

Chapter

**DRUG ABUSE AND TRAFFICKING
IN UNIVERSITIES: AN EMERGING
SOCIAL PHENOMENON**

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is the environment in which the future senior managers that will guide the forthcoming of societies are wrought. Therefore, and in social terms, everything that people learn and develop in these higher education institutions has a crucial and a determinant impact.

Young people acquiring skills and knowledge related to the technical and scientific fields in which they work in also end up acquiring competencies and knowledge in non-academic fields, such as anti-social behaviour or even criminal conducts. This is the case of drug use in a university context, which has been so studied in recent decades, and of drug trafficking in a university environment, widely known to all, but still little investigated in scientific terms. Therefore, and taking into consideration that universities play a social role that has a strong impact on the lives of young people and societies, this chapter is precisely dedicated to the phenomena of drug trafficking, and its use/abuse in universities. It is a serious social problem in which young students not only consume illegal drugs, but also frequently take an active part in illicit activities associated with drug trafficking, often compromising their future and causing undeniable social damage. It should be noted that the university context is a privileged target for the powerful individuals who manipulate these illegal drugs markets. It is therefore very important to pay attention and study this social problem of serious consequences. In this chapter, a comprehensive literature review and results of a study about drug trafficking and abuse in university context will be presented, in order to better understand the nature of this problem. Final considerations regarding the prevention/intervention on these phenomena are also presented.

Keywords: drug trafficking; universities; social problem; sociology

INTRODUCTION

Drug use/abuse and drug trafficking in the university are phenomena that have become particularly relevant in society, and their study is becoming increasingly relevant, especially if taking into account a social perspective, that is very much affected by the problem under consideration.

In fact, drug use is a deviant behavior, and trafficking is a crime frequently associated to those who use drugs (Font-Mayolas, Gras & Planes, 2006; Nunes, & Sani, 2016). Drug use/abuse in universities has been largely

investigated (e.g., Barrett, Darredeau, & Pihl, 2006; Maier, Liechti, Herzig, & Schaub, 2013; Machado, Moura, & Almeida, 2015), but the same cannot be said about the trafficking of these substances. The truth is that it is known that in places frequented by students there are activities of trafficking, but scientific research, namely in the Social Sciences, has not been sufficiently developed in order to establish an effective association between drug abuse and drug trafficking in universities. The media are already reporting on this phenomenon (e.g., Snell, 2017; Veiga, 2017), although studies on the subject are very few (Beça, & Nunes, 2016).

Obviously, the problem of drugs, their use/abuse and trafficking, has a medical-legal perspective but, above all, it has a sociological dimension (Shaw, 2002), since they are phenomena which are strongly impregnated with conditioning factors and with serious social consequences and very impacting, either in individual terms or at community and societal level. For this reason, and due to the frequency of both drug use and drug trafficking, this chapter intends to present an integrated analysis of both behaviors from a very sociological point of view. Objectively, it is expected that the subject will be explored from an unanalyzed perspective, which includes not only use/abuse but above all drug trafficking among university students, often inside the universities and surroundings. It is important to point out that, given the well-studied drug consumption in this population, it will be easy to perceive, as Beça and Nunes (2016) state, that universities will be targeted by those who traffic, since it is a desirable market share for this illegal business.

1. UNIVERSITIES AS A CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The aim in the 21st century, is to develop means for universities to be far-reaching, through close relations with the communities in which they

operate. Therefore, it is intended to establish bridges of connection between universities and what is external to them. Thus, as the world is changing, universities will necessarily be also changing (Lerner, & Simon, 2013). For this reason, and for training the professionals who will ensure the development of societies, the University is an institution of central importance in the formation of the new generations.

It is essential to understand that the transition from secondary education to university usually takes place in the youth stage, where new experiences are discovered and sought along with a natural increase of freedom of choice and decision-making, but also of a need to increase responsibilities (Pinedo, 2012). It is in this context that many young people move to universities, often in distant places, and their separation from the family of origin is necessary. It can therefore be understood that universities are institutions of socialization and acquisition of technical and scientific skills, but in fact they are also places where many other learnings are developed that, not being part of the programmatic content, result from the interactions established there by the young who begin to live their daily life more autonomously.

Also for the reasons mentioned above, studies have been carried out on the vulnerability identified in young university students about addictive behaviors (Kandel, 2009), drug use/abuse, either to achieve better school performance (Dietz, Striegel, Franke, Lieb, Simon, & Ulrich, 2013) either for recreational or relaxation reasons. It has been recurrently concluded that these consumptions are increasingly worrying (Machado, Moura, & Almeida, 2015), and that the problem has continued in a university context, when not aggravated, over time, across generations (Andrade, Duarte & Oliveira, 2010; Morales, Valle, Belmar, Orellana, Soto, & Ivanovic, 2011).

For all that has been pointed out so far, it is easily understood that in places where consumption is recurrent and the population adheres to this behavior, as it will be the case with university students, drug trafficking is also something to be considered. In other words, presumably, where there is abundant consumption, there will likewise be equally significant drug sales. In fact, it is very difficult for those who traffic to be willing to lose a market share where there are so many potential buyers.

2. DRUG ABUSE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING IN STUDENT CONTEXT

Being highly sought after and consumed by young people (Willits, Broidy, & Denman, 2013), drugs are part of a big business that is naturally distributed according to the demand for the product that is transacted. In fact, drug trafficking accounts for one-fifth of the world's product targeted by crime. It should be noted that only in Europe this illicit business corresponds to 0.1 - 0.6% of the Gross Domestic Product of the eight European States with published data in this respect. According to estimates, the drug market in the European Union exceeds 24 billion euros. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that such estimates are always shown as minimum values, since they are weighted considering only the five most commonly consumed drugs. Therefore, such estimated values will certainly fall far short of the actual values achieved by substance trafficking (European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction, & Europol, 2016).

As mentioned before, this type of market is not distributed in a random way, but rather in a way that depends on spaces, places and populations where there is more demand, more chances of good business and less possibilities to be detected by means of formal social control. In other words, the geographical distribution of markets and the distribution and sale strategies are linked to the dynamics of substance demand (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2017), both globally and locally. It can therefore easily be verified, once again, that if university students are potential drug users, drug traffickers will not leave universities out of their distribution plans.

A number of studies (e.g., Barrett, Darredeau, & Pihl, 2006; Maier, Liechti, Herzig, & Schaub, 2013; Machado, Moura, & Almeida, 2015) have been carried out on student substance consumption and, more specifically, university students. A study carried out with over 3000 university students from Lisbon, Portugal (Silva, Borrego, Ferreira, Lavado, Melo, Rowland, & Truninger, 2015) found that 40% of students reported having already used cannabis, with smart drugs amphetamines/methamphetamine appearing

with 5.4% and 3.3% of students consuming, and, in addition, 11.3% of the students surveyed reported having used cannabis in the last 30 days.

Recent studies, all over the world, are presenting very worrying numbers about the use/abuse of drugs by university students. One of these many studies was conducted in Switzerland with more than 6,200 young students (Maier, Liechti, Herzig, & Schaub, 2013). It was concluded that more than 13% had abusively used legal and illegal drugs or medically prescribed substances, i.e., as drugs of abuse. Among the substances consumed, it is important to highlight alcohol, sedatives, amphetamines, cannabis and cocaine, claiming causes such as overcoming stress, achieving better school results, relaxing by reducing anxiety and willingness to experiment. The research concluded that a significant percentage of Swiss university students consumed substances, at least sporadically, at times of academic assessments.

Another study, published in Canada (Barrett, Darredeau, & Pihl, 2006), found that university students often exhibit simultaneous multi-substance consumption patterns (pattern named Simultaneous Polysubstance U - SPU). The study evidenced the use of drugs such as cocaine, amphetamines, methylamphetamines, cannabis and others, revealing that such consumptions were made repeatedly and even routinely. In Brazil, a study carried out on the campus of a university (Oliveira, da Silva, & Franco, 2016) concluded that the measures to be taken regarding the dissemination of drugs in that context should be analyzed from the Social Sciences perspective, which could greatly contribute to mitigate the harmful effects that drugs generate at all levels. Very recently, in Colombia (Córdoba-Paz, Betancourth-Zambrano, & Tacán-Bastidas, 2017), a study found that more than 20% of surveyed university students reported consuming or having already consumed drugs. Many other researches, from various countries (e.g., Beltrán-Matute¹, Oseguera-Lazo¹, Coello-Paz, Posas-Mejía, García-López, Lanza, Alvarado, & Fawed-Reyes, 2016; McCabe, West, Teter, & Boyd, 2014; Ribeiro, Guerreiro, Dias, & Costa, 2013) have focused attention on drug abuse among university students, and once again it can be stated that these consumptions have not diminished, and that these youngsters, and the universities they attend, will be the target of drug traffickers.

There have been many analyzes of drug consumption among the university student population, but little has been researched on trafficking in these educational institutions. However, it is recognized the existence of circulation of substances in institutions of higher education, as it is indicated by the written media, in which Lito (2011), as part of a report for the *Sábado* magazine, edition 372 of June 2011, states that drug use/abuse is very high among university students, referring how drug trafficking is carried out, not only in the vicinity of universities, but also in the interior spaces and classrooms of these institutions.

Therefore, the study of drug trafficking, as a social phenomenon that has implications in terms of the economic, cultural, social, and global and local security levels, needs to be urgently studied.

2.1. Drug Use/Abuse and Drug Trafficking in Universities – an Exploratory Evaluation

It is important to realize that if issues related to drug trafficking in a student context should be seen as something to combat and prevent, it is also essential to understand that prevention/intervention actions should be preceded by an assessment in each university context, accounting with the specificities of each institution.

It was from this perspective that a questionnaire (Beça, & Nunes, 2016) to obtain information about drugs, their consumption and trafficking, through a survey of the university student population, was developed. The questionnaire was tested and, once revised, it was disseminated in a network through the internet, through circuits composed of university students. In addition to the sociodemographic data and referring to the situation of the respondent as a university student, the questionnaire included a second part in which questions about consumption are raised. In this section, the student is asked whether he/she is or was a consumer, and if there are colleagues who also are or have been consumers. In the case of affirmative answers, the identification of the drugs consumed and the pattern of consumption is then made. It is also questioned about the substances that the participant knows

to be the most consumed in his/her university. Then, the questionnaire presents questions regarding the particularities of consumption in the specific university of the respondent. Questions are then asked about the places of consumption (inside, outside and in the vicinity of the university) and the time periods when there are more consumptions (day or night, during the school period or on vacation, during school hours or in the breaks, ...). Finally, the questionnaire addresses the particularities of drug access in the specific university to which the individual belongs. It is asked where drugs are bought/sold (inside, outside and in the vicinity of the university), who provides/sells (student or not, belonging to that university or to another institution, with external provenance and if who sells is or is not a consumer). In this way, it is intended to collect information that allows to know the circuits of illegal drugs that are established in each university institution. Only with this knowledge will it be possible, afterwards, to think about monitoring, prevention and intervention programs.

It was based on this questionnaire, published in the meantime (Beça, & Nunes, 2016) that an exploratory and descriptive study was developed, aiming to have a first analysis of what is happening in Portuguese universities, and where the high occurrence of drug use/abuse was observed, as it was foreseen by the literature review, and it was also possible to identify a significant reference to illegal substance trafficking in the circuits frequented by students and in the universities themselves, especially in the bars and even in classrooms. It was also possible to conclude that a large proportion of those who sell drugs are also consumers, students in universities and from abroad, with more male participation but tending towards a growing involvement by female students. From this first survey of information, the need for a deeper study is revealed, although it is already possible to draw from this chapter some conclusions and implications.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH ON DRUG ABUSE AND DRUG TRAFFICKING IN UNIVERSITIES - CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

First of all, it should be emphasized the need to carry out analyzes that, in different countries and universities, can give an idea of what can be convergent and common, in order to outline general programs of action in this field, in a university context. On the other hand, from those comparative analyzes, the particularities revealed by the divergences found in different universities can also be identified, so that this general structure can be endowed with the programs of action, strategies, measures and specific practices addressed to each educational institution, taking into account its specific characteristics.

Secondly, it seems to be clear that, since there are so many studies on drug use/abuse in a university context, such analyzes could take into account that there are only illegal drugs involved where there are those people who distribute and sell them. Therefore, it seems evident that the analyzes of the consumptions must include questions that allow to access the way the drugs consumed are within reach of the students, where and through which social personalities, how and in what periods of time. In fact, it is not worth much fighting the use of drugs when not accomplishing the same against drug trafficking.

Then, based on these studies, and on the results outcome, it is important to rethink the vigilance, security and social control in universities, as illegal drug traffickers enter them, either being students or people from abroad, allowing that in the own classrooms and in the bars and residences the drugs may circulate without restrictions.

Finally, it would be crucial to clearly define prevention/intervention programs designed for this specific population, which, of course, presents particularities that differentiate it from other contexts of young people - as it can be seen in the literature, since they are young people often displaced from home, newcomers to cities which they do not know and where they will be very lonely, subject to great pressure and academic and personal demands, never before known to them.

The problem of drugs, drug use/abuse and drug trafficking, does not have only implications in terms of health issues or to the justice system. In fact, they are social phenomena that must, therefore, be viewed in this light and socially contextualized, so that more effective measures can be drawn.

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