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Drugs and Crime

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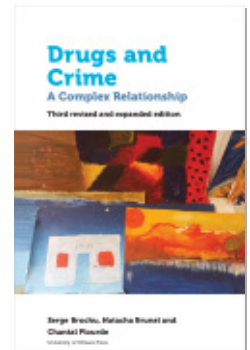
Published by University of Ottawa Press

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.

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Deviant Lifestyles: An Integrated Conceptualization

In this chapter, we will integrate the findings we have presented so far as we break down the relationship between drugs and crime.¹ Our goal is to enable the reader to grasp its full complexity and better understand the ins and outs. We will make use of the conceptual models introduced in chapter 4 and the notions of trajectory we analyzed in chapter 5.

A number of authors, chief among them Goldstein (1987), adopted an essentially deterministic perspective to show how drug use can lead to crime. In their view, be it because of the psychopharmacological effects, the need for money to support an addiction, or violence associated with the illegal distribution system, psychoactive substances are the prime mover for a significant number of crimes. Analysis of these causal models reveals that they are typically developed as either/or propositions. The inverse proximal model is a good illustration of that because it pins the origin of problem drug use on delinquency. In chapter 5, we made it clear that the drug–crime dynamic can also evolve over time.

The concepts of *career* and *trajectory* add another dimension to that static analysis (Brunelle 2001; Faupel 1991; Kokoreff 2005). These concepts are useful because they provide a good description of how people who become regular drug users learn and develop patterns of behaviour and because they take changes in the drug–crime dynamic into account (Brunelle, Cousineau, and Brochu 2005).

We can agree that problem drug use is a complex behaviour in constant flux involving the interplay of myriad past and present, public and private, objective and subjective factors (Bellot 2005; Brochu et al. 2014). Our conceptualization of the drug–crime relationship must therefore go beyond notions of intoxication, dependence, and illicit markets to incorporate personal, subjective experiences. The conceptual models we analyzed in chapter 4 probably represented the outcome of time-limited, one-dimensional observations—snapshots—of this phenomenon. Furthermore, although the trajectory concept discussed in chapter 5 seems well-suited to describing drug use as an ever-evolving process, it glosses over how individuals subjectively experience events and interpret facts (Brochu and Parent 2005).

The deviant lifestyle concept is a construct that offers insight into the subjective reality of a social actor constantly interacting with his or her environment. It identifies a propensity for non-conformist, marginal, illegal, and antisocial behaviours, among others. This attitude and the resulting behaviours eventually shape the identity of the person who adopts them (Brochu and Brunelle 1997). This chapter is based primarily on the notion of *deviant lifestyle*.

The Integrative Model

Qualitative, ethnological, and phenomenological studies, which involve more contact with the actors involved, point to the importance of idiosyncrasy and the evolution of the drug–crime dynamic. Knowledge accumulated over the past thirty years, including what our own research group, RISQ,² has discovered, has supplied enough pieces to put together an integrative model explaining drug–crime relationships. Our model takes into account risk factors, deviant lifestyle, and progression factors. The following core schematic representation situates these elements relative to one another. The integrative model presented here amalgamates two complementary models, one by Brochu, first published in 1995, and the other by Brunelle, Brochu, and Cousineau, first published in 2005 and refined in 2010 by Brunelle and Bertrand. Merging the two yields a new integrative model. Now that we have identified its principal elements, we can better define and articulate them.

Although the schematic representation of this model (see fig. 6.1) may suggest a linear conceptualization, this is in no way the case. While some conditions are prerequisites for the adoption of particular

behaviours, they never fully explain those behaviours. Humans, even when intoxicated or dependent on a drug, have a will of their own and ascribe phenomenological meaning to their behaviour and their path through life. These meanings can continually influence an individual's trajectory.

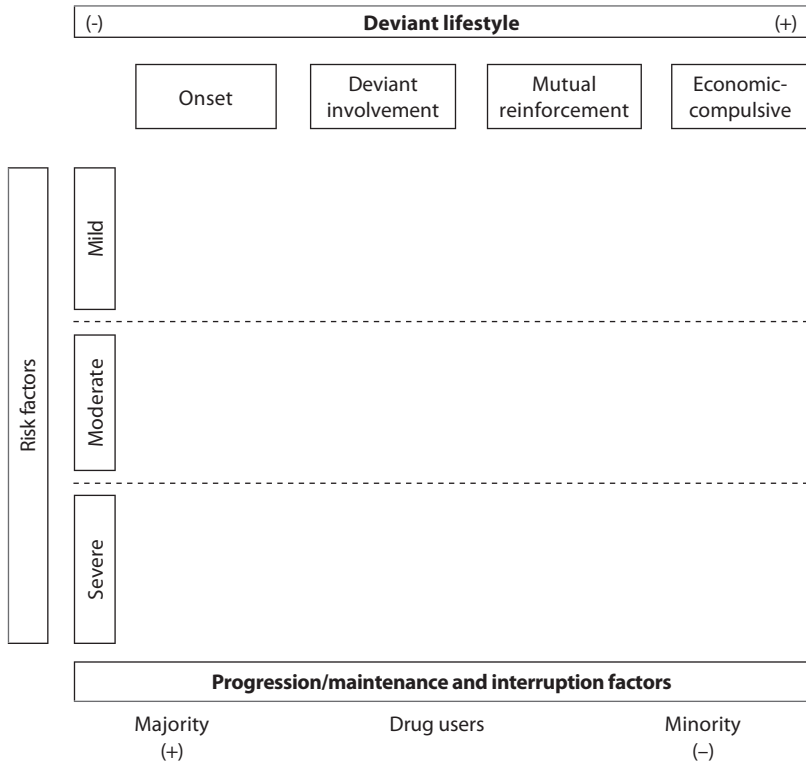


FIGURE 6.1. Core integrative model.

Risk Factors

As we saw in chapter 4, a number of risk factors promote the emergence of a lifestyle that deviates from the norms upheld by the dominant social classes. For example, early drug use and delinquency are much-documented risk factors. Basically, there are situations, contexts, and environments that increase a person's risk of adopting a deviant lifestyle, and the same variables influence the likelihood of a person exhibiting a range of delinquent behaviours or consuming illicit psychoactive substances.

However, our findings put us at odds with traditional research on risk factors that assigns an actuarial value to these risk factors for predicting deviant behaviour. Predicting whether such behaviours will occur based on combinations of risk factors is error-prone (Brochu and Parent 2005; Brunelle, Brochu, and Cousineau 2005). Of greater importance here are the subjective significance and synergies among these factors from the perspective of the social actor, as well as the presence of protective factors, all of which augment or diminish the relative weight of risk factors. From our point of view, individuals must be considered social actors who organize their lives according to who they are, what they experience, what they feel, and what they understand. Risk factors play a greater or lesser role depending on the meaning a social actor attributes to them and the interpretations associated with them.

To assess the intensity of the risk factors present, we must consider not only these subjective elements themselves, but also what happens when they interact synergistically. For example, with respect to socialization institutions, parent–child relationships and school attendance can be good or poor, but cutting class or dropping out can have much more negative repercussions for a student with a dysfunctional or non-existent parent–child relationship. Furthermore, risk factors can have a greater or lesser impact depending on the individual’s maturity (self-control, empathy, and attachment), social capital (resources), and the presence of protective factors (family and school environment, certain recreational activities, certain moral values, etc.).

The social actor’s subjectivity, risk-factor synergies, and the presence of protective factors interact to determine the degree to which risk factors influence a person’s life. The likelihood of embarking on a deviant trajectory varies according to risk factor intensity. For illustrative purposes, our integrative schema depicts three levels of risk intensity: mild, moderate, and severe.

Deviant Lifestyles

It is clear from longitudinal research and large national studies focusing on adolescents that experimental drug use rarely leads to criminality, so its root causes must be found elsewhere. Nevertheless, drugs do mingle quite readily with other deviant behaviours. Is there some explanation for this other than linear proximate cause models? The

distal model presented in chapter 4 covered a broad range of socially deviant conduct, including delinquency and illicit drug use by some adolescents. We will now expand on that model by adding degrees of permeation and stages of progression.

The deviant lifestyle concept is based on phenomenological postulates about how individuals and their inherent subjectivity are central to understanding their behaviour. This is a particularly interesting concept because it enables us to integrate new knowledge about risk factors while observing these elements through a different lens. Here, the user's behaviours are seen as linked to the personal meaning they bear rather than resulting from external determinism. There may be more to a drug user's delinquent act than the mere instrumental acquisition of drugs. As we saw in earlier chapters, not all illicit drug users become dependent, delinquency is not the only way for people who misuse illicit psychoactive substances to get by, and not all drug-dependent people are involved in crime to the same extent. People commit crimes not only for economic-compulsive reasons, but also to fulfil marginal aspirations tied to the sociocultural context.

The deviant lifestyle concept offers insight into how individuals exposed to particular risk factors construct their identity and why they adopt certain deviant behaviours. These factors include failure (e.g., school or work) and rejection (e.g., family or ethnic group), a person's resulting self-esteem and beliefs, and meaning ascribed to experiences and deviant behaviour (Brochu and Brunelle 1997; Kaplan 1995). This is how a lifestyle that can be considered deviant comes together for some people (Becker 1963; Brochu and Brunelle 1997; Brochu, Bergeron et al. 2002; da Agra 2002).

At times, this concept has been associated with moralizing, Manichaeism, or pathologizing conceptualizations. To avoid attaching a pejorative sense to the concept, and to avoid confusion, we want to clarify exactly what we mean by "deviant lifestyle" here (Brochu and Brunelle 1997; Brochu et al. 2002; da Agra 2005). As we see it, going off the beaten path can open the door to healthy creativity and progress. However, unconventional pathways may sometimes include deviant acts that are harmful to the individual, to those around him or her, or to social institutions. Harmful use of psychoactive substances and delinquent acts are generally associated with deviance. While there is no social consensus around this idea, to many researchers (Brochu and Brunelle 1997; Brochu et al. 2002; da Agra 1986; Grapendaal, Leuw, and Nelen 1995), the word "deviance" is a relatively neutral term

meaning the violation of a norm stemming from a social construct. That is how we view the notion of deviant lifestyle in this chapter.

Degrees of Permeation

As with risk factors, deviant lifestyle is not a simple dichotomy—present or absent—but a spectrum of intensity. To varying degrees of intensity, deviant lifestyles may include illicit psychoactive substance use, criminal activity, or in many cases both.

People with weak deviant tendencies (exposed to risk factors that are fewer in number, lower in intensity, or viewed as less significant by the individual) can easily hold down a job while cultivating a rebellious side that they express when it does not conflict too much with their work or social life. They may adhere to many prosocial values that prevent them from adopting a fully deviant lifestyle and try to reconcile their marginal tendencies with the values endorsed by dominant social classes. Their illicit drug use may go on for a relatively long period of time without coming into conflict with their other activities. In fact, it may go hand in hand with some of those activities and can even be used to enhance their performance at work (Peele 1989). This type of drug use is an indulgence that does not put a strain on their budget.

In comparison, the notion of work means something completely different to people with strong deviant tendencies. They have a hard time bending to the yoke of a nine-to-five office job and may opt for unlawful alternatives rather than a more conventional trajectory. Illicit drugs are likely to have a greater presence in their social context. More intense deviant involvement can promote more frequent and more serious consumption and delinquency.

For our schematic illustration purposes, we begin by associating each level of risk with income from deviant activities of varying severity: mild (legal income), moderate (petty theft), severe (more blatant delinquency). As we will see in the next section, these risk levels are also indicators of the length of a drug–crime trajectory.

Stages of Progression

Deviant lifestyles are not fixed in time or bound to a single invariable trajectory. Subtle or substantial evolution can occur due to personal factors (Dérivois 2004) and the influence of external variables

(which we will analyze in the section on progression and interruption factors).

All individuals are constantly evolving and adapting in response to internal realities (emotions and beliefs) and external pressures. Our evolution is not sudden and complete; we each follow our own life course, and our lifestyle is affected by our evolution. This is what da Agra (1999) calls a *processual explanation*. As we probe the links between drugs and crime, we must consider the individual's evolutionary process within the context of their life.

At each stage, many possible interactions can influence the direction of the individual's trajectory. Young users typically begin their progression by consuming legal psychoactive substances used by the adults around them (generally tobacco and alcohol, which adolescents cannot legally buy). Some then go on to use illicit substances that society tolerates somewhat (marijuana), while others begin to consume products that are more strictly forbidden (amphetamines, cocaine, crack, heroin, etc.). Type of use also follows a progression. As we saw in the previous chapter, the drug use pathway begins with occasional or experimental use, from which some progress to regular use and a very few become dependent. This progression inevitably alters the drug-crime relationship, which can differ markedly depending on the stage in an individual's trajectory. Our model identifies four stages during which links between drugs and crime appear, evolve, and may crystallize. The stages are onset, deviant involvement, mutual reinforcement, and economic-compulsive.

Onset (see fig. 6.2) is marked by occasional, generally light drug use. Consumption is a function of contact with other users and available funds, and is motivated by pleasure and curiosity. During this first stage of the deviant lifestyle, adolescents and young adults use drugs haphazardly as opportunities arise. People who engage in a mildly deviant lifestyle are likely to pay for their drugs with money from work or other legal sources of funds, but those who adopt a more deviant lifestyle may commit petty theft or more serious crimes to pay for their drugs. In such cases, criminality creates favourable conditions for drug use: crime supplies income, and friends supply contacts and social support for drug use (see the inverse proximal model in chapter 4). Regardless of the degree of deviant lifestyle permeation, available funds constitute both an incentive to use drugs and a rigid, limiting factor. Drugs are a discretionary expense subject to the ebb and flow of income and opportunity.

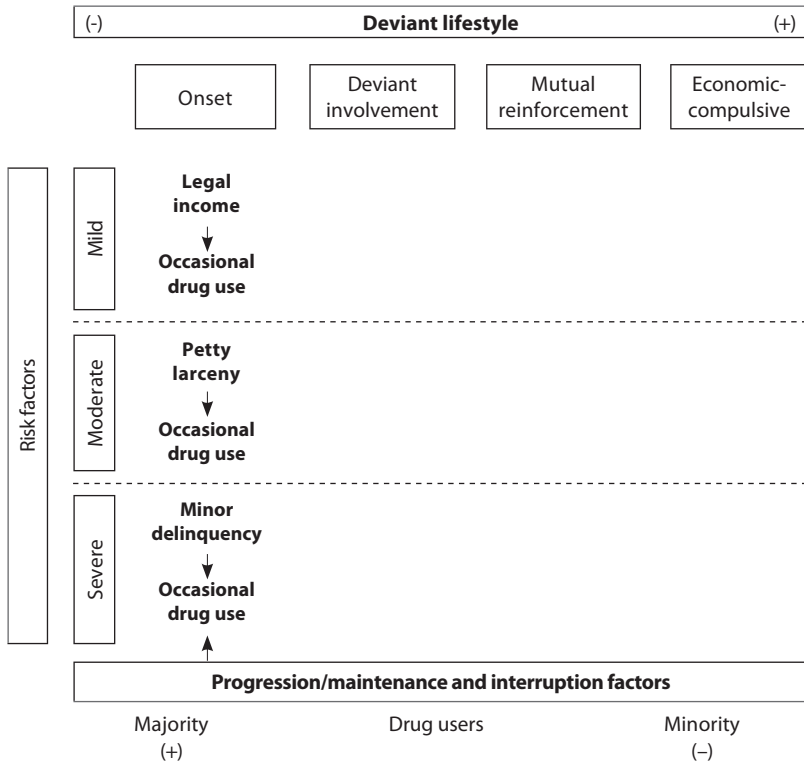


FIGURE 6.2. Onset stage.

For many people, this stage serves as an introduction to a different, unconventional lifestyle, changes how they feel about prohibited activities, and provides access to a peer group that enables them to pursue their nascent deviant tendencies.

Deviant involvement (see fig. 6.3) is marked by more frequent drug use that, though typically not problem use, can be abusive or risky. Initial positive experiences with drugs motivate users to keep using. Users do not experience the negative effects and consequences of drug use while using occasionally. Humans, being what they are, seek to re-experience known pleasure. However, at the deviant involvement stage, individuals may intensify their drug use because they want to belong to a peer group. The inverse proximal model also applies to young people. Their contact with other deviant individuals and their illegal income enables them to consume more drugs. Drug use can also play a utilitarian role because users feel it gives them the nerve

to commit certain crimes, and they may be intoxicated during delinquent acts. Drug use, in this case, may facilitate crime. It is difficult to discern whether perpetration can be attributed to the user's expectations about the effects of a substance or to the substance's actual psychopharmacological effects. Regardless, the intention to commit the crime precedes drug use, so the drug is in no way responsible for the unlawful activity. Illegal behaviour is a little more frequent and diversified here than in the previous stage. It may be expressed as minor theft, such as shoplifting, theft of less than \$20, and fraud.

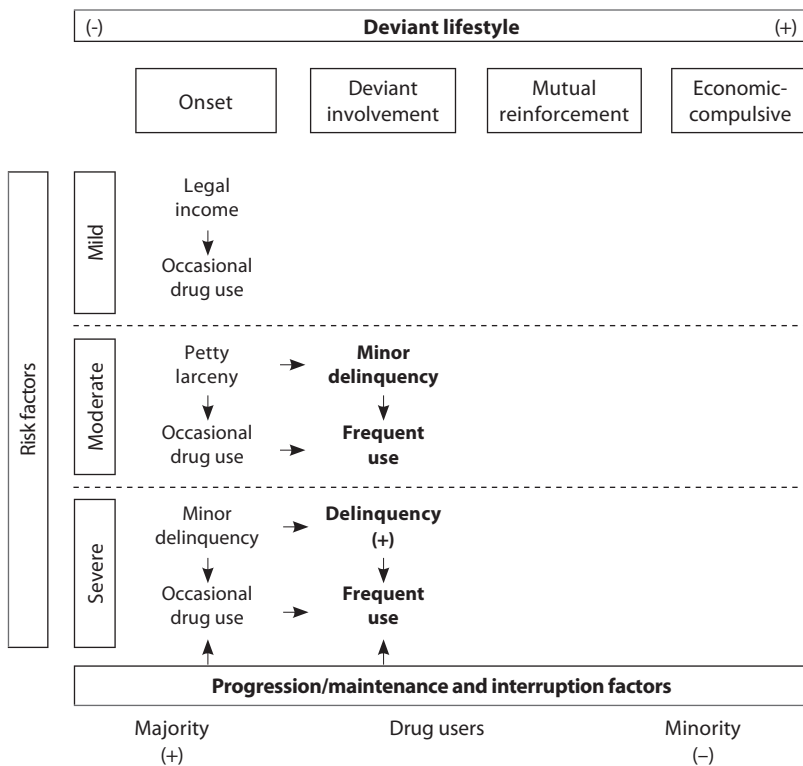


FIGURE 6.3. Deviant involvement stage.

If individuals subsequently begin to consume costly illegal drugs regularly, their delinquent behaviour is likely to become more frequent and varied and to include gradual involvement in drug dealing, first as one-off favours for friends, then in a more organized and regular fashion. As we saw earlier, this type of activity seems virtually unavoidable as a means of supporting sustained use of costly illicit

psychoactive substances, particularly for individuals from disadvantaged social classes. This has less to do with the demands of addiction than with the user's seeing an opportunity to minimize spending on drugs and enjoy easier access to the substances they want. Involvement in the drug trade can also lead to systemic criminality. Easy access to drugs can in turn have the adverse effect of increasing drug use significantly (Brochu and Parent 2005).

At the *mutual reinforcement* stage (see fig. 6.4), consumption is still governed primarily by available income, and it is plausible that some individuals would never have become involved in drug dealing had they never consumed illicit drugs. We therefore show a two-way link between sources of income and regular drug use: drugs become both the cause and the consequence of delinquency. The drug-crime relationship is one of circular causality, not linear causality, and mutual reinforcement prolongs both drug use and delinquency trajectories. More so than at previous stages, crimes are often committed while the individual is intoxicated. Meanwhile, one's degree of involvement in crime that is not related to the drug trade is a function of earlier deviant lifestyle permeation.

Generally, the deeper that permeation, the more frequent, varied, and serious (theft of \$500 or more) the delinquency. Users may engage in activities related to sex work (although sex work itself is no longer illegal in Canada), which can lead to an increase in consumption because they have more disposable income and because drugs numb the emotional impact of sex work, if only temporarily. At this stage, users may be motivated by a desire to forget or escape the consequences of delinquency or even drug use itself, as well as feelings about a traumatic event.

We will return to this consideration below. This general description of the mutual reinforcement stage paints a picture of individuals who adopt a moderately or highly deviant lifestyle; other users have probably not progressed beyond occasional drug use. Eventually, the fact that drugs are always available and that users and their peers admire drug culture can thrust some individuals into dependence.

Ultimately, drugs claim their due from individuals who become *dependent*. Addicts report that the demands are implacable and financially onerous. At this point, delinquency supports drug use, and the individual has reached the *economic-compulsive stage* (see fig. 6.5). It is here that the economic-compulsive model truly applies. Initial forays into lucrative crime escalate as the user spends more and more money

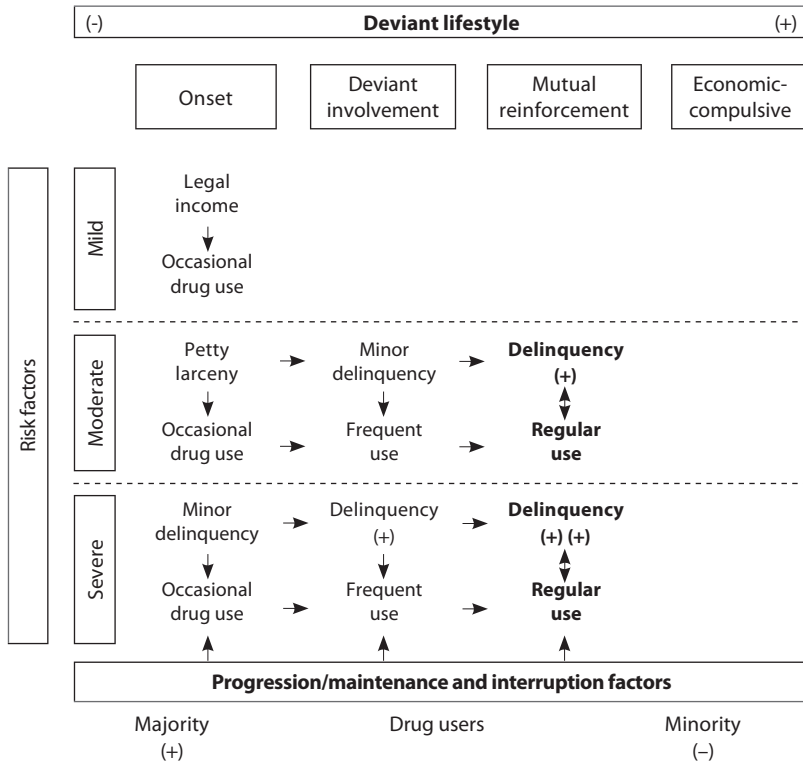


FIGURE 6.4. Mutual reinforcement stage.

on drugs and lacks the legal income to keep up; this is the catalyzing effect of dependence on a costly product. Delinquency also becomes more serious at this stage and may include robbery, which users see as a quick way to get money to buy drugs, especially when they are experiencing withdrawal or are under pressure to repay large debts. Also at this stage, drug use may be motivated primarily by a desire to forget, as users try to escape the negative aspects of their reality. It is only at this stage that a person's drug use can be considered the cause of their delinquency. However, insofar as using psychoactive substances is a conscious and deliberate process, criminal activities appear to increase in frequency and severity primarily among individuals who have chosen a delinquent lifestyle; others put an end to their drug use once the criminal component gets too serious.

The level of deviant involvement prior to initiation of drug use is a major factor in the development of delinquency. Progression

toward dependence seems much more likely for individuals who have been exposed to many major risk factors and who have already adopted a highly deviant lifestyle. We must not forget, however, that only a minority of users reach the economic-compulsive stage. It is also worth noting that, since such individuals are frequently intoxicated, they very often commit their lucrative or violent crimes while under the influence of a substance. The psychopharmacological effects of drugs and even the user's expectations about those effects probably play an even more important role at the economic-compulsive stage.

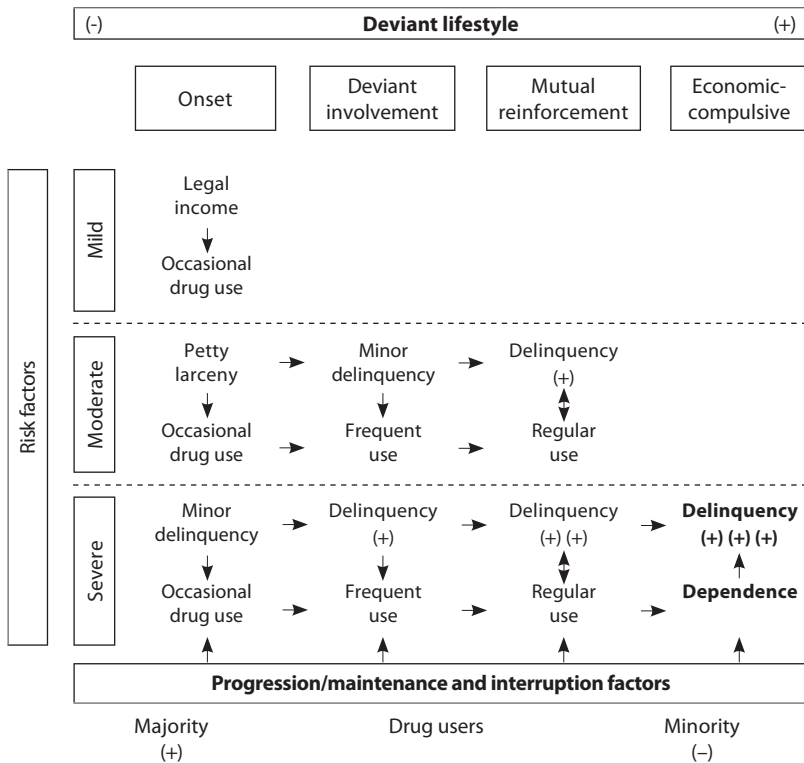


FIGURE 6.5. Economic-compulsive stage.

By focusing on the stages of progression, we may have given the reader the impression that deviant progression is just a matter of time. Like Dérivois (2004), we must emphasize that progression toward a deviant trajectory occurs when an individual repeats an act and attaches a symbolic value to that act (symbolization). Isolated drug use episodes

typically result in few deleterious effects in the long term; repetition, however, can put the user on a drug use trajectory. Even so, repetition alone does not explain the most deviant trajectories. For more insight, we must look to the complexity of psychological processes and users' symbolization of the acts they repeat until they become central to his or her identity.

In essence, the concept of *lifestyle* refers here to the step-by-step construction of a deviant identity that makes it possible for people to cast off certain values and gradually adopt new behaviours. Without really realizing it, the social actor plays an active role in constructing this identity. We see the notion of lifestyle as a construct that integrates the actor's personal dispositions and his or her propensity for adopting behaviours and ways of life that are adaptive, marginal, or deviant to varying degrees, thus validating his or her existence and defining his or her identity. Drugs are certainly part of this lifestyle, but they are not the only part of it. It is created, constructed, and reinforced by the actor–context interaction. Let us now examine in detail the progression/maintenance and interruption factors of the deviant lifestyle.

Although exposure to risk factors, generally in childhood and adolescence, plays a role in deviance permeation, our studies (Brunelle, Cousineau, and Brochu 2002a; Brochu and Parent 2005) suggest that more contemporary factors in the social actor's life have a greater influence over his or her deviant trajectory. These are the progression/maintenance and interruption factors that we discussed in chapter 5.

Certain factors in people's lives create the right conditions for progressing along or maintaining a deviant trajectory; others are linked to a reduction, cessation, or interruption of the behaviours we are examining, an interruption in the trajectory. As we have seen, the most important progression and maintenance factors are the properties and effects of the substances consumed, the individual's income, a stigmatizing environment, and traumatic events.

It is certainly not easy to abandon a way of life that was established gradually over a long period. It is much easier to abandon this path during the earliest stages of deviant progression or after a frustrating trajectory. It is also easier if the individual has maintained a certain degree of social integration. This is probably why various pressures the individual experiences function as interruption factors. In a way, they hinder the progression or maintenance of the deviant

lifestyle. For some people, these interruption factors trigger complete cessation; for others, they slow down progression or bring about a temporary cessation.

* * *

It is clear that the drug–crime relationship can vary depending on risk factors, deviance intensity, progression and maintenance stages, and progression and interruption factors. This chapter was organized around the notion of deviant lifestyle, a construct that considers a range of personal and social factors informed by exposure to risk factors, and that is associated with a tendency to adopt conduct and ways of life on the adaptive, marginal, or deviant spectrum. One’s lifestyle is established gradually through repeated actions and the meaning attributed to those actions, which eventually shape the individual’s identity. This concept takes into account the complex phenomenon of deviance take-up and the numerous interactions among individual, contextual, and temporal circumstances that drive psychoactive substance users toward various types of criminal involvement (Brochu and Brunelle 1997; Brochu and Parent 2005).

As shown in figure 6.5, in a matter of months or years, some individuals can progress from occasional drug use motivated and sustained by the success of delinquent activities (crime → money → drugs) to economic-compulsive crime (drugs → need for money → crime) dictated by drug dependence, while others will limit themselves to recreational drug use that does not exceed their available resources (money → drugs). The two begin with different lifestyles, which change in response to circumstances related to drug use. Many a cocaine user’s deviant lifestyle is about cultivating defiance, power, and appearances. However, those who become dependent on cocaine adopt a lifestyle more heavily influenced by multiple attempts to get the money they need to buy cocaine and by time spent recovering from the effects of using drugs.

Initially, the lifestyle is shaped by certain behaviours, repetition of the most symbolic acts, and meaning attributed to those acts. Subsequently, the lifestyle itself dictates priority behaviours and, in a way, becomes the prime mover of activities that arrange themselves into a coherent whole.

In a sense, the integrative model we presented in this chapter represents a conceptual break with the positivist paradigm underpinning the assimilationist and reductionist theories that emerged

over the past thirty years. Our model is based on a phenomenological paradigm that fully humanizes the individual and takes into account his or her interaction with a web of systems over time.

The models we have developed to gain insight into the nature of drug–crime relationships make one thing abundantly clear: these relationships are much more complex than we thought, and they evolve. In chapter 7, we look at how services can help addicts in the criminal justice system distance themselves from dependence and delinquency.

Notes

1. Many sources cited in previous chapters will not be cited again here.
2. Recherche et intervention sur les substances psychoactives – Québec.

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