1999, p. 7.

(95) Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, *Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs, 1999*, p. 4. Available online at <http://www.cisc.gc.ca/Cisc99/omg.html>.

(96) *Ibid.*

(97) P.J. Goldstein and H.H. Brownstein, 1992.

(98) S. Brochu, 1995, p. 101.

## PROFILE OF A GROUP OF MARIJUANA USERS

There are very few studies of long-term users, particularly cannabis users, which is surprising considering that cannabis is the most widely used illegal drug in the world. The United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention (UNDCP) estimates in their *World Drug Report 2000* that 180 million people worldwide used illegal drugs in the late 1990s; of that group, 144.1 million people used cannabis, which represents 3.4% of the world's population age 15 and older.<sup>(99)</sup> One recent study<sup>(100)</sup> investigated the characteristics and patterns of cannabis and other drug use among long-term users in the North Coast of New South Wales, a rural area of Australia with high levels of cannabis cultivation and use, and reported the following findings:

- **Characteristics and patterns** – The study involved 268 adults with a mean age of 36.4 years. They were well educated, with 62% having obtained further educational qualifications since leaving school. Their main sources of income were employment (48%) and government benefits (42%). Respondents had a long history of regular cannabis use (an average of 19 years), and most had ready access to cannabis, with two-thirds growing cannabis for their own use. The majority used cannabis daily (60%), with a median of two joints per day.<sup>(101)</sup>
- **Contexts and perceptions of cannabis use** – Cannabis is most often used in social settings with most users (67%) usually or always sharing cannabis with family and friends. Slightly more than half of the respondents (54%) lived in a household with children under 16 years of age and of these, 52% indicated that they either used less cannabis when the children were around or that they used cannabis away from the children. Most performed their normal daily activities either during or after smoking cannabis. The vast majority (90%) reported that they drove a motor vehicle at least occasionally soon after using cannabis and more than half (60%) had operated machinery after using cannabis. Respondents reported that they used cannabis for relaxation or relief of tension (61%) and for enjoyment or to feel good (27%). Most respondents also reported some negative aspects of cannabis use including the illegality of cannabis use (29%), the high costs of cannabis (14%), and the social stigma of

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(99) United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, *World Drug Report 2000*, United Nations, 2000, p. 70.

(100) D. Reilly, P. Didcott *et al.*, “Long Term Cannabis Use: Characteristics of Users in an Australian Rural Area,” *Addiction*, Vol. 93, No. 6, June 1998, downloaded 1 August 2001 from the Library of Parliament databases (Academic Search Elite).

(101) *Ibid.*



being a cannabis user (11%). However, 72% believed that the benefits outweighed the risks. The most widely used drugs other than cannabis were alcohol and tobacco, but most had also used other illicit drugs in their lifetime.<sup>(102)</sup>

- **Involvement with the legal system** – Just over one-quarter of the respondents (26%) had ever been charged for possession, 11% for cultivation and 6% for supply, and 12% had been arrested for other drug-related offences. Most of the offences had occurred some years prior to the study with only 22% of cannabis cases in the past three years. The percentage of non-drug offences was low, with the most common being drinking-driving (8%), stealing (6%), traffic offences (6%), robbery and assault (3%), and miscellaneous offences (8%).<sup>(103)</sup>

These data are pertinent because they show that some regular cannabis users (an average of almost 20 years of use) commit very few crimes not related to drugs and do not use other illegal drugs on a regular basis. However, before any conclusions can be drawn, more studies will have to be carried out to analyze the profile of regular users of cannabis and other illegal drugs; this will not be an easy task given the difficulty locating and obtaining input from this type of population, which is still considered a deviant group.

## CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed a number of studies dealing with the relationship between illegal drug use and crime in an effort to illustrate the complexity of the connection between drug use and crime.

After examining the link between the legal status of certain drugs and crime, the paper discussed three theoretical models which endeavour to explain the relationship between drug use and crime: the psychopharmacological link; the economic-compulsive link; and the systemic link. A study on regular cannabis users was then presented.

The evidence demonstrated that the closest link between drug use and crime occurs in drug users who are dependent on expensive drugs but cannot afford to buy them. Even then, the relationship is not automatic, because crime is not an inevitable consequence of drug use, even for users who are addicted to drugs such as heroin and cocaine. Involvement in crime also varies depending on the economic, cultural and social context. Finally, some users simply

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(102) *Ibid.*

(103) *Ibid.*

choose to stop using drugs rather than commit crimes (with or without the support of organizations which help drug addicts).

As well, the mere fact that crimes are committed by drug users is not enough to say that drug use does cause crime or *vice versa*. It is more likely that drug use intensifies and perpetuates the commission of criminal offences.<sup>(104)</sup> Drug use is only one factor among a group of variables that may account for criminal behaviour; other variables include physiological, psychological and behavioural, family, cultural, social, economic and situational factors. The research does confirm that a number of links can be established between illegal drug use and crime but that those links are not necessarily causal in nature and more closely resemble variables in the complex relationship between drugs and crime. As Brochu wrote:

[Translation] The relationship between drugs and crime is not as easy to understand as some claim. The triangular relationship between a person, a product and a behaviour is complex and cannot be defined in a simple formula no matter how appealing. Care must be taken to avoid the tendency to reduce reality to simplifications that distort it.<sup>(105)</sup>

The consequences of this observation for drug intervention and policy development are considerable. An approach that would fail to treat all factors contributing to drug use and crime or that would attribute a causal role exclusively to drug use would inevitably result in the implementation of ineffective policies. As suggested by this brief literature review, the whole concept of “drug-related crime” which features in most of the policy documents and research in this area needs to be re-thought.

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(104) E. Leuw and I.H. Marshall, 1994, p. 248.

(105) S. Brochu, 1997, p. 311.