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Drugs and Crime

Serge Brochu, Natacha Brunelle, Chantal Plourde, Julie da Silva

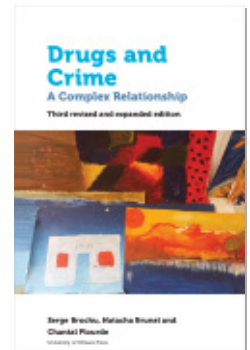
Published by University of Ottawa Press

Brochu, Serge, et al.

Drugs and Crime: A Complex Relationship. Third revised and expanded edition.

Third revised and expanded edition ed. University of Ottawa Press, 2018.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/57959.



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Introduction

The idea that drugs can have negative effects on users and lead people to commit crimes is not new, but is it valid? In this book, we take a practical, scientific approach toward better understanding the relationships between drugs and crime. Our research focuses on how those relationships develop, but before delving into the heart of the matter, we will discuss the factors that enable us to understand the consumption trajectories leading to criminal behaviour, and vice versa. We will conclude on a positive note with a discussion of how to break the drug–crime cycle and the effectiveness of services available to help drug-dependent people involved in the justice system.

Research into drugs and crime is shaped primarily by how these matters are understood and approached, which may be influenced by personal or corporate interests (Szabo 1992). We must remember that scientists function within an economic and socio-political context in which power relations influence the subjects being studied and influences knowledge as a whole. Over half of the scientific literature about drugs and crime is produced in the United States. Our body of knowledge draws heavily on American research, which exerts an undeniable influence on the scientific world. The United States is, however, atypical in its approach to managing people's drug use. Although some states have legalized cannabis, the federal government still exercises strict control over users. The United States imprisons drug users by the thousands, yet is reluctant to enact gun control laws. There can

be no doubt that the relationships between drugs and crime are influenced by this social context. Research produced by our neighbours to the south is carried out against a backdrop of repression. Participants in studies on illicit drugs are very often individuals deprived of their liberty (incarcerated, in a treatment program as an alternative to incarceration, etc.). While the results of studies on relationships between drugs and crime are valid for a repressive environment where guns circulate relatively freely, are they valid in other contexts? Science, of course, is never *pure*. Scientists operate in a particular socio-historical context that colours the perception of the subjects and the study's results. In this sense, science is quite simply *human*.

For these reasons, the third edition of this book relies more heavily than previous editions on Canadian studies to paint a picture of our own reality.

Illegal Psychoactive Substances in Canada

Canada's stance on illegal drugs and drug users is incongruous. Moralistic new laws and federal government actions over the past decade have clearly led to greater repression and difficulty accessing substances as well as to potentially dangerous drug use practices. Policies seem to be based on the notion of drugs as diabolical substances that cause social disorder by bewitching weak-minded individuals who seek out hedonistic pleasures. Those who subscribe to this ideological position believe that drug users become marginalized through their own deviance and antisocial behaviour and that it would be pointless to normalize society's relationship with them.

Canadians nevertheless realize that incarceration does not solve drug users' problems and that making appropriate treatment available to those who need it is a better option. Canadians are open to the idea of making treatment available, but many people have a not-in-my-backyard attitude toward services for drug-dependent individuals. Many people believe that heavy users have a disease that requires treatment, perhaps even against their will, and society seems to accept an enforcement regime widely believed to be pro-treatment.

More and more Canadians believe that the use of psychoactive substances is a phase or, at worst, a relatively harmless lifestyle choice. They tend to find the idea of cannabis legalization appealing precisely because they would not have to come into contact with the criminal element. Its status would be more akin to that of regulated drugs in

Canada, such as tobacco and alcohol. It goes without saying that, in 2017, the public's perception of illegal drugs and drug users is quite different from its attitude toward alcohol and alcohol-dependent individuals, which is why we have decided to exclude alcohol from our analyses. We are in no way suggesting that individuals who consume alcohol are not involved in criminal activity; on the contrary, alcohol is the substance most often associated with violent crime. Nevertheless, we have chosen to focus our analyses on illegal substances, which are distinct because repression reinforces user marginalization. This unique relationship is the primary focus of this book.

Drug Use and Criminal Behaviour

This book was written for people who no longer subscribe to pat assertions about psychoactive substances leading to criminal behaviour and who want to dig deeper. The triangular relationship among an individual, a substance, and their context is complex and cannot be boiled down to a pithy phrase, no matter how catchy. In this volume, readers will discover the results of major research projects carried out over the past twenty years that paint an accurate picture of the current situation.

This third edition takes into account the upsurge of research into drugs and crime. It presents robust qualitative studies carried out in recent years that place greater emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of illegal drug users and drug-dependent people.

In chapter 1, we lay out facts and figures to show that drugs and crime are indeed interrelated. We find evidence of very high rates of drug use within the justice-involved population. In chapter 2, we further explore the criminogenic nature of drugs. We examine two situations in particular: the effects of intoxication and the consequences of dependence. Chapter 2 also details documented links between various substances and criminal behaviour. In chapter 3, we delve into the policies and laws governing drugs that are currently illegal in Canada. We review how the existing legal framework came to be and how current policies might be improved upon with respect to drug users. Armed with that knowledge, in chapter 4, we present a review of classic conceptual models that seek to explain the relationships between drugs and crime, and, in chapter 5, we discuss the notion of trajectory and its contribution to our understanding of these dynamic relationships. In chapter 6, we lay out the elements of an "updated"

conceptual model that takes into account the latest research about the relationships between drugs and crime. We must be aware that modelling is, by definition, reductionist. It is merely a tool that enables us to better apprehend the facts. The last chapter focuses on treatments available to drug-dependent individuals in the justice system and on factors that can help those who are beginning the rehabilitation process. Our goal is to answer the following basic questions: Who? Why? What? How? Who are the people involved? Why are they involved? What are they involved in? How can we help them?

The relationships between drugs and crime will remain relevant for years to come. This work will have achieved its goal if it succeeds in presenting every facet of those complex relationships.