

The Relationship between Drug Use and Crime:

A puzzle inside an enigma.

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**Keywords**

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**Abstract**

The recreational/ dependent drug use dichotomy has very quickly become the established wisdom within drugs literature. The paper uses the concept of ‘drug career’ to demonstrate that this bipolar distinction is problematic. The research it reports suggests that, alongside ‘recreational drug use’ and ‘dependent drug use,’ a third form or ‘episode’ of drug use can be observed: what we call here ‘persistent drug use.’ Following this exploration of drug careers, the article examines the interaction between drug use and crime. It is purported that a simple unilateral causal explanation is overly simplistic as the relationship is not consistent throughout the career of a drug user and through the qualitative exploration of drug careers the nuances of this relationship are identified. It is therefore suggested that both classifications of drugs and the relationship between drug use and crime are products of local social contexts and environments.

## **Introduction**

As the title of the paper suggests the relationship between drug use and crime is complex, despite the dominance of the drugs leads to crime hypothesis. Hough (1996: 11) in his review of the literature, argues that the precise nature of the causal process can take several shapes and provides the following example:

- 'Dependent drug misuse can predate other forms of crime, and precipitate these.
- Involvement in property crime can also predate drug misuse, facilitating experimental or casual misuse and then dependence.
- Dependent drug misuse may often amplify property offending.
- Drug use and property crime may both increase in an upward spiral'.

In other words, the debates surround whether involvement in crime may cause drug use, or illicit drug use may cause crime or finally whether they are intertwined in a more complex manner. Previous research has tended to focus upon dependent drug users and in particular dependent heroin users to examine this relationship (Mott, 1986; Bennet and Wright, 1986; Baker et al, 1994; Covington, 1988 Chaiken and Chaiken, 1989, 1990, Faupel, 1988; Fazey, 1987, 1992; Parker et al, 1986). The aim of this paper is to move away from this reliance upon dependent heroin users to explore the drug crime relationship.

Initially the methodological approach adopted for this research will be discussed before moving on to an exploration of drug-using careers where it will be argued that the recreational-dependent dichotomy that has become axiomatic in drug literature is problematic. I will suggest that classification of drugs may be products of local social environments and that drug careers in Deighton contained three categories or

episodes: Dependent Use, Persistent Use and finally Recreational Use. The second part of this paper will then explore the relationship between each of these episodes and other criminal activity. It will be argued that when young people make transitions through different forms of drug using behaviour their involvement in drug-related crime changes. Thus it is argued that a simple unilateral model of causation is overly simplistic as it fails to account for the complexities of drug using careers.

## **Methodology**

The research presented here is based upon ethnographic interviews with 88 young people and two separate sessions of participant observation both lasting six months. All of the research took place in a town in the Northeast of England, known here as Deighton. Deighton, like many other towns in the Northeast has high levels of deprivation and connected social problems. The site was selected for the pragmatic reasons of funding and distance to travel, but it also gives us an insight in to the sort of place often missed out of other studies (i.e. a non-metropolitan, small town in the Northeast not infamous for drug problems, but the sort of place in which many young people grow up).

The research is based upon the hypothesis that to understand why people act in particular ways there is a need to comprehend the significance and importance they bestow on different behaviour and actions and to explore the social context of their lives and examine the ways in which the environment they live in may effect their lives and behaviour. This attention to depth of understanding about the nature of people's lives and people's actions resulted in the selection of qualitative research

methods for this project within the ethnographic tradition. As Wiebel (1996: 186) notes ethnography is 'particularly well-adapted to contributing to our understanding of the social worlds of drug users and drug use.'

The sample for this project is made up of young people aged between sixteen and twenty-four years of age. This age group has been selected because the 'use of drugs seems to be largely confined to the young' (South, 1994: 302). Interviews were conducted with eighty-eight young people in total, fifty-one with males and thirty-seven with females. Whilst this gender imbalance was not intentional it does reflect the greater male involvement in both drug use and crime.

The vast majority of previous research on the drug-crime nexus has predominantly been based upon research with problematic opiate users, known criminals or both. This has led to a narrow insight into the connection between drug use and crime. In light of this, the research presented here attempted to gain a much broader picture by breaking the sample into three groups: known drug users, known criminals and finally a group unknown to the researcher as either criminal or a drug user. The young people volunteered to take part in the research and were recruited through the different agencies approached. The sample was recruited opportunistically but in relation to some pre-formulated quotas (and as such cannot be understood as a statistically random sample).

The fieldwork used three research techniques: individual interviews, focus groups and participant observation. This mixed methodological approach has been employed in an attempt to overcome some of the problems of using only one of these research tools. As noted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) there are distinct advantages in

combining participant observation with interviews, in particular, the data from each can be used to illuminate the other. Thus, participant observation can be used in contextualising and interpreting data from interviews (and vice versa and each technique generated data that was unlikely to be gained from others). Using these three techniques together provided a fuller picture than possible from one alone and multiple methods added the progress of the study as a whole (e.g. the interviews helped me to understand and communicate with the young people during the participant observation, for example, the slang names used for different illicit substances).

The participant observation within this study took place in two areas. Initially, time was spent in a Drug and Alcohol Service drop-in centre. This was used for two reasons, to access young people to interview and also to observe and talk to young people entering the service. Secondly, time was spent observing young people through a youth work Outreach Project, participating in activity mornings, days and weekends but also through limited time participating in 'street-work.'

The practice of ethnographic analysis involved a thorough immersion in and intimacy with the data. As Fetterman (1998: 92) notes ethnographic analysis 'begins from the moment a fieldworker selects a problem to study and ends with the last word in the report or ethnography.' Thus as well as conducting all of the fieldwork, I typed all of the audiotapes and the field notes and used Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to handle and analyse the data.

Finally, a process of triangulation was used to assess validity. Within this research three elements of triangulation were utilised. Firstly, data source triangulation, by comparing the accounts of different participants. Through comparing these accounts themes have emerged from the ethnographic data, which are shared by particular groups of young people and these are the focus of this research (e.g. particular patterns of drug using behaviour). Secondly, these accounts are compared and contrasted with other sources of information (interviews with professionals, crime statistics etc.) to check validity. Finally, the data produced from the different research tools adopted (participant observation, individual interviews, focus groups) was compared.

### **Drug Careers**

The notion of using the concept of ‘career’ to study deviant behaviour stems from Becker (1963). He attempted to analyse several diverse groups deemed to be marginal to American society. He noted that ‘a useful conception in developing sequential models of various kinds of deviant behaviour is that of *career*.’ (1963: 24) Many recent commentaries in the UK on illegal substance use have focused upon the dual dimensional manner in which people consume drugs. On the one hand there are said to be recreational using careers and on the other, dependent or ‘problem’ drug using careers.

Recreational drug users are seen to use drugs as part of a lifestyle which encompasses hedonism, experience-seeking and a rejection of ‘straight’ or ‘conventional’ values (Plant and Plant, 1992: 41). Drugscope (2000) similarly define recreational drug use

as ‘the use of drugs for pleasure or leisure. The term is often used to denote the use of ecstasy and other ‘dance drugs’, and implies that drug use has become part of someone’s lifestyle, even though they may only take drugs occasionally.’

Dependent drug use is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as ‘a state arising from repeated administration of a drug on a periodic or continuous basis, and with characteristics that varied according to the agent involved’ (WHO, 1982: 5).

In the early 1990s Gilman (1992: 16) highlighted this dichotomy in an article entitled ‘No more junkie heroes.’ He claims that two categories of drug user exist. Category A users who are ‘now not so new heroin users and injectors’ and Category B users who are the ‘up-and-coming users for whom drugs are an adjunct to fun rather than the organising force of their lifestyle’ (ibid.). At the time, this was an important distinction as Gilman rightly pointed out that service provision was dominated by opiate users and injectors and little, if anything, was being offered to recreational users. He argued that it was vital to keep these groups apart to ensure that Category B users did not move into patterns of Category A use (1992: 17). He stated ‘Group B use is about fun and recreation; Group A is about dependency, despondency and the dole’ (ibid.).

[DIAGRAM I HERE]

Gilman’s model describes two different type of drug use and drug users, but he suggest there is some overlap in the categories in the sense that firstly, both groups focus around illegal drugs and secondly, that some of these drugs will come from the



same source, i.e. multi-commodity dealers. The clearest difference is that Group B's never inject, never use heroin and never smoke (crack) rock cocaine (Radio 1 and Lifeline, 1992: 14), further they are not dependent upon the drug of their choice (Gilman, 1992: 16). He argues that there are sub-groups that are in transition from Group B to Group A which include individuals burnt out by stimulant use who seek relief in depressant drugs, and stimulant users who change their method of administration, from snorting to injecting amphetamine sulphate, for example (ibid.).

Parker et al (1998b: 3) note that 'it can be argued that parents, teachers and state officials, by too often arguing that all illicit drugs are bad and dangerous, have failed to distinguish *between* (original emphasis) drugs.' Yet, I would argue that drugs researchers and academics also make this mistake. The vast majority of current research categorises drugs users into these two groups. This two-dimensional model has become very quickly, the established wisdom. Parker et al note however, that the term, recreational drug user is 'not without its difficulties' (Parker et al, 1998a: 152), but do not expand upon this point. Using the current model of drug use, any person who is not deemed to be dependent upon a substance is viewed as a recreational drug user. This means, however, that recreational use encompasses a vast array of different types of substance use, from a person who consumes a drug annually to someone who consumes a drugs monthly or weekly or indeed more regularly. The following extract from field-notes taken from a recent text by Measham et al (2001:77) examining those who use dance drugs recreationally highlights problems with the 'recreational' category:

'As we talked it became more apparent that although he was sociable there were underlying issues/ feelings he wouldn't raise. In a rush of openness he admitted that

speed had led him to contemplate suicide and depression (which he appeared to have sought no help for) lasting for at least six months. This is obviously still a concern for him because in the future he suggests there may be psychological problems. I couldn't find him after the interview. He was certainly the most intense of the three interviews. He told me of his daily speed (amphetamine) habit which he uses intravenously...'

I would argue that the drug use described in the above extract could not and should not be viewed as recreational use. Similarly with the research presented here, a number of drug users had persistent but not physically dependent drug use, as the following extract illustrates:

Tim: Dope [cannabis], just dope and then the whizz [amphetamines]. I have only had whizz a couple of times.

MS: So how much money would you be spending on the dope?

Tim: Before I came in here [young offenders institution], the six months or something before I came in here, about thirty quid a day.

MS: Right.

Tim: So like a quarter on a morning when I woke up. I dunno about forty anyway cause I'd have like a quarter on a morning and have like another sixteenth on a night.

MS: So would you smoke it everyday?

Tim: Yeah, everyday, all day.

Through the development of a fivefold schema (see diagram II) focusing upon: (i) the time patterning of use (regularity); (ii) the amount of substances consumed (degree); (iii) the type of drug chosen (type); (iv) the method of administration (style) and (v) attitudes regarding the place of drug use in the user's life (centrality) it is argued that drug using behaviour can be categorised into three groups: dependent use, persistent use and recreational use.

[DIAGRAM II HERE]

Using the fivefold scheme of drug using categorisation, we can start to identify the common traits of drug use. For example, the previously unrecognised category of

persistent use can be seen as having the following common traits. Firstly, drug use is more frequent than users within the recreational category (regularity), often because of a distinct lack of structured time. Thus for many drug use was daily and became central to daily activities (centrality), unlike dependent drug use, however, this centrality was not caused by withdrawal symptoms. For some within this group the type of drug they would use was fixed and for others it was varied and ad hoc (type) but anti-heroin views prevailed within this category and although some would inject their drugs (style) for most this was also seen as a step too far. Finally, the levels of use fluctuated dramatically, based on availability and/or the amount of money a user had for drugs (degree).

For this group (Group C), drugs play a dominant role in the lives of the users. Poly-drug use is often prevalent within this group because the users are not physically addicted to any one *substance* or any one *form* of drug administration. Drug use is not linked with recreation but instead to intoxication. Drugs are used so that, as Paul put it, you can get 'blaked' [severely intoxicated].

I have got a tenner in my pocket and nowt to do I might as well get fucking loads of cans and get blaked and maybe get a bit of dope and get stoned as well. Cos you start thinking to yourself well, you don't think oh it's bad for us, you think look at the fucking smackheads standing there doing that to themselves. I'd sooner be like I am now, than be like them any fucking day of the week.

Moreover, drug use does not necessarily take place everyday. For example, it was not uncommon for persistent users of amphetamines to have a few days on and a few days off. (This was possibly because of fatigue or because tolerance to amphetamines is built up relatively rapidly). As the following interview highlights:

MS: Would you view your injecting of whizz [amphetamine] as a problem or not?

James: No, not really, I only have it... I had one yesterday, like yesterday morning, just after I left here [Drug and Alcohol Service] and I had one this morning. But I probably won't have one tomorrow. Oh, I probably will cos I get paid! Like sometimes I have one, one day and the next day I won't have one and the next day I will. Sometimes, I miss two days out and don't have one. I am not fucking bang into it. I don't like sticking needles in me arm that's what it is. When I have one I just like have loads, so I don't have no more.

MS: Right, so how long will that last, the effects of that?

James: I have not been to sleep in two days [in a yawning voice].

[DIAGRAM III HERE.]

These forms of drug using behaviour may be observed in young people's drug using careers and as analytical categories, they provide the opportunity to highlight specific concepts and specific experiences, they are not mutually exclusive and in this way the allocation of drug users into these categories is not simple or absolute. A drugs career can be seen as the characterisation of a longitudinal sequence of drug use (see Frykholm, 1985; Hser et al, 1997). Furthermore, careers can be broken down into a series of episodes. Little offers a very useful definition of an episode: 'an episode is defined as a variable period of time surrounding a particular phase of the delinquent career' (Little, 1990: 4). As he goes on to note the period of time it takes to complete each episode may vary according to the individuals involved. Little (1990: 2) argues:

The value and significance of understanding social events and behaviour in this way is that the method can be used as a way of analysing systematically individuals' accounts of their behaviour.

Similarly Coles (1995) talks of 'staged status sequences' and acknowledges that it is important to break careers down into these staged status sequences (or episodes) in order to gain a greater understanding of how careers progress. Coles notes that each step can be shown to determine future steps. He acknowledges, however, that:

It is not been argued that one stage automatically leads to the next but, rather, that the attainment of each status position, in turn, has the capacity both to open up and close down future opportunities.

The categories are distinct but there is overlap. The following quote taken from Johnston et al (2000:33) highlights this:

We'd say, 'Look at them scruffy horrible bastards'... 'They're fucking scum' ... we used to fight 'em and batter 'em ... just 'cause they were on heroin ... But when you get on it yourself, it's a different story ... you can't call 'em no more 'cause your in the same boat...

Thus despite the well-documented division between recreational and dependent drug users in the UK (See Parker et al, 1998a & 1998b, for example) some young people do make the transition from one group to another (see MacDonald & Marsh, 2002). However, it is important to acknowledge that drug and crime careers are diverse and the career approach should no be based upon over deterministic trajectories that hide the complexities of careers. They are likely to be shaped by the local social environment and therefore may well play themselves out in different ways. As acknowledged recently by Johnston et al (2000: 20):

transitions are extraordinarily complex. They do not have a straightforward 'story.' Careers involve a multiplicity of changing statuses over time, which are not connected in a linear, neat and orderly fashion.

MacDonald and Coffield (1991:92) similarly argue that 'it is often immensely difficult to identify a coherent, unitary or linear trajectory from the mess and jumble of individual's biographies.' It is possible to argue that broadly speaking, on the one hand, the Criminological literature (Farrington, 1992, for example) has overplayed the role of structure, whilst on the other much of the sociological literature on youth transitions has overemphasised the importance of agency.

A key theme within youth transitions literature has been the relative emphasis given to young people's *agency* in creating individual paths of transition compared with the constraints on personal choice and decision-making provided by social *structures* (Johnston et al, 2000: 7).

Farrall and Bowling (1999: 254) argue that 'this divide, focusing on the agent's own actions on the one hand, and structural constraints on the other, has tempted many to explain experiences of crime on one side or the other of this false dichotomy.' Thus as Coles (1995: 21) notes:

In arguing for the importance of the concept of career, it is not the intention to supplant the profound influence of social background in shaping the opportunity structures of the young with some innocent or voluntaristic notion of free choice and individual agency. Rather, it is to insist that we must give due regard to both sides of the equation.

The following diagrams illustrate the drug careers of the interviewees within this research.

[DIAGRAMS IV-VII HERE<sup>1</sup>]

The first thing these diagrams illustrate is the exceedingly complex nature of drug using careers. The variety of careers witnessed within these 88 interviewees provides further evidence that any gateway theory, hypothesising that the passage from one form of drug use to another is inevitable, is fundamentally flawed. These diverse career paths also provide the first evidence that the relationship between drug use and crime is likely to be complex given the range of drug using careers.

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<sup>1</sup> The graphs illustrate the individual drug careers of young people. [From left to right] the numbers in the first column illustrates the number of users with the career set out to the right. The numbers *above* the points on the career line illustrates the stage of that category of drug use (e.g. a 1 on the point above cannabis user means that the individual started their career with recreational cannabis use).

## **The Relationships between Drug Use and Crime.**

The aim of this section is to attempt to disentangle the complex dynamics of the relationships between drug careers and criminal careers. The sample of young people used within this study cannot be viewed as representative of young people as a whole, as most of the sample were from what can be described as socially excluded parts of Deighton (itself a relatively disadvantaged town). This clearly has implications when discussing the relationship between drug use and crime, particularly the relationship between recreational drug use and crime. It has been argued that recreational drug use is part of a post-modern consumer culture which crosses class, gender, race, age and geographic divides (Redhead, 1993, 1997; Redhead et al, 1998; Parker et al, 1995, 1998a). This means that experiences of recreational drug use (e.g. its link to crime) may vary greatly in relation to the social group or context concerned. Recreational drug use can be expensive (Collison, 1996) and if legitimate means of raising revenue are not present then illegitimate methods may be employed. Furthermore, as Collison (1996: 429) notes 'if postmodern consumer culture is classless someone has forgotten to convince those at the bottom.' The relationship between recreational drug use and crime for those 'at the bottom' is therefore likely to be different from those 'at the top'. Parker et al (1998a: 160) argue that 'most recreational drug use, whilst itself illegal, is funded from legitimate means of pocket money and part-time earnings.' Yet, the majority of young people interviewed in this research who were, or had been, involved in recreational drug use reported engagement in other crime prior to, and during, their recreational drug use. This is not to suggest that recreational drug use is a *direct result* of other criminal activity; a volume of research clearly suggests this is

*not* the case for the majority of recreational users. It does highlight, however, that the sample here maybe different from those in more nationally representative studies and suggests that the *local context* can impact upon patterns of youth drug use.

Recreational drug use was constantly discussed in terms of fun and ‘a buzz’. Furthermore, early involvement in crime was often spontaneous and more about ‘having a laugh’ than raising revenue. The motivating factors behind both behaviours were therefore similar and interrelated. For most young people within this study then, a direct causal relationship between recreational drug use and crime did not exist. As noted, however, crime often predated recreational drug use within this sample and engagement in recreational drug use sometimes became a further expense to be funded through crime. As Collison (1996: 67) noted from his study, many of the young people did not themselves link their involvement in crime to drug use but instead linked patterns of ‘general consumption to crime in the sense that leisure and pleasure costs.’ The following extract illustrates how nineteen-year-old Emma funded nights out through shoplifting:

MS: So how much would it cost to get into a rave then?

Emma: About ten, well say a tenner if you have got a membership card, fifteen to twenty, em. One place I used to go was twenty-five quid if you did not have a membership card, only a tenner if you had.

MS: How would you fund that then, to get in places like that?

Emma: Shoplifting, you had too. Cause I could not get it out of me own money, there’s your money gone isn’t it? That’s why I don’t go to them anymore, I can’t afford it, I don’t want to get back into it.

One crime that *was* more explicitly linked to involvement in recreational drug use was that of drug dealing. In the case of 24 year old Janet, (who, at the time of interview was serving a three-year prison sentence for dealing Ecstasy, cannabis and amphetamines) the initial involvement was in the form of supplying ‘dance drugs’ to



a close network of acquaintances for their group nights out. The revenue raised was spent on nights out and reinvested in the purchase of more drugs. Her and her partner's drug use was restricted solely to weekends and they were both in full-time employment. Over a period of time, however, their social/ leisure network developed and their dealing expanded.

What is clear is that supplying friends' drugs for recreational use was not perceived as drug dealing by interviewees. During the fieldwork minor instances of drug dealing were witnessed, and these events were certainly not hidden or secretive. Drugs, particularly cannabis, were often exchanged in public places. As one young man informed me, 'I'm just sorting out me mates.' Parker et al (1998a) suggest that with recreational drug use there is often a blurring between users and dealers. Friendship networks provide access to drugs and as Parker et al (1998a: 123) note:

Whilst refusing to get drugs 'for children' is one thing, a significant minority of drug users in our samples had obtained drugs for other friends, usually 'for free', sometimes with 'clubbing together' resources and sometimes to cover the costs of their own drugs bill.

In some cases, this process becomes well organised and a transition is made from sorting out friends, to sorting out friends of friends and eventually this supply group expands as the 'dealer' becomes known, highlighting the complex nature in which drug careers and criminal careers are intertwined (see Pearson and Hobbs, 2001).

Recreational drug use was not portrayed as a major crime and neither was supplying these drugs to friends. Many had 'genuine difficulty in perceiving these acquaintances as dealers committing a potentially serious criminal act' (Parker et al, 1998a: 125).

Minor recreational drug dealing to acquaintances was depicted as being on the periphery of illegitimate activity.

Within the recreational drug use category then, for the majority of people there was no direct causal relationship between drug use and crime. Nevertheless, drug careers and criminal careers are intertwined in a complex manner. For some, drug use was funded through both legitimate and illegitimate revenue, however crime often predated drug use and involvement in recreational drug use became a further expense to be funded through crime rather than the crime being drug driven. Minorities of young people in this sample were involved in supplying drugs to pay for their nights out and drugs used. What is important and perhaps accounts for this involvement in crime is the way it is perceived. Genuine difficulty was witnessed portraying supplying friends and acquaintances with drugs as a potentially serious crime. Drug dealing was justified by viewing it simply as sorting mates out and therefore the crime was neutralised in this manner reflecting perhaps the normalisation of this drug culture (Parker et al, 1998a). It is clear, however, that the complex manner in which drug dealing and recreational drug use were intertwined needs further research and it is wrong to assume that there is no relationship between recreational drug use and crime.

## Persistent Drug Use and Crime

According to Hough (1996: 11) ‘persistent use of drugs other than heroin and cocaine seem unrelated in the USA to persistent predatory offending.’ My research here, however, argues that a strong relationship between persistent use of drugs (beyond heroin and cocaine) and revenue raising crime *does* exist. Persistent use of drugs often occurred amongst young people who had little structured time within their lives (e.g. in the forms of school or employment). Due to a lack of structured time days were filled with ‘hanging around’ in local neighbourhoods in tight-knit friendship networks and engaging in various activities, including drug use. For some, drug use became a central method of consuming time and if its expense could not be funded through legitimate means, then illegitimate revenue was raised. The following interview with Zac, a persistent cannabis smoker, illustrates this pattern of persistent drug use and related criminality:

MS: So when you were using the cannabis everyday how much were you going through?

Zac: I dunno, I used to buy about an ounce.

MS: How much would that cost you?

Zac: £45.

MS: How often would you buy that?

Zac: I would buy it nearly everyday. I never used to smoke that much cause I used to sleep more like during the day and that and like I used to leave it with me brother. Me brother used to smoke it. I used to only smoke about a quarter.

MS: Although you were buying all that. So how were you paying for that then?

Zac: I was going out doing burglary and that, this was when I was living in Newtown and that.

MS: How often would you go out [Burgling]?

Zac: Every night I used to stay out. Like I used to go out every night, I used to make money and that and I used to buy a smoke. I used to smoke some of it and then go to bed and leave it with me brother, get up have a smoke and then there used to be a couple of joints left. I used roll a couple of joint for while I was out.

The interview with Zac also illustrates how qualitative research techniques can reveal the nuances of the drugs and crime relationship. He describes how he also funds his brother's cannabis use through his crime, illustrating that patterns and rates of criminality are not always linked directly to specific individual's drug consumption. This pattern of supplying siblings, partners and friends with drugs was a recurrent theme throughout the research. Research in this field therefore needs to examine interactions within these networks rather than assuming that the individual that purchases drugs will necessarily consume all the drugs purchased or that patterns of individual consumption can be unproblematically mapped onto assumptions about that individual's financial needs (for drugs). This has clear implications for research that attempts to calculate the cost of crime committed by examining drug use. Clearly, every user will not purchase all of the drugs consumed and that revenue raised from crime may be used to support more than one person's drug use.

It would be wrong to assume that crime is always committed simply to fund drug use. The following extract from an interview with Dan reveals the complexities of the drugs-crime relationship; a relationship that shifts in nature over time and which denies simplistic uni-directional causal accounts. Nevertheless, Dan acknowledges that he was committing crimes driven by his desire to purchase cannabis, illustrating that some persistent drug users may commit drug-driven crime for a period of their persistent drug using careers. The extract also illustrates the fluidity of the relationship and highlights the importance of examining careers and transitions.

MS: So did you say that you were committing crime before the drugs then?

Dan: No, just after.

MS: So was it the drugs that caused the crime then?

Dan: It wasn't like, I was on it once a week when I started and then I meet these lads, well I knew a couple of them. So I went with them and we went for a burgle. We burgled and I was just buzzing off it at first. I was buying dope in the end.

MS: But to start with you weren't just doing it for the drugs then?

Dan: Nah.

MS: So when you did the burglary and that what were you spending the money on?

Dan: Blow.

MS: Just on blow?

Dan: Yeah blow.

MS: But it wasn't necessarily... you weren't going out with the express purpose of getting money to buy blow?

Dan: Not at first, but then it was just for the blow. I burgled for about 6 month and then I stopped and shoplifted for 6 month.

MS: How much money do you think you were making from crime?

Dan: About 30 or 40 quid, not much. Just what I needed, I didn't go shoplifting just to have money in my pocket. I was just going shoplifting to have some blow in my pocket.

Within this group then, a strong relationship between drug use and crime does exist. For some, drug use became a central method to consume time and revenue was raised through illegal activity. It would be wrong to assume that all of the crime committed by persistent drug users was drug driven. It has been argued, however, that some persistent drug users may commit drug-driven crime for a period of their persistent drug using careers.

## **Dependent Drug Use and Crime**

The third relationship to examine is that of dependent drug use and crime. Within this section the notion of career will continue to be used and it will be suggested that as with the other forms of drug use discussed, the relationship between dependent use and crime cannot be discussed in terms of a constant or singular, causal relationship. As noted by Faupel and Klockers (1987), 'the relationship between heroin and crime is not consistent throughout the career of the addict'. Furthermore, Pearson et al (1987: 35) argue that 'there is no such thing as a 'typical' heroin user nor a typical heroin user's career'. As they go on to note, however, some key phases can be identified, three of which are 'the initial offer and experimentation', the 'grey area of transitional use' and 'addictive use' (ibid.). It is important to reiterate that 'there is nothing inevitable about the passage from one status to another' (ibid.) and that not all experimenters will become dependent users.

For some, particularly those that made the transition from recreational drug use to dependent drug use, early involvement in drugs such as heroin was often paid for through both legal and illegal avenues. Martin was asked how he paid for his 'brown' [heroin]:

Just depends, like when I started I was earning money meself, like NACRO wage and that, but that didn't last long and I was kicked off that. Me Mother lending me money and me Dad lending me money, me Gran, me girlfriend, me mates. Then just ran out of people, owed too many people money. Then I started pinching.

The move towards revenue-raising crime due to heroin use occurred over a period of weeks or months and was not instantaneous. Early use was often funded through savings that the young people had accumulated, again through both legitimate and illegitimate activity. The following extract taken from an interview with Alex highlights the creeping hold of heroin:

MS: And how addictive was it? When did you realise? Did you realise you were addicted?

Alex: No I did not realise at all, it was like, at that time I had quite a bit of money know what I mean? So like money wasn't a problem then. So every night it was, like I say, started by going halves. Sat there bored, know what I mean? "Do you wanna go halves on a bag?" Yeah, so we would go and get some. Smoke that, know what I mean? And again the next night, then the next night, know what I mean? I first realised I was addicted, like when I was ill, I had flu or something, know what I mean?

MS: Yeah.

Alex: So I stopped then, but I felt terrible and I knew then. All I could think about was that I wanted a bag, know what I mean? I thought 'I think I'm addicted'.

Initial involvement in heroin was, therefore, not regarded as especially problematic. I was informed time and time again that initial use was not what had been expected. Interviewees claimed 'You don't have to steal' and 'beg', it is only a 'daft tenner here and there,' this is 'no problem,' the drug is not 'fucking horrible it is fucking great,' and during the initial stages it was seen as being no different from other drugs previously consumed. They were not 'junkies' and they would 'never be junkies.' But it was clear that the patterns and styles of heroin use within the town were formed around daily use.

Initial and early involvement with drugs of dependency was not usually funded by drug driven crime. The drugs may have been purchased with money raised through crime; however, crime was not driven by the desire to earn 'drug money'. More often than not, during these early phases, the drugs were purchased through loans from

family or friends and/ or money the user had or by selling possessions. Early heroin use was often undertaken within friendship groups and initial offers were often from friends and acquaintances rather than strangers or a 'pusher.' These networks then enabled the users to 'skag off their mates' (borrow or have off their friends) and it was portrayed as important to 'keep each other right' or at least 'go halves.' These complex deals, loans and shares often go on throughout drug careers making the relationship between the amount of drugs consumed and the amount of drugs purchased by the individual very complicated. The ISDD (1994) report that dependent heroin users are better than non-users at obtaining 'favours' and hustling material resources from around them, thereby avoiding some cash expenditures.

For others, however, initial and early involvement in drug use was funded through legitimate employment. Yet as dependency upon the drug became established crime often became more chaotic and more drug driven (Hough, 1996).

This increased risk resulted in the increase chance of getting caught yet this paled into insignificance compared to the desire to get the money. As the following interview with Curtis reveals 'you couldn't care less' about the consequences.

Curtis: Yeah. You don't care about anyone at all but yerself. I know that I am just proper selfish. Well I am just a selfish git really, I didn't give a damn about anyone else, or anything apart from getting the gear and that's it. Once you've had it yer like a bit, a bit remorseful about it all.

MS: Are you?

Curtis: Well I was like that anyway. But er... up until getting the money together I didn't give a damn about who I hurt or what I did. I would have pinched off me family or anybody you know. I know it sounds a horrible thing to say but that's what I would do.



Heroin users were renowned for their 'could not care less' attitudes and were therefore regarded by many others in the sample as 'worthless junkie scum'. (It was reported that others higher up in the local criminal economy would exploit the fact that these junkies would graft for their money. Within some of the estates this paying of drug users to 'do the dirty work' was not uncommon). Many people on the estates viewed the heroin users as the lowest of the low and in-turn many of the users themselves felt like this. The following extract from an interview with nineteen-year-old Emma illustrates these feeling of worthlessness described by some of the drug dependent participants within this research.

MS: Did you ever worry about killing yourself?

Emma: No, because I was addicted to it (heroin), wasn't I? I was too addicted and when I was on it, I thought if I can't get off drugs it would be an easy way to die, an easy way to get out of it and that. All the time I was on drugs, at first I thought it was a buzz, then I couldn't get off it, then I was depressed because I wanted to get off it, but I couldn't. I thought to myself if I can't get off drugs is this how me life gonna be, well I would rather die. An easy way to die, OD yourself, it's a buzz then it's no more, no pain and stuff like that.

The relevance of this in relation to the drug crime connection is that it illustrates the thought patterns of some individuals. If a young person feels this way about their life then they do not care about their actions. This expression of not caring is amplified by the fact that heroin use 'places the troubles of the world at some distance' (Tyler, 1986: 285). This is not to imply, however, that heroin users are in a constant state of euphoria (Emma above makes this clear). As noted by Preble and Casey (1969: 2) 'the brief moments of euphoria after each administration of a small amount of heroin constitute a small fraction of their daily lives'. The rest of the time is spent 'taking care of business' (ibid.). This relationship between drug use and attitude is highly complex as both are intertwined. Some of the young people explained how they became involved in persistent and dependent use in order to mask out problems

within their lives. The drug use itself, however, only provided fleeting remittance from their other diverse problems and, in time, became for the majority a further source of despair. Furthermore, the pharmacological effects of drugs can clearly influence behaviour and further reduce the fear of punishment in the minds of the user. As Emma explains:

So when I got onto diazzies and mazzies you don't give a fuck, you think you are invisible, you think nobody's gonna see you. That's when I start getting.. thinking fuck I pinch this. I was doing runners out of shops and that, I did not care if people saw me.

Once dependent upon a substance daily routines were often built around the consumption of drugs, 'grafting' (committing crime) to earn money, selling the goods and getting a deal. Because of the levels and type of offending involved this type of offending is almost unique to the dependent drug-using criminal. During periods of dependent drug use most of the young people within this sample were funding their drug use through acquisitive drug driven crime. The users will 'chore' (steal) because they have to and as tolerance levels build and/ or the quality of the gear is reduced the crime has to increase and taking care of business becomes a more demanding affair.

For those dependent upon heroin then time was consumed by activities related to their drug careers. Pearson et al (1987: 46) reported that ex-users state 'that 'staying off' heroin was much more difficult than 'coming off' the drug, because the day seems so empty without the drug and its associated flurry of activity.' This flurry of activity was the result of time spent looking for opportunities to commit crime to raise revenue, committing crime, finding people to sell stolen goods to, finding a dealer with gear, possibly exchanging needles, and then taking the drugs and the time spent

under the effects of the substance. This partly explains why this drug career is followed by particular sorts of disconnected young people.

As criminal careers develop and more risks are taken there is an increased likelihood that the young person will become known to the authorities (such as the police). This can make 'grafting' more difficult, for example, informants had to shoplift outside Deighton, as they had been 'barred-out' of the town centre. The dominance therefore of both drug use and crime within the lives of dependent drug users within this study was clear. As one participant informed me 'you think we enjoy this, you think it is fucking easy. I can tell you it is hard work.' This quote epitomises the feelings of many dependent drug users here. Under normal circumstances their involvement in crime would not be portrayed as a hassle as there would not be a need to force themselves to go out 'on the graft'. Dependency upon drugs, however, provided the drive and motivation to commit crime on a very regular and frequent basis. Thus it can be stated with a certain conviction that dependent drug use causes acceleration in criminal involvement.

## **Conclusion**

Results from this study illustrate that drug using patterns are products of local social environments. In the case of Deighton, three categories or episodes in drug using careers were identified; namely, recreational, persistent and dependent use. In light of this, it is important that academics, drugs workers and those involved in social policy appreciate that drug using patterns are affected by local social environments and move away from complete reliance upon the dichotomous model of recreational-dependent use currently favoured within the UK.

It has been well documented that the vast majority of recreational drug users see themselves as very different to dependent drug users (Gilman, 1992; Parker et al, 1998a, Release, 1997; Perri 6 et al, 1997). Indeed, Measham et al (2001: 96) note that ‘clubbers are extremely drug-experienced’ and go on to say that ‘the only other drug-using group with these levels of lifetime experience and high rates of recent use are “problem” drug users who are “career” heroin, crack and cocaine users’. They state, however, that this is where the similarity ends. The issue is that if a simple ‘recreational – dependent/ problematic’ model is used, drug users are led to believe that they will only have problems if they are dependent users (and as noted these users see themselves as no way connected to dependent users and the literature also describes them in this way). Turning back to the earlier quote from Measham et al (2001), the researchers noted that the daily amphetamine injector appeared not to have sought help for the problems that he had. The user may not have sought help because drug treatment is still heavily, although not exclusively, focused upon dependent users

(particularly dependent heroin users). Clearly co-morbidity is a complex process and mental health problems cannot be causally connected to involvement in drug use (even if it can be illustrated that substance use may exacerbate pre-existing psychiatric disorders; Crome, 1999). Introducing and operating with a third episode of ‘persistent user’ may therefore, highlight the problems that heavy users can have, thus enabling more credible and realistic education to be aimed at drug users.

The study also demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the complexities of the relationship between drug use and crime. The identification of ‘persistent drug use’ allowed this project to identify important relationships that previous research in the UK has often overlooked due to its tendency to focus upon dependent users. Using a career-based approach acknowledges the complexities of the relationship and allows for a more nuanced understanding of the drugs crime nexus. Future research might usefully further explore the complex interaction between drug and crime careers beyond the focus upon problematic heroin use in order to further aid our understanding of, and the development of policies in respect of, the realities of drug use and crime.

These findings are subject to the limitations of the research design used. Whilst there was an attempt to reach a broad range of drug users through the sampling framework, it is important to acknowledge that the drug users were taken from one locality at one period in their drug using careers. A quasi-longitudinal approach was utilised within this study, however a more extended longitudinal approach might reveal further nuances and could further test these findings.

As this study has shown, both drug careers and crime careers are complex and change over time. Moreover, the way they interplay requires more than a simple unidirectional causal account. As young people make transitions through different types of drug using behaviour their involvement in other crime changes. As noted by Parker and Newcombe (1987: 347), 'there are likely to be variations in the drug-crime relationship in different localities at different times for different drugs' as drug/ crime relationships are a product of particular local social environments. Research must now move beyond theories based upon singular causality and instead examine further the multiple and complex ways that drug use and crime interact with each other in people's lives.

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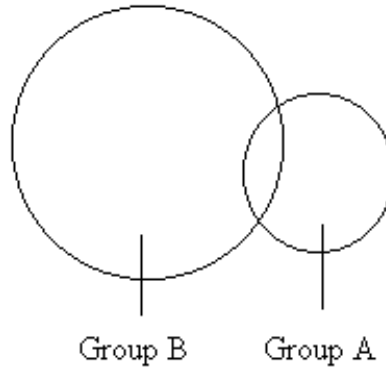
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Diagram I: Gilman's model of drug use.



Group A = Opiate dependents    Group B    Recreational non-opiate users.

DIAGRAM II: Fivefold schema of drug using behaviour categorisation.

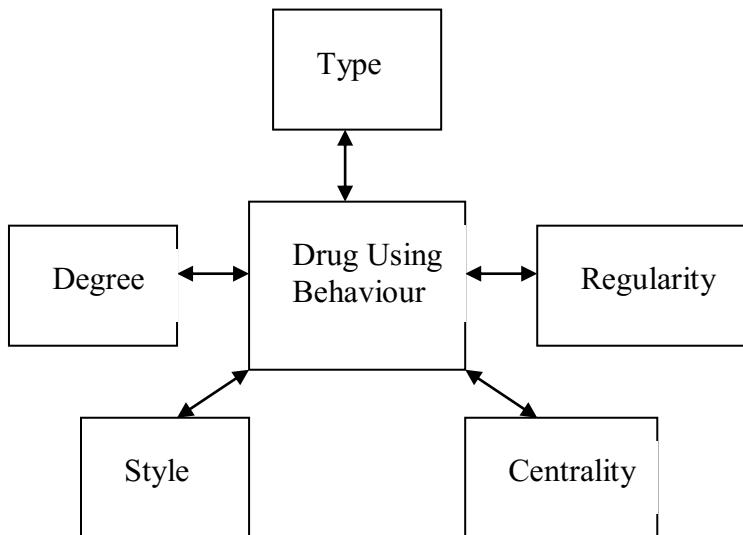
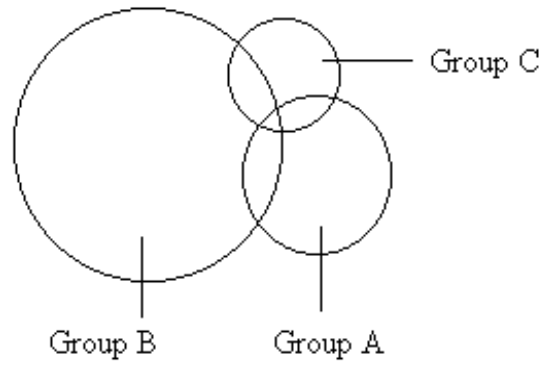


Diagram III: Model of drug using behaviour in Deighton.



Group A = Dependent users. Group B = Recreational users.

Group C = Persistent users.



Diagram V: A Graphic Illustration of the Drug Careers of the Known Criminal Group (N = 18)

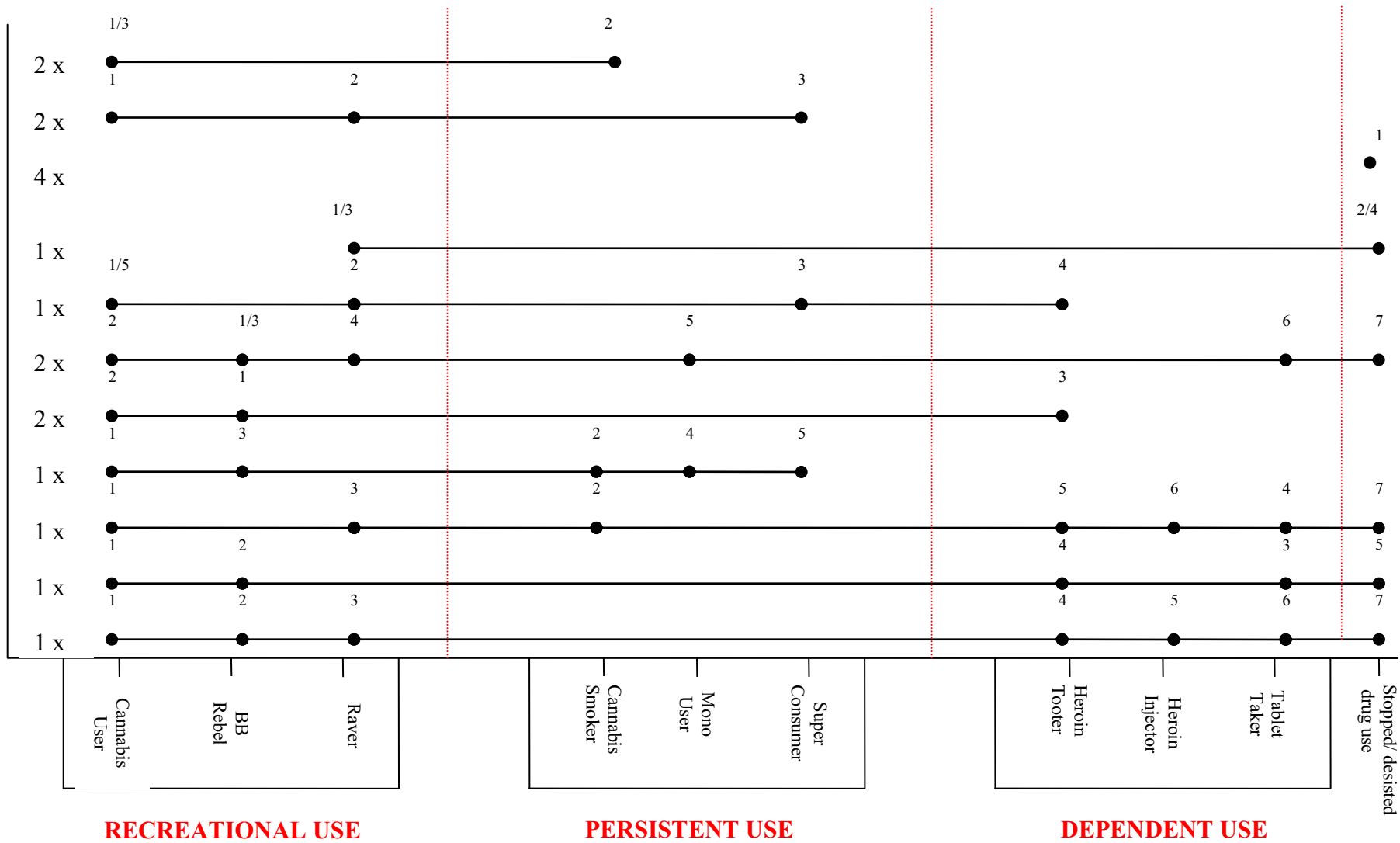


Diagram VI: A Graphic Illustration of the Drug Careers of the Unknown Group (N = 41 ) (1 of 2)

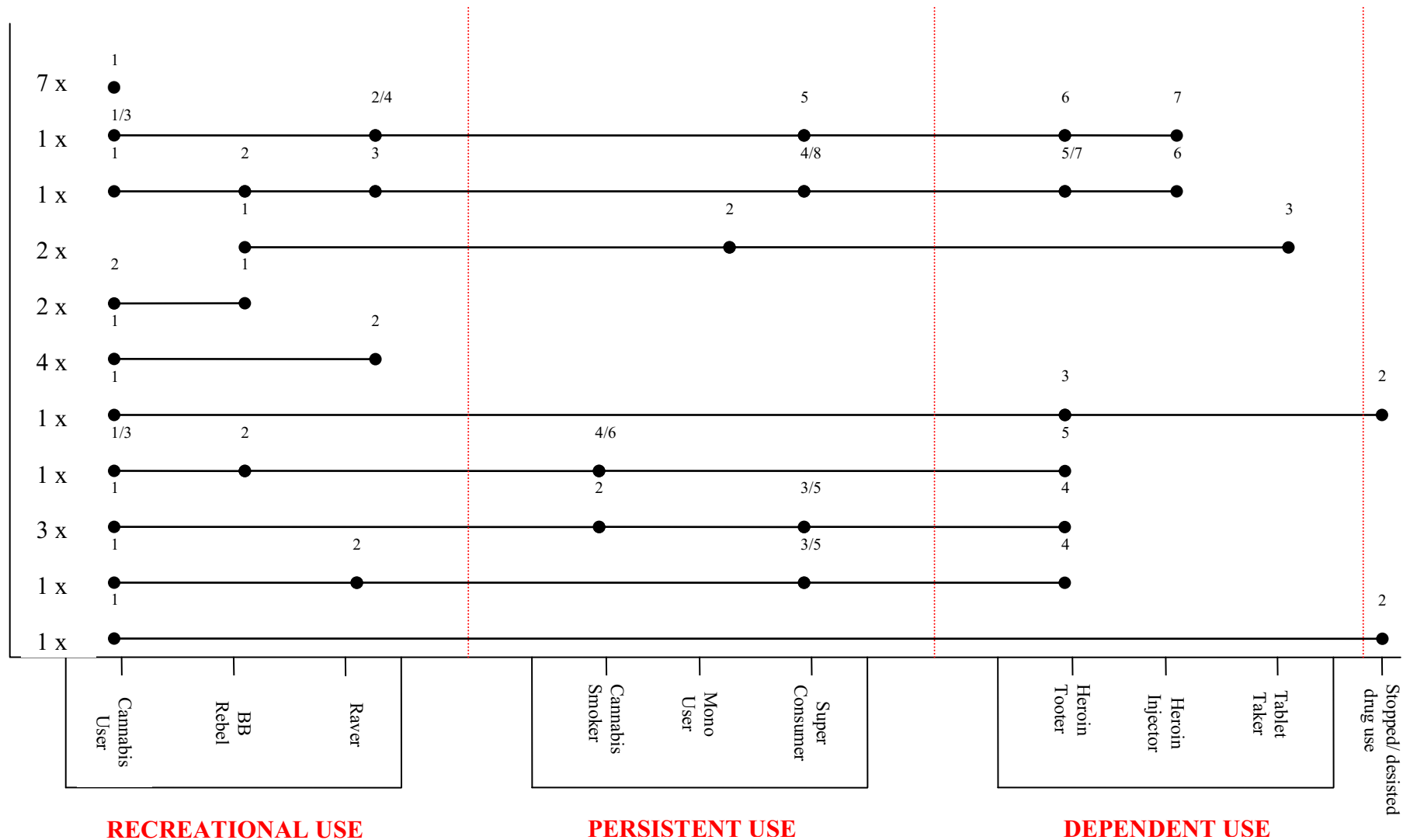




Diagram VII: A Graphic Illustration of the Drug Careers of the Unknown Group (N = 41 ) (2 of 2)

