



news release

from the EU drugs agency in Lisbon

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Focus on EU drug markets

WHY CAN HEROIN BE ORDERED LIKE PIZZA?

And why is the Mafia's role in drugs not all that it seems?

- Why, in a major European city, is ordering heroin like using a pizza delivery service?
- And why is the drug trade more likely to be in the hands of *disorganised* crime than *organised* crime?

Answers to such questions are contained in a special focus on European drug markets out today from the **Lisbon-based EU drugs agency, the EMCDDA**.

Drug markets are just one topic covered in a series of articles in ***Understanding and responding to drug use: the role of qualitative research*** – a substantial and important publication in the **EMCDDA** Scientific Monograph series. The publication's aim is to enhance understanding of drug use and the problems and responses to it – and encourage wider appreciation of the contribution of qualitative research.

The drugs agency's **Director, Georges Estievenart**, says: 'Today's publication reflects the breadth and variety of qualitative research on drug use patterns and responses currently underway in the **EU**.

'Such research focuses on the meanings, perceptions, processes and contexts of the drug world and offers ways of understanding drug-use patterns and related responses. Its key value lies in helping to reveal and interpret developments behind the bald statistics'.

Estievenart adds: 'One important thing the publication demonstrates is the valuable role drug users themselves can play in qualitative research. Their insider knowledge can be the key to enlightening us about their otherwise hidden world. Rather than marginalise them, we need to work with them.'

Drugs and disorganised crime

In an assessment of the **Italian** Mafia's involvement in drug trafficking, **Letizia Paoli of the Max-Planck Institute for Foreign and International Criminal Law in Freiburg, Germany**, shows how qualitative methodologies can be employed to evaluate police reports and judicial documents on the higher levels of drug supply. She argues that by carefully and dispassionately analysing these sources, it is possible to reach conclusions that contrast with preconceptions and dogmas. Involvement of the Mafia and organised crime in drugs is a case in point.

She says information provided by *pentiti* (former Mafiosi, turned prosecution witnesses) has thrown new light on the Mafia and drugs...

People tend to assume that the higher levels of drug distribution are controlled by organised crime, with the **Italian** Mafia playing a key role. Once such organisations are defeated, it is argued, drug markets will dry up.

But, she adds, 'there is no evidence that **Sicilian** and **Calabrian** Mafia organisations ever controlled the **Italian** drug market, much less the European one'. Drug markets are hardly ever supplied by one single wholesale drug distributor. Instead, there is a plurality of suppliers, all relying on their own distributors. 'Judicial investigations show that *Cosa Nostra* members have been progressively marginalised from wholesale heroin and cocaine trafficking...'

Paoli maintains that, of course, there is no doubt about Mafia involvement in drugs but not 'in the manner of a multinational corporation', which some observers have 'frequently assumed in the tones of a moral panic'. Rather than organised crime, much of this activity is 'disorganised crime', with 'no tendency towards the development of large-scale criminal enterprises'.

She adds that erroneous assumptions, such as those about drugs and the Mafia, can strongly influence national and international drug policies. So, while research in this area is difficult, it is 'too important to be left to moral entrepreneurs'.

Why is heroin delivered like pizza?

In another study in today's report that highlights the importance of qualitative research, **Mark Gilman, a UK drugs' researcher**, focuses on how the closed drug markets of 15 years ago in **Manchester**, in the **North of England**, have changed. He describes the present situation like this:

'Dealers operate a heroin delivery service that resembles a pizza delivery service.

'Orders are placed by calling a mobile phone number and the heroin is delivered to pre-arranged sites. Heroin users will often have a list of these numbers: the streets of cities like **Manchester** are home to highly-visible, homeless heroin addicts who are willing to pass on these numbers to new users for a small commission.

'Dealers operating these delivery systems are trying to build up a regular customer base. Deals are made secretly and swiftly, often using coded language...'

Gilman says the user-dealers of yesteryear have disappeared under the weight of long prison sentences. The open street markets emerged as a response, supplemented by the mobile phone and the pager.

His findings show that new-style policing can interrupt the business of commercial heroin dealers and their customers in these 'impersonal and dangerous modern markets' that are otherwise difficult to police.

'Imaginative...policing could play a major part in [reducing] heroin-related harm to addicts, their families and the wider community who suffer from the acquisitive crimes committed to raise money for street heroin.'

By setting modest but achievable goals to disrupt the heroin business, rather than grand, unachievable goals of eradicating drugs, the police can become real partners in multi-agency drug work, he argues.

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