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The Drug Economy and Youth Interventions: An Exploratory Research Project on Working with Young People Involved in the Illegal Drugs Trade

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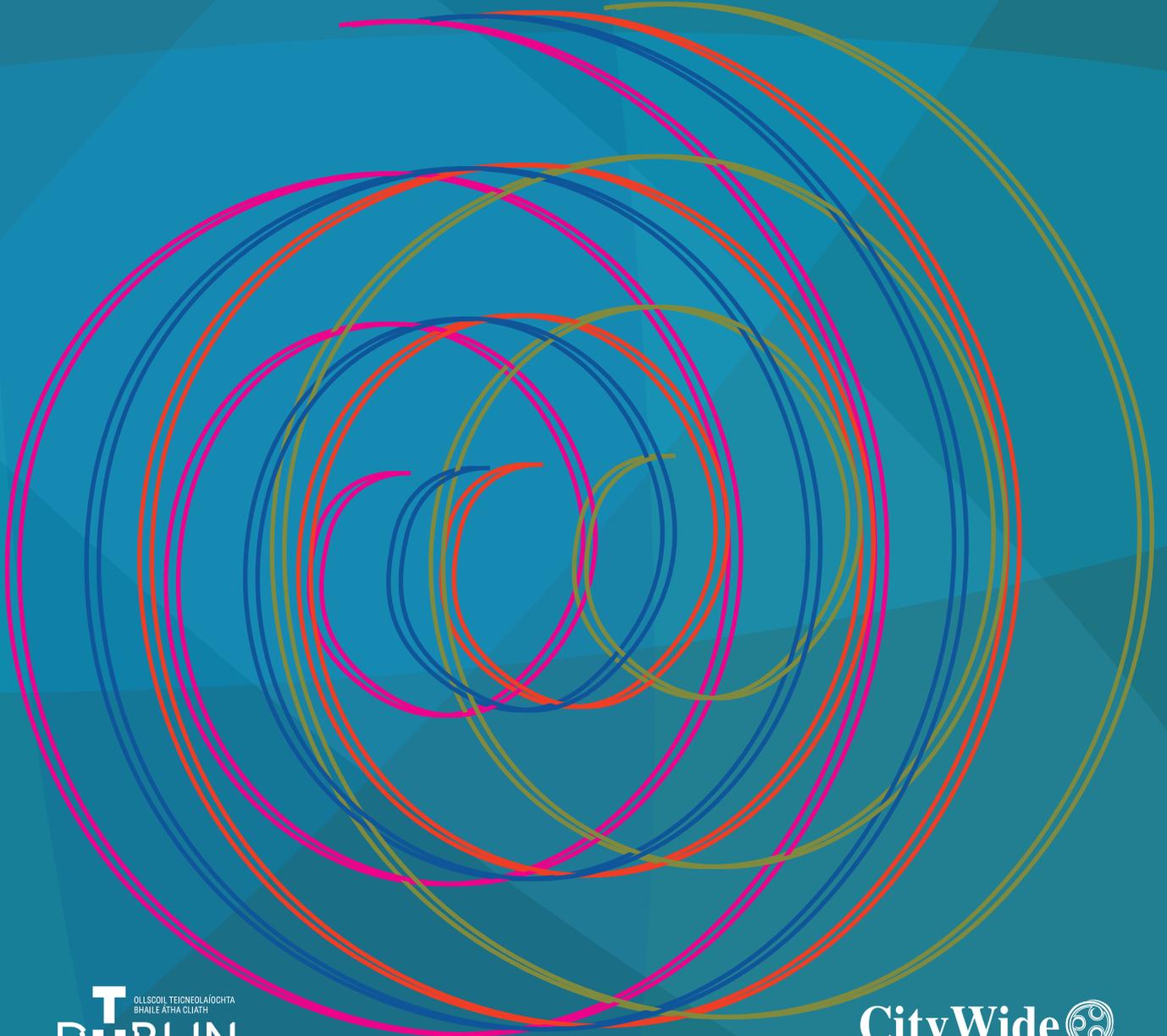
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Working with Young People
Involved in the Illegal Drugs Trade

Dr. Matt Bowden

Technological University Dublin



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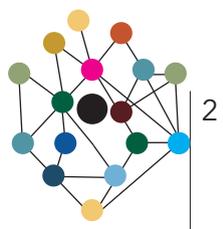
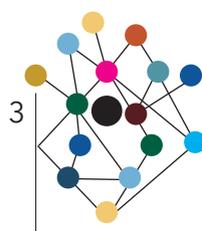
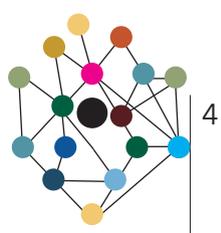


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1. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This study stems from a report produced by Citywide in 2016 on the issue of drug-related intimidation. The report identified the need to look closer at the issue of early intervention with young people who become involved in drug distribution (Conolly and Buckley, 2016). The intention of Citywide in commissioning this new study was to undertake some exploratory research with a small, yet intensely representative sample, of practitioners working directly with or encountering drug-related intimidation and violence in the communities in which they worked.

Citywide commissioned Dr Matt Bowden, Senior Lecturer at Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin) to carry out the research in December 2017. The researcher was tasked to undertake a series of interviews with practitioners working at local level, primarily in either youth work or in drug intervention services working in communities. The researcher's terms of reference were formed from the aims and desired methodological approach set out by Citywide in its research brief.

The aims of the research were:

1. To explore the experience of youth services and community drug projects who are engaging with young people involved in, or at risk of becoming involved in, the illegal drugs trade
2. To gather information on the approaches they are taking to working with the young people
3. To describe the context, achievements and limitations of the approaches as experienced by the practitioners
4. To identify key elements of a potential model for working with the young people, that can be further examined for its fit with existing European or international models

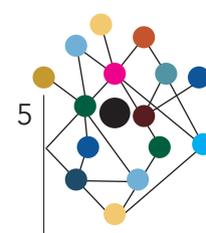
As the fieldwork progressed, it became clear that a wider set of issues were being raised by the participants in interviews. The project therefore evolved to encompass these rich insights and experiences in respect of the drug economy.

A research advisory group consisting of the researcher and two members of Citywide staff met to guide the research over the duration of the project. The advisory group helped to form the sampling strategy and made initial approaches to the participants in the project. The group also provided a sounding platform for issues arising from the research as the fieldwork stage proceeded.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH APPROACH

The research is an exploratory qualitative study with a small yet focused sample of practitioners working at community level with young people, and who are engaged in issues related to local drug markets and their effects. A total of seven in-depth, semi structured interviews were held with practitioners in a variety of settings in the Dublin area. While attempts were made to include participants from across the country, this proved more difficult to arrange than envisaged. This limits the scope of the research to some extent, but nonetheless it is hoped that the intensity of the issues identified will resonate among practitioners across Ireland.

The research was developed within the guidelines for research ethics and integrity at Dublin Institute of Technology (now TU Dublin). Approval of the research approach, methodology and fieldwork procedures were approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee. Accordingly, participants were recruited on a confidential basis and data in this report has been anonymised.



Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted. Participants were chosen based upon the following criteria:

- Closeness to and ability to speak particularly about the issues of drug markets and intimidation;
- Be embedded in a local community context and be actively engaged with young people experiencing drug related problems and or associated violence.

A selection grid was developed to ensure that there was representation of distinct areas of the city, each with different experiences of the problems, together with a variety of practice traditions. To aid the selection of participants, the following categories were generally adopted to ensure a balance in geography, gender and practice experience:

- Peripheral areas;
- Inner city areas north and south;
- Inner suburban;
- Male and female balance;
- Length of experience.

All of those interviewed were Dublin based. The sample was selected to reflect a wide variety of settings in the city, and further filtered to create a variety of ages / length of experience and gender. The spatial criteria sought to ensure that the differences in effects of the drug market in each setting were captured. The categories used were inner city (north); inner city (south); inner suburban; outer periphery; non-Dublin. In recruiting the participants, contacts were approached in two urban areas outside Dublin but the organisation of interviews did not proceed. A summary of the participants'

characteristics in terms of positions, gender and experience is outlined in Table 1 below.

The participants ranged in age from late twenties to mid-sixties and therefore was representative of the different levels of experience across the field. The more experienced practitioners were well positioned to identify the qualitative shifts in drug related problems over time; more newly positioned participants brought their own critical insights and ideas. Overall the data reflect a rich cross-section of experiences.

A total of seven interviews were carried out. All interviewees are working directly with young people and families affected by drug use and the related violence. All seven participants have reported direct encounters with young people who have been drawn into drug selling, holding either drugs or cash for drug dealers, or who have been threatened or assaulted as a result of their engagements with drug selling.

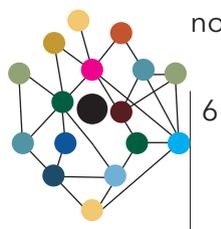




TABLE 1. INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

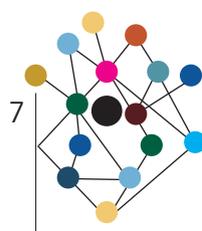
PARTICIPANT / PSEUDONYM	GENDER	SERVICE CONTEXT	EXPERIENCE
1. Chris	Male	Drug service adults and young people	25 years
2. Jenny	Female	Youth diversion project	7 years
3. Robert	Male	Social work / youth work	35 years
4. Lucy	Female	Youth service	15 years
5. Aidan	Male	Drug team	25 years
6. Noel	Male	Youth work	35 years
7. Madeline	Female	Youth service / drugs education	10 years

Interview Method

Qualitative interviews were undertaken using a standard guide containing six core questions. An inductive approach was followed so that as each interview proceeded, additional clarifying questions were asked. Interviews were audio recorded and were fully transcribed to produce a dataset.

Approach to Data Analysis

A thematic approach to the data analysis involved the organisation of data into a series of nodes. Using nVivo the researcher identified those themes that were recurring, prominent and widespread across the interviews. Clusters of nodes were then ranked and the highest occurring themes chosen where they had been identified by at least three participants or where there were more than four references to the node. The core themes are presented in chapter 3 below.



2. VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION IN THE ILLEGAL DRUG TRADE

INTRODUCTION

In the ten year period leading up to this report, the illicit drug market in Ireland has changed from a preponderance of opiate use, to a more highly differentiated pattern of polydrug use. As a consequence, some of the observations introduced below, record a more fraught, violent and dangerous milieu involving drug related debt and the threatening methods used by dealers to recoup monies for drugs purchased or advanced on credit. A number of research reports over the last decade have recorded the effects on communities most impacted by such actual and implied violence. This report adds value to these analyses by drawing together the experiences of practitioners working with young people at community level.

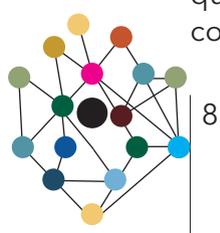
This chapter outlines and discusses what we have learned from previous reports on the issue of drug markets and intimidation in Ireland. In addition, some critical issues from the wider literature are also considered, together with some considerations for intervention, prevention and desistance.

ISSUES FROM IRISH RESEARCH ON DRUG MARKETS

Critical to any analysis of drug problems in the state is the experiences of local communities especially as these relate to social order and quality of life issues that impact negatively on community life. Such quality of life issues are widely reported in the experiences of people living in social housing, especially local authority estates (Fahey et al 1999; Norris 2013; O’Gorman 2013). Probing this issue of drug related problems at community level more deeply, a qualitative participative study in three communities in Dublin and Bray commis-

sioned by the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD) sought to develop indicators of community drug problems (Loughran and McCann, 2006). The report noted a qualitative change from problems associated with opiate use to a more complex picture resulting from a shift to polydrug use especially cocaine, alcohol, benzodiazepines and cannabis. In addition the report noted that drug markets had become more complex, involving the use of mobile phones, open dealing in public places, and a greater sense that there was violence and intimidation associated with drug markets. A rise in drug related deaths was seen has having a devastating effect on children and families. Communities in the study perceived that crime associated with drug use had become more violent while relationships with An Garda Síochána, although welcomed, were strained by unresponsiveness and were, in their view, lacking in any capacity to act on drug related crime. The study captured a greater sense of fear and insecurity associated with changing drug markets as local people withdrew from public places (Loughran and McCann, 2006).

A further study was carried out by the Family Support Network (FSN) that surveyed family support workers and facilitators on cases of intimidation they had come across. Of the 47 services who participated in the survey, 30 said that they had dealt with up to ten cases and nine services had dealt with between 11 and 20 cases in a one year period. All the families in touch with the FSN linked services had experienced debt related intimidation. Most of the cases noted by the FSN services were related to debts of less than €4,000 and 30 cases related to debts less than €500. Families experienced verbal threats and physical violence as well as damage to property: a smaller number of cases (n=7) were known to have involved sexual violence or threat. Paying a debt did not necessarily





end the intimidation as drug users bought or were offered drugs on credit, and most families had to borrow money to make repayments, some of which brought them into contact with non-regulated money lenders (O’Leary, 2009).

O’Leary (2009) also reported that apart from the fear experienced at personal and familial levels, the fear generated within the community meant that it was difficult to raise awareness and seek support publicly. In addition, women were pressured to carry out sexual favours for drug dealers related to drug debts. The report highlighted in general the social and economic impact of debt related intimidation and raised a series of critical issues in respect of its role in underpinning the drug economy. Intimidation has been seen as part of an ‘iceberg’ structure of that economy which uses lower level anti-social behaviour in the community as a way of generating fear (Jennings, 2015).

A report published by City Wide (Connolly and Buckley, 2016) analysed responses from community project workers who kept an audit of incidents of intimidation or violence. The research also used focus groups to contextualise the quantitative findings. The report found that:

- Incidents occurred primarily in the evening but that social media could determine that intimidation had no fixed schedule;
- Victims themselves or their mothers were the primary reporters to the community projects;
- Victims and their parents were the main targets of this intimidation, primarily mothers, followed by fathers and siblings;
- Intimidation, threats and violence was mainly deployed as a way of ensuring drugs bought on credit were paid for;
- Debts were often arbitrarily ‘manipulated’ upwards as a means of profiting;
- Intimidation was primarily committed by

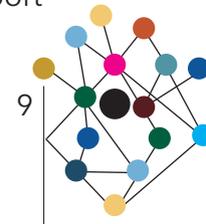
males aged between 18 and 35 and in 70% of cases were carried out by groups as opposed to individuals;

- Much of the latter was peer-to-peer communication as noted by focus groups;
- Paying the debt (45%) or taking no further action (30%) were the main ways that victims or families responded;
- Most reported it to a community organisation or to the Family Support Network, with one third of incidents reported to Gardai;
- Fear of reprisal was the main reason cited for not reporting incidents to the Gardaí.

The report also noted that incidents of intimidation led to some personal and community wide consequences. The report found that:

- Apart from physical harm (37%) mental health issues (67%) were reported as one of the main consequences;
- Fear for personal and children’s safety was also a major consequence including also relationship breakdown;
- Incidents of intimidation led to problems at work including workplace stress as well as financial problems.

Discussing the policy implications of the findings Connolly and Buckley acknowledged that there was no simple solution to the problem and underlined that fear was a major factor in preventing the proper harnessing of data to drive policy responses. The role of the community and voluntary sector, the report argued, is not to gather or report on such data: this, the report pointed out, is the responsibility of the criminal justice system and the police. Nonetheless, people are prepared to report to trusted local bodies and agencies; and a way of capturing this data remains a challenge. Much of the intimidation occurs in local and school settings and is peer-to-peer in nature. Hence the report



stressed the need for early intervention and prevention to help youth be more resilient in such circumstances. Further consideration needed to be given in respect of supporting mothers as bearers of the experience of intimidation; and for preventive interventions with young people. The report argued that to respond to local drug markets the state should consider legislating for community impact statements which could be admissible as evidence (Connolly and Buckley, 2016).

Intimidation is widely recognised as serving a number of functions within the drug economy both at the interpersonal and community level where it seeks to produce a level of fear into individuals, families and communities. It can be seen as the force and power driving the drug economy in local neighbourhoods. An evidence review commissioned by the HRB on drug-related intimidation (Murphy et al, 2017) built a conceptual framework making a series of critical distinctions. Citing Goldstein (1985) for instance, they made the distinction between psychopharmacological intimidation; economic-compulsive intimidation; and systemic intimidation – including two sub-categories of disciplinary intimidation and successional intimidation. Overlaying these distinctions are two broad categories of Drug Related Intimidation (DRI) which is carried out by those using drugs or involved in their distribution; and Drug Debt Intimidation (DDI) which more specifically relates to the disciplinary process through which drug debts are reclaimed.

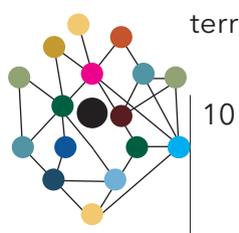
Psychopharmacological intimidation relates to intimidation resulting from the effects of a drug or drug withdrawal. *Economic intimidation* relates to the acquisition of money to fund one's own drug use where there is a compulsive dimension. *Systemic-disciplinary intimidation* relates to the use of force within drug selling hierarchies to ensure that it can punish or control those under its power such as marshalling others within the drug distribution network or in the reclaiming of debts. *Systemic-successional intimidation* describes that which is used to control a territory or to solicit new members to a

distribution group (Murphy et al, 2017: 14-15). Hence a working definition of intimidation, the authors suggest, is 'a serious, insidious and coercive behaviour intended to force compliance of another person against their will' (2017: 14) involving verbal threats or actual physical violence.

ISSUES FROM INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE

Many of the issues highlighted in the Irish research reports demonstrate the qualitative differences between the heroin epidemics of the 1980s -1990s and the current situation. Primarily the major shift has been towards greater polydrug use and away from opiate use, a trend that has been also noted in Ireland and tracked systematically by prevalence studies over the last 15 years (see NACDA, 2014). Reflecting the implications of this for drug problems and drug policy in the UK, Seddon (2000, 2006) suggested the shift to polydrug use at once exposed the limits of opiate treatment using methadone as a crime reduction strategy: the change was noted as not just a shift in choice, but was a reflection of wider social, economic and cultural changes. Heroin is a predictable substance and that simplifies its containment: a wider range of substances creates a more heterogeneous set of effects and were seen as a coming wave of risk-taking associated with a more consumer oriented youth (Parker et al, 1997). Some Irish research on this risk decision-making process noted that recreational polydrug users were using different substances at different times in the week to achieve a range of different mood altering effects (O'Gorman, 2016).

Just over a decade ago, researchers working on the related issues of drugs and crime noted that drug problems, like all social issues and problems, were being transformed (Seddon et al, 2008). Society was entering a new era commonly referred to as *late modernity*: a period in western society marked by greater uncertainty and insecurity where the modern institutions and certainties





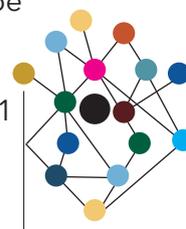
had become 'liquefied' (Bauman, 2000). This involves the demise of the stable paid work and the rise of the consumer oriented society with tremendous wealth co-existing with abject poverty and social exclusion (Young, 2007). This pattern was also noted to be reflected in the shape of cities which were seeing greater 'gentrification', co-existing alongside the socially excluded, that would have a damaging effect upon stable working class communities as social solidarity declined (Castells, 2000). As early as a decade ago it was noted that the occupational structure in Ireland had reflected this trend: rising levels of wealth associated with management and software related occupations; declining manual trades; and a multiplication of precarious employment in services (Breathnach, 2002, 2004, 2007) seemed to point toward greater social polarisation. The rise of recreational drug use in the UK was seen as accompanying a similar polarised pattern with greater social exclusion; leading ultimately to more complex social problems and to new policy predicaments (Seddon, 2006).

Methadone maintenance had been part of a range of policy interventions to stabilise the opiate problem and therefore reduce the rate of acquisitive crime. A new predicament for drug policy and practice therefore has been the shift to a new set of supply chains and the debt based, networked system of distribution that underpins it. Such networks are noted for operating on a distinct logic that are not captured by the idea of 'gangs'. This goes against media and official ideas about gangs in which they are perceived as vertically organised with chains of command from top to bottom. However current criminological research reveals that "gangs" are seen as being 'messier', fluid and less predictable (see Densley, 2018). Indeed, the concept of "gang" remains contested and debatable and caution is advised against adopting policies and interventions deriving from US definitions, as there is a lack of empirical evidence for their fit for European patterns (Fraser et al, 2018). A study in the UK showed that young people are often mislabelled as being members of gangs

for what are street-based peer groups, most of which are prosocial and involve no illegal activity (60%); some involve groups where there is some drug use (11%); while higher level offender groups are a minority (5%) (Medina et al, 2013). Policies and interventions in relation to identifying or disrupting "gangs" need to clearly distinguish between these different groups.

Credit is an essential part of any economic activity and in the commercial world, credit is regulated by a legal framework involving contracts and strict controls. Illegal drug markets by definition are not supported by regulation and therefore have to work within codes of honour to ensure that debts are recouped. Hence while licit markets are said to be guided by an "invisible hand", illegal markets have to rely upon the "visible hand" of violence and therefore rely upon 'intricate interpersonal negotiations and reputational considerations' (Moeller and Sandberg, 2016: 4).

A common assumption is that all drug dealing is necessarily violent and yet most drug transactions are conducted and completed without any violence. Moeller and Sandberg (2016) put forward a conceptual model that they derived from 40 qualitative interviews with imprisoned drug dealers. Their findings dispel the idea that violence and intimidation stems automatically from drug transactions and the credit system. Drug dealers or 'creditors' are involved in "fronting" drugs to 'debtors'. Drug creditors manage debt through two main modes of governance: *co-operative* and *adversarial*. These produce four different outcomes: (i) loss (ii) refinancing; (iii) extortion; and (iv) revenge. *Co-operative* drug dealers calculate that they will have some level of *loss* and allow for contingency for such losses without the need to recoup. This is provided that the debtor does or has not deliberately engaged in risky behaviour with the supply. In addition, *co-operative* creditors govern debt by refinancing, as what is most critical to them is to remain embedded with the debtor; they would rather their system be



kept intact than losing their loyalty. *Adversarial* drug dealing by contrast is where a creditor has to resort to a 'reputation for violence' in order to assert coercion: they will assess in advance what they might be able to recoup from a debtor through *extortion* if they lose the supply or fail to pay. The use of violence is considered by the drug dealers in the study as a last resort where their reputation for violence needs to be upheld in order that their system of governance is kept intact. In short, the authors conclude:

We found that creditors invest time, money and drugs in their ties in recognition of how important they are for insulating against law enforcement and for creating value. Socio-cultural context and law enforcement also affects peace and violence in drug markets by influencing the decisions involved in credit provision (Moeller and Sandberg, 2016: 23).

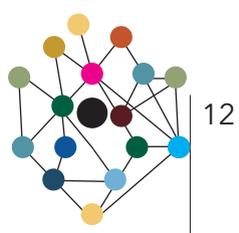
Disrupting drug markets has become a major media, political and popular call with the intent of eliminating drug related violence. However a systematic review (a meta-study of major studies on enforcement) showed that this is counter intuitive (Werb et al 2011). Most of the studies reviewed seemed to suggest that increasing law enforcement was not likely to bring down levels of violence associated with drug markets. As gun violence and high death rates are shown to be the result of drug prohibition, disruption strategies can increase rather than decrease violence. The authors concluded that:

..the existing scientific evidence suggest drug law enforcement contributes to gun violence and higher homicide rates and that increasingly sophisticated methods of disrupting organisations involved in drug distribution could paradoxically increase violence. In this context, and since drug prohibition has not achieved its stated goals of reducing drug supply, alternative regulatory models for drug control will be required if drug market violence is to be substantially reduced (Werb et al, 2011: 6).

In summary, drug financing is a complex arena and there are no easy solutions: especially if the problem is approached without reference to the underlying economic and financial logic. Over emphasis on enforcement produces contradictory effects and has the potential to amplify violence.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON INTERVENTIONS AND THEIR LIMITATIONS

A Health Research Board (HRB) review of the international literature (Murphy et al, 2017) provided a wide ranging search of available literature on effective preventive and intervention programmes to prevent gang membership and to hasten gang desistance (though it must be said, presented little evidence for such gang structures in the Irish context). The report categorised interventions at three levels: universal or primary prevention to prevent drug use and involvement in 'gangs' through social inclusion; secondary or selective interventions to promote desistance from gangs by diverting young people; and indicated interventions to deter or suppress gang or criminal network activity. The findings of the review for each level of prevention / intervention are summarised as follows:





Universal Prevention

Interventions that sought to strengthen protective factors, such as problem-solving skills and life skills, were effective where they promoted positive goals, involved parents, had professional facilitators (teachers), and a scheduled curriculum.

Selected Prevention

Interventions that strengthened relationships between children and parents and training for at-risk parents, reduced their children's offending in adolescence and adulthood.

Indicated Prevention

These interventions engage young people with high risk behaviours including substance use and criminal involvement. Effective interventions included those that involve therapeutic principles and wrap around approaches to specific young people, that were individualized programmes of care over sustained periods.

In general the review found that there was limited evidence on interventions to prevent gang membership in itself and hence targeting some of the associated behaviours might be more worthwhile. Effective interventions that target crime and antisocial behaviour, the review suggested, are those that are school based and have a skill training dimension and / or programmes with therapeutic principles. The review also pointed out that therapy based interventions showed greater effect where they used risk factor assessment tools:

As well as reducing risk factors and preventing negative outcomes, programmes focused on promoting positive changes in youth (and their families) may be more acceptable to the community, due to the stigmatizing nature of programmes focused on specific issues such as gang membership, drugs or crime (Murphy et al, 2017: 81).

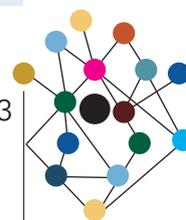
Desistance

Studies in the area of desistance have widely shown that offenders desist where they develop a strong alternative narrative as part of a process of maturity. This usually entails having a strong intimate relationship with a significant other and having wider commitments to a job or vocation (Sampson and Laub, 2005). Desistance involves turning points in a young adult's life: they begin to desist as they pursue other paths. This process is aided, by what Maruna (2001) has revealed and termed, a 'redemptive script'. This involves a strong sense of control over their life chances; positive recognition for their own achievements; achieving their life goals; presenting a sense of themselves as essentially good people. A redemptive script stands in contrast with those of persistent offenders who demonstrated having a 'condemnation script' whereby offenders have no sense of agency or capacity to change. Offenders are helped to develop redemptive scripts by advocates such as probation workers, counsellors, youth justice workers.

CONCLUSION

The drug problem has become more complex over time and the associated violence and intimidation has become as much a challenge as the issue of drug dependency itself. Interventions show signs of hope for defusing the violence associated with drug markets. A major challenge is to keep lines of contact open with those who are drawn into drug markets either as debtors, creditors or end consumers.

The research interviews explored some of these themes with locally based practitioners working with young people in the community alongside a focus on present and potential interventions.



3. THEMES FROM THE INTERVIEW DATA

INTRODUCTION

Following the research aims and the brief for the project, the semi-structured interviews centred upon six broad themes. Using nVivo, codes were organised into a series of 'nodes' as they emerged in the transcripts. The nodes were then grouped according to the broad themes. Priority was given to nodes that had more than three references or more than two participants. The first two themes are largely descriptive as they outline the positions occupied by the participants in their communities and how young people, who are impacted by drug markets, are engaged with by the service or project. In these first two themes what is shown is how close the participants are to the issues and reflects the location from which they are legitimate observers of the issues explored in the research. The remainder of the themes are drawn from the analysis of the data.

The thematic structure for the research analysis is as follows:

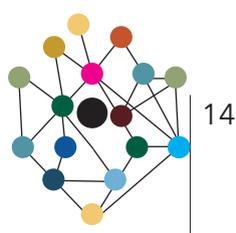
- Work and Positions of the Participants
- Engagements by and with Young People
- Drug Problems in the Areas Served
- Effects and Affects of Drug Problems and Drug Markets
- Approach of the Service or Project to Interventions
- Models of Intervention Tried, Required or Desired

WORK AND POSITIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The participants are all locally based and situated in a variety of local service contexts including Garda Youth Diversion Projects, youth work / services, community-based drug interventions. Broadly speaking the participants are involved in secondary level crime and or drug prevention work, in both informal and non-formal settings. Some were working in low threshold services that encourage access irrespective of condition, in order to build relationships. As such, our participants are close to the issue of drug markets, drug selling and intimidation by virtue of their close working relationships with their clients and participants.

Research participants are based at local level and involved directly in providing services or help to young people and families. The scope of the work they undertake includes:

- Direct helping and accepting referrals from family members;
- Services dedicated to young adults as well as for under 18 year olds experiencing drug problems;
- Youth services offering a wide variety of interventions from structured in-house activity to street-based work;
- Providing youth services and individual counselling to second generation migrant youth;
- Engaging both with networks of state and non-state agencies, either formally where a contract or funding arrangement might exist, and informal where there is a sharing of information and expertise;
- Taking part in policy-making fora.





In short, the participants represent a range of standpoints and positions but in common they are close enough to the issues to voice their direct experiences of the predicaments associated with drug markets and the related threats and violence. The experience of the participants also crosses many generations - two of our interviewees had in excess of thirty-five years experience each. Our participants are positioned to comment on how the issues manifest themselves not only in recent years, but over four decades, adding to this report their intergenerational memory, knowledge and credibility.

ENGAGEMENTS BY AND WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

Participants reported that they use a range of strategies to contact young people and to encourage them to use their service or join their programmes. A mix of referral, self-referral and outreach activities were reported. This initial contact, which aims to develop relationships with young people, is a critical and valued first step for all the participants in the research. This is the case because irrespective of the level of intimidation and or threat that might exist, all interviewees regard it as critical to resource the work of outreach and initial contact. For those in denser inner-city areas this is easier than in peripheral areas where neighbourhoods are spread over wider distances.

Getting known and accepted is a critical part of engaging young people who are marginal and who are involved in drug selling or related intimidation and / or violence. A crucial challenge for most of the participants, centres upon the emergence of a group of younger men whose behaviours pose difficulties for standard activities or engagements, and who are viewed in the community as being potentially volatile and problematic. Lucy for example, described how some of these young men, who are caught up in cycles of drug related offending, debt, temporary exit and prison time, lead a frantic existence. They appear to be compelled to have to do a 'bigger deal' to pay fines or debts:

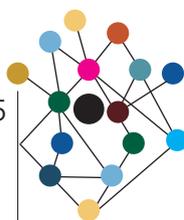
They end up there's a kind of franticness then. They either run, fight or flight or end up in deeper indebtedness. Prison or eh somebody else has a massive charge and they have got hung out then as well because they owed
(Lucy, Youth service co-ordinator).

Participants who were very experienced suggested that this cohort were qualitatively different to previous generations they had worked with. Noel pointed out that he saw as a great success the fact that his service had actually managed to attract a group of teenage boys who are viewed as out of control in the community.

Critical here is that despite the challenges, another participant Aidan points out that these young men are not untouchable despite the narrative about them. He suggests that there is always some family and community ties, given the interconnectedness of relationships. Such ties or bonds present a positive resource to aid desistance:

I mean I'm sure, cause there's not so much the societal pressure but there remains I would say of the decency of community or family, that still is strong so, and I suppose in a community development sense, that's forgotten about sometimes, that they are, they are the big things that can help change, you know? (Aidan, drug team)

Between the more established practitioners interviewed there is a strong consensus that they have encountered a qualitatively distinct group of young men who present as more brash, frantic and potentially volatile than experienced hitherto. There was a strong sense from the interviewees that they must be engaged. As Aidan again puts it *"there's huge benefits in being engaged with young men at this age and with all the problems that they're causing (.) and involved in, including some that are detrimental to their own existence as well, is that they're still is very very (.) doable practical things that we can do that can make the difference"* (Aidan, drug team)



DRUG PROBLEMS IN THE AREAS SERVED

Polydrug Use

All participants agreed that a wider range of drugs were being used. More established practitioners were able to compare their experiences of drug problems now in contrast with what they experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. A shift to polydrug use was noted and a move from heroin use. A concomitant shift also noted is the need for a reclassification of the distinction between user and dealer as these begin to blend into one another. Jenny, when asked what the main challenges were in relation to drug use, describes a process that involves recreational use initially which can progress along to 'muling'. Many young people who use cannabis or other recreational substances do not necessarily progress but Jenny says that this can happen very informally, often without young people consciously undertaking to be part of the drug trade:

Em and unfortunately, I suppose for us what has happened is start off on weed, quite sporadically you know, it's kind of recreational thing. But the drug situation has escalated within a matter of months for them so all of a sudden then they're doing recreational drug use of cocaine and we've seen some young people rapidly decrease within a year. Em there is a lot of em how would you put it, drug muling. In our cases what we've come across is young people holding drugs for kind of the bigger drug dealers (Jenny, youth diversion worker).

Comparing the current issue with the 1980s and 1990s, where the main drug used was heroin which has a predictable pharmacological effect, participants suggested that the current situation is more risk-laden and more unpredictable. However, both cannabis and alcohol remain two of the most prominent substances used and around which there are problematic behaviours, compounded by

the use of cocaine and ecstasy, as outlined by Chris who works in a local addiction service:

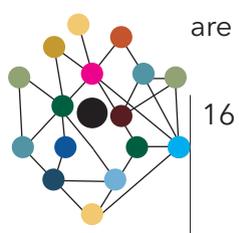
Like I done a urine test on a guy on a Monday and he had eight drugs in his system. Seven and then alcohol. We don't test for alcohol. He had seven drugs and alcohol in his system over the weekend (Chris, drug service).

While in the current situation there are qualitative differences with the heroin epidemics at the end of the last century, there are some continuities. This is particularly true where there is a history of problematic drug use of parents and from those coping with a compound of problems. Robert points out that the most at risk "*tend to be ones who are coming from the most difficult families, the long term unemployed, the broken families, the already drug-parent families, the prisoner-parent families*" (Robert, social worker / youth worker).

Drug "Normalisation"

The term used by practitioners to describe the current situation regarding drug problems in their neighbourhoods and communities was *normalisation*. The effect of this is to re-cast the roles played by users and dealers, as if this binary is too simplistic to capture the complexity of the situation. As a long established professional and well-regarded observer of these issues in the community, Noel suggests that drug consumption, and its associated issues have penetrated the lives of 'ordinary people': "*there's just a bigger selection of drugs available here, is the big difference right, I would say. It's just a broader menu of things, of drugs, right that's what I would say right. Maybe it's because the weed is around, and hash is around and cocaine is around. All the benzos are around and and I mean and they're in big supply around here*" (Noel, youth worker).

Normalisation of drug use in communities appears to incorporate many people, even those who are not particularly at risk: not seeing their involvement in distribution, however minor, as problematic, seems to





enable people to enter into potentially harmful behaviours or to accept a role in distribution, or is neutralised by them. Lucy explains that it has become so normalised that even those regarded as being highly protected and resilient, have been easily mobilised to carry drugs: *“resilience is kind of a funny thing cause actually those guys would have resilience in their own way in another way but there’s something about the normalization of all this in their area”* (Lucy, youth services co-ordinator).

Normalisation results, they believe because there is less stigma attached to using this wider range of substances especially alcohol, which still is widely and aggressively marketed. Stigma is reserved, by the new drug users, for heroin users, especially older heroin users. Heroin is seen as a “dirty drug” to be reviled, and by extension, those who use it. Often they cannot share the same space and those working in drug services pointed out that the younger users bully the older heroin users. In the areas where the practitioners worked, heroin had been endemic for decades and has crossed generations. There appears to be a need amongst younger drug users, to create a distance between the drug use of the previous and current generation.

The Drug Economy

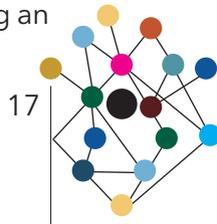
Participants reported that drug problems are now related to how the economic structure of distribution is organised. In this way drug selling is comprised of many levels. These are commonly referred to in interviews as divided by “main dealers”, “middle men” and “foot soldiers”, together with “enforcers” and “mules”. It also includes those who are “holding stuff” or “carrying stuff”. Many of those in these roles are also consumers and can shift between different roles at various times. Participants speak of the economy as having supply chains and friendship networks, where selling based upon a system of honour can be best effected. Drug selling is regarded as an alternative to labour market participation: seen as a type of entrepren-

eurship in an unregulated economy. The language of economy is strong therefore and eclipses any moral discourse that might otherwise surround drug use. This might have been possible when it came to heroin as there was usually one identifiable drug dealer. Participants spoke of solutions as including the interruption to the flow of capital on which the local drug economy is built. Robert suggests that to interrupt it, you need to have a similar effect that methadone maintenance had on profits from heroin addiction:

It’s often you get a one-dimensional picture of it as opposed to seeing it as an economy. So we need to take away the moral thing about it and look at it objectively and then say well how can we disrupt this and how can we get people to stop [...] If for example, if now they are given say for example needle exchanges like they’re giving out methadone. Methadone would have reduced for a while would have reduced the profitsSo I mean some of them of the more radical ways are about disrupting the market that way
(Robert, social worker / youth worker).

Some participants spoke of young dealers as *entrepreneurs*. A drug dealer being imprisoned or otherwise exiting the market creates a space: an opportunity which is grasped confidently and enables another young person to take hold of power to gain a position of domination over a particular territory. Noel points out when asked about threats that new ‘entrepreneurs’ make: *[That] “story I told you the last time about the two young fellas getting locked up and the other young fellas stepping into the breach. I mean they were openly stepping into the gap that had emerged, openly”* (Noel, youth worker). That dominant position in the drug market locally also enables a type of power to be wielded (discussed further below).

Participants in this study, reported that it has become ‘natural’ to think of drugs as being an



part of the informal economy with a degree of organisation. Participants, from their standpoints, confirmed that this is organised within a basic tiered hierarchy but they confirm that it primarily operates within a network logic. Lucy pointed out that drug dealing and organising others in the business is regarded as a job. When someone is a dealer they speak openly about it with practitioners, who know those involved in the distribution networks. Recalling a situation where the birth of a child, often regarded as being a point of desistance, Lucy attested that it was seen as opportunity to move up the hierarchy.

Like we'd like one of them recently he was a dad and we kind of said to him would you think now of haha [laughs] opting out of this business now you know and he kind of said are you mad? I have to do more of it now because I've a child to look after so he'd be a key HR manager of a lot of the younger people em (Lucy, youth services co-ordinator).

Holding Stuff, Testing and Grooming: Exposure to the Drug Economy

Initiation to the drug economy goes unrecognised and can materialise from what appears to be 'random', innocent or innocuous connection or request. This was referred to by some as a type of inculcation which can begin in an unconscious way and progress to testing loyalty to more fully conscious and active grooming. As Noel points out, this can start with being asked to run an errand to the shops, and can appear quite random:

They're confronted with something which is, I mean and there's a whole variety of things depending on what age are you. "Will you run up to the shop for me? There's a fiver". Right, to "will you keep sketch there". Right. "Will you hold that for me; will you"? Right (Noel, youth worker).

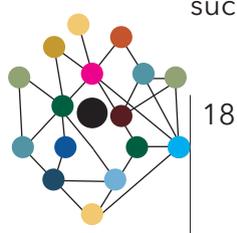
While there was a reluctance to suggest that such initiation was active or conscious

'grooming', it was nonetheless seen as a type of relationship building that might progress towards requests to holding money, drugs or weapons. In turn, this type of initiation seems to be linked closely with the cycle of debt (discussed further below) which underpins the drug economy in local communities. Holding drugs, cash or weapons can precede or follow initiation and may be a consequence of debt: as a way of expunging debt that cannot be repaid. Chris explains: "*They're asked to hold or they're asked to carry or make a delivery of some sort or to do something. Other things may be that they have been asked to intimidate someone. So in other words go down there and they'd be told 'that house'. And they'd do something to that house or that car or that person*" (Chris, local addiction service).

AFFECTS AND EFFECTS OF DRUG PROBLEMS AND DRUG MARKETS

Drug Economy and the Attractiveness of Drug Work

For the participants, the drug economy is fuelled by the precarity of the labour market, failures in the education system, poverty and social exclusion. These are not new problems but the informal economy associated with drugs is volatile, violent and risk-laden and therefore produces new manifestations. The drug economy is also socially driven, is organised upon a network rather than a hierarchical logic: is premised upon codes of honour with intimidation and violence as an external constraint on those who are involved. Drug selling and the associated activity of 'muling' and 'holding stuff' generates income to satisfy access to consumer goods desired by young people. In this sense it competes with labour as the main means for achieving rewards. As a consequence, it further undermines labour as a principle of organisation in working class communities and provides an alternative *deal* to which some young people are attracted.





One of the participants voiced this distinction well when she said that young people fall into two groups. The *resilient* (with jobs, education and prospects) who see drug work as means of accessing cash to 'party'; and the *vulnerable* for whom it is more about basics - clothes and food:

And when they were around clubs and wads [cash] it was all about the wads and buying drinks buying everything and going back and it was all that so yeah and then there was the other- I honestly I don't think it was that- and yeah it might be basics and yeah it might be trackies, runners food something to do, but I didn't get that feeling it was about the flash or the- when in fact generally they're kind of well-groomed not to be flash because you're bringing attention back to them so that yeah
(Lucy, youth service co-ordinator).

The labour deal involves hard work, saving, deferred gratification, years of preparation to acquire qualifications and training, competitive labour markets and all without guarantees of stable employment. For our participants, young people are faced with the choice between diminishing opportunities, zero hours contracts: whereas drug selling and related work offers immediate access to the prizes of the consumer society. Madeline explains that this is part of the fast moving, globalised, late-modern consumer world where status is what you are wearing and the possibility to participate is restricted:

I think it's a you know a whole modernisation thing or, you know, the world is moving so fast now and everybody likes nice things... I think a lot of it comes down to social media all this to do with image, all these nice things that you might have you know. Even in the last year there was a very big kinda thing around wearing Moncler, Moncler jackets and Canada Goose
(Madeline, youth work / drug education).

The attractions present themselves as young people seek out the 'glittering prizes' of late modern consumer society which these simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion (Young, 2007). Underlining this view is that the drug economy provides an alternative route to inclusion in the culture of consumption.

Recognising this more divided pattern of inclusion and exclusion, participants spoke of the difficulties that some young people have to overcome in order to take part. This is most stark in education where setbacks make labour market participation all the more difficult. Young people coping with unstable home lives find that the drug market becomes a viable alternative:

They're never going to compete against kids who are stable kids who have a family home, kids who are, you know [stable]. So then when you have the options of easier money through selling drugs and being part of the local drug market some of them fall. Not all of these ones fall that way but some of them fall that way and they're the ones that tend to be involved in the criminality, the intimidation and have the serious problems
(Robert, social worker / youth worker).

Participants were strong in their use of economic terms - labour force participation, qualifications and skills in their responses in the interviews. Again, an economic language is used to describe what is often addressed as health and criminal justice issues. Speaking of young people who experience intergenerational poverty, Robert points out that it is the precarity of the labour market, the low pay, the long hours and the struggle against adversity to require qualifications that do not incentivise work; a 'welfare trap' as he sees it, together with lack of 'disincentives'. All reinforce the attraction of drug work: "*hang around, stay up late all night it becomes for kids who can't see the future, and can't see the long term, it becomes their options, you'd be mad to go the line of the job and the work*"
(Robert, social worker / youth worker).



Some participants highlight that drugs are an alternative livelihood because of the absence of sustainable, long term prospects to replace the loss of jobs in trades and manufacturing, especially in the inner city. Noel says that he understands that “*some young people see it as the only choice. Now what sort of an indictment is that of this society, that the only choice that people working in this community, or communities like this, that the only choice they see right is drug dealing right*”. Over thirty-five years of experience working in a community, Noel said he felt disappointed with himself for not focusing on widening people’s educational and aspirational horizons. While some young people he has worked with have gone to college, their ‘big dreams’ have been limited to precarious work in retail:

....but we were talking you know and they had massive dreams for themselves. Incredible big dreams for themselves. They’re all in retail and not going anywhere else, right. ...All I’m trying to say is, my observation at this moment in time is that [...] they are as stuck there as they were in the other places right. Okay. (Noel, youth worker).

In summary, where stable work is unavailable, the drug economy is an attractive alternative. Aspirations stretch beyond what might be available in service employment which offers little incentive. The drug economy is a feature of ‘advanced marginality’ (Wacquant, 2008) – the absence of traditional trades and their replacement with precarious labour serves as no real alternative. Robert sums it up that participation in the drug economy offer status, consumer goods and a real alternative for some, despite the risks:

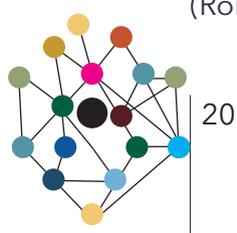
Your future is going to be unemployed, doing nothing, low income. You see your future as some fancy fella going off to mixing in with famous boxers and running a boxing club and having a big car. And you don’t have skills, you don’t have education and that’s your only career opportunity
(Robert, social worker / youth worker).

Credit, Debt and the Drug Economy

While there are distinct nuances between the participants’ accounts of the role of credit and debt in the drug economy, which had mostly to do with area differences, all were unequivocal on how credit and debt structure the drug economy and drug work. Critical here too is how networks of *friends selling to friends* serves not only as a means of distribution but also as a *technique of neutralisation* – a rationale that allows those participating to minimise the impact of their role or actions on victims (Sykes and Matza, 1957). This allows the higher-level supplier to coach the young person to act or remain in drug work, or for the young person to adopt the view that they are only selling to friends. Acquiring drugs to both consume and sell is primarily given ‘on tick’ or on credit. This credit-debt system is the principle economic organising logic underlying the drug economy; the bondage and violence associated with it.

Based upon his experience of dealing with young people with drug debts, Chris describes the structure as a *pyramid*. At the bottom there are networks of friends selling to friends who subsist on free drugs and who gain greater access to consumer goods. The real profits are made, according to Chris, at a higher points on the pyramid:

The way, normally the way that pyramid works is that when you start using cannabis you may buy some off a certain dealer or a certain friend of yours. A friend of yours you know sells and you buy a bit off your friend.....So these are not big-time drug dealers. They’re just making enough to of their own, to supply their own use. And a lot of the way up that pyramid would be people using in order to keep their own habit or in order to keep their own drug use. If they’re getting free drug use by selling drugs on. They’re not buying houses out of it or going on big mad holidays
(Chris, local addition service).





Working through groups of friends, participants pointed out that the drug dealer is not a remote, evil person but one who is very much integrated and part of local networks, familiar with and liked by those that are part of the supply chain. Therefore it is easy to accept drugs on credit from them. As Robert says *“well that’s the that’s the big thing is of course (..) sometimes the image is the evil drug dealer, the evil guy but a lot of the time is that the person welcomes the three hundred credit and they welcome the thing that they’re giving the drugs to their friends or they’re giving their drugs to their mates and the drug dealer is liked by the people he’s giving the drugs to”*.

Distribution friend-to-friend does not necessarily involve contact with dealers up the pyramid, according to Chris. When buying drugs for distribution involves contact, and therefore contracting with a supplier, it elevates and defines drug dealing and distribution. As Chris explained, the young people who are buying from friends do not have contact with the distribution - but there is someone in their friendship group who does: *“there is young kids that don’t get involved with the next dealer as such and the one they are always dealing with is just their own friend”*. Also Chris points out that it is this contact that is vital, for it is this link in the network that helps to bridge distributors with consumers. For that person, Chris notes: *“Once you get into it in some ways you’re trapped”*.

Effect of Drug Economy

The logic of economic exchange in the distribution of drugs is preceded by credit. This is advanced through friendship networks, and therefore disguised, as a *gift*. This itself appears to introduce violence as a means of enforcing the code of honour underpinning the exchange. The credit can be misrecognised therefore by the young people. It is only when the *covert contract* is enforced is it understood then as a bond to the distributor. Chris recalls and narrates an intervention with a young person:

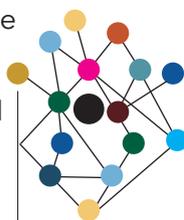
Are you in debt? “No I’m not, no I’m not”. Two weeks later the guy came in, he was after getting a hiding at the weekend. He was in debt (Chris, local addiction service).

Drug markets can work without violence. Research cited earlier shows that dealers are often open to re-financing debts without resorting to violence (Moller and Sandberg, 2016) However for our participants a key effect of the credit / debt structure of drug consumption and distribution is the violence it generates. The violence permeates all points in the distribution network and is premised upon the recouping of debts by those who have made the capital outlay, at different levels. The violence appears to the participants in this research project to be indiscriminate and insatiable. There appears to be little that will protect victims whether they are young men, young women or family members.

The violent enforcement or recouping of a debt does not follow a gender code: Madeline points out that while young women might have been protected by paternalism in the past, that is no longer applicable. Madeline suggested that from her experience, drug debt breaks with this logic and that violent enforcements of drug debt contracts has to be understood by young women especially:

They don’t care if you’re a girl, they won’t stop you because you are female you know? And I’m constantly saying in the programme that if you owe money, they have to pay someone else. And so the pressure is on them and the person they have to pay has to pay someone else. It’s probably gone through four people or five people before it’s come to you. So they’re not going to let you away with owing money. (Madeline, youth worker / drugs education).

Drug debts are paid by parents to avoid their car tyres being slashed, windows being broken or being accosted in public according to participants. Noel said that the message



will be given clearly: *“they put your windows in”*. Chris said that there is little pressure from the police to get the dealer’s enforcers to desist. He continued that parents are fearful that there will be consequences if they refuse to pay, and that often a debt can be inflated as time passes where they have not initially been paid:

So when the Guards are telling you that you have to give into these people that they are serious, you don’t tend to go much further than that than getting the money, getting the money together and paying off this bloody debt. ...That they won’t stay away and that they won’t stay off your case. And then there’s the question I always get, a mother will come in here and say I paid three hundred quid last month and he’s after coming in now and he owes five hundred quid (Chris, local addiction service).

There are some families who struggle with addiction themselves and for whom this cycle is almost accepted as there appears to be no option, according to Jenny. The characteristics of peripheral areas where housing dominates the public realm, and where there are few opportunities to blend into the urban environment, people feel that paying is the only solution as there are few places to ‘hide’:

I suppose we have had some kind of situations where mam is recovering from drugs so paying off drug debt and having the house kicked in, that’s life. ...And I suppose one thing we have noticed parents, one parent paid it off very rapidly and realised that that family has nowhere to go. They’ve no external families so it was easier to pay off the drug debt despite maybe hassle it might put them in yeah (Jenny, youth diversion worker).

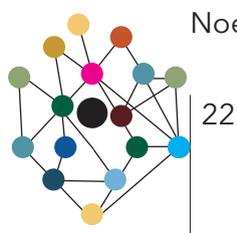
While the drug economy has the effect of generating violence and associated intimidation, it varies it seems from area to area. Noel pointed out that he used to hear about

it *“but I just don’t hear those stories as often as I used to hear em. But that doesn’t mean that, it could well mean that it’s just normalised”*. Aidan notes that in his area, there are a lot of younger people dealing. However, they are selling to people who come to the area from outside. While he has heard about it, it is not a feature of the drug economy in his area. Local variations appear to exist and this seems to depend on whether there is low demand locally but where the area is a go-to place for supply. Aidan says: *“there’s a lot of, in this area, there seems to be a lot of young people who deal, you know, and you’d wonder (.) and I’d know that a lot- most of that dealing is to people who come in from outside”* (Aidan, drug team).

Affects of Drug Economy

The distribution chains in the drug economy, participants say, produces a series of messages and signals: the beating of a youth has a direct impact on that young person and their family but some participants see this as letting a wider circle of people know that that group of drug suppliers is dominant within its area. Together with the direct effects of substance use and debt, the drug economy is, as Lucy described it, *frantic*. But they generate stress for parents of young people and in turn mental health challenges.

Fear is an *affective* impact of drug selling and its operational logic but it is a sense of knowing your place, based upon one’s fear or sense of isolation. Chris said that people will not go to the police with what they know, and will not join a neighbourhood watch *“because of intimidation because they’re afraid that if I stick a sticker up in the window that has neighbourhood Garda neighbourhood watch you’re a rat and they’ll fucking smash your window”*. Much of these affects are generated by the power of drug suppliers - those who have control over the supply chains and with the power to enforce their will. Noel thinks this is not too well thought out, but it is a secondary effect: the primary effect is to recoup the debt from an individual young





person and the secondary one is to lay down a clear line which people should not cross:

You see, well, well I think it has that. I think it's a secondary message. It's a secondary message though [...] the primary message is Matt "you're a little bollocks, you're ratting, you're fucking, you didn't give me all the fucking money you said you were going to give me back that you owe me", right. That's the primary message right. And the fact that I am doing it to you so openly is (.....) the secondary one to other people and that's, whether that's just pure brazenness at this stage from the drug dealers right, or whether it's deliberate message giving I don't know right, I've a question mark there (Noel, youth worker).

Noel describes this as something we are given to know as "the line": that people should not cross it. He thinks we all understand that this line exists but are unable to say what it is. He evokes a distinction made by Humberto Maturana a biologist, who suggests that this knowing is a type of pre-cognitive deeply embedded form of knowledge. Most people, Noel points out, understand that the line is a 'know how' but they do not understand it enough for it to translate into 'say how'. Crossing the line means that drug dealers operate within a culture of silence. Knowing the line it seems is described here as part of the structure of power: the effect is to embed in people deeply what can and cannot be said. People can get into trouble as Noel suggests, if they cross the line. But knowing where that line is and being able to deal with it, is a critical skill in maintaining communications across it:

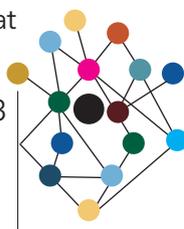
I was able to stay on the right side of that line. And most people, the big dealers around here, I had a relationship with right. I was able to talk to most of the big dealers right, em in this area and be able to have conversations with them about all sorts of things right. But I knew the line. I didn't cross the line. I never said

Joe Bloggs you're a drug dealer. I never said that in a public place anyway. I might have said it to you in the privacy of a room like this (Noel, youth worker).

Some participants thought that there was not enough enforcement of laws and that this creates a feeling that people are getting away with it. This does not sufficiently disincentivise entry to the drug trade. The criminal justice system, it was argued, is too slow to ensure that the community gets a remedy to the harm that drug markets cause to the sense of security that the community wants to have. A mechanism has to be found to achieve this that takes account of the impact on community life, combining a social harm approach to policing and the use of 'community impact statements' (see Connolly and Buckley, 2016). Robert thinks that this structure of power is allowed to exist because the state does not challenge it enough or in the right way. A social harm approach is needed to produce an appropriate level of deterrence he argues:

But that fear will go if they feel that people are being tackled. Even again I always say to the police it isn't even that they actually have to tackle them even if they get the perception... Because the sanctions are not commensurate with the damage they're causing (Robert, social worker / youth worker).

But the 'affects' of drug economies are also generated from without based upon stigma; state neglect; media labelling. People behave differently in the area says Jenny, she's not sure why but as soon as she journeys out with young people, they seem 'freer' and when they return they slot into a different language, posture as if describing a different code of being and survival once back in the area. Noel argues that people living in areas are struggling against structural poverty which is compounded by further adversity created from without. He sees this as a posture adopted by the state where citizens, once the state has its discharged some responsibility at



a basic level, should know their place. Noel sees this as sharing the same history as that of institutionalisation that impacts on wellbeing and mental health:

And what we're doing is "sure haven't we given them a home? Haven't we put a roof over their head?"[...] so what I was describing earlier on, nothing has changed. If you look at what I was describing it's got worse because there's a whole community here dependent upon legal drugs and illegal drugs right. And that's what we've created. And the state has locked the door. And branded these people, as anti-social, as fucking miserable fucks (Noel, youth worker).

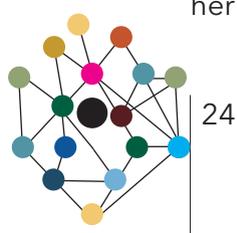
The drug economy and its real and implied violence and the 'structural violence' that people experience as Noel points out here, makes people in the community feel helpless and abandoned.

Young Women and Drug Economy

Most respondents when speaking of young people as intimidators or victims of threats, referred primarily to young men. There was some acknowledgement amongst the participants that young women appear to be less visible in drug selling but that their involvement might be based upon complicity (willing to live from the earnings of a boyfriend, partner or family member) or consumption - they are happy to take free drugs when socialising in pubs or at parties. Chris described young women as being in the service of 'the gang', in a domesticised role: *"Girls are almost like the service providers for the gang members themselves. And they're on the periphery but they get their drugs for free and they're part of it in a certain way"*. Chris goes on to explain that this connection might be tied to the performance of sexual favours in return for drugs or income associated with it. They may not be the victims of direct intimidation but are dominated in a different way, by being asked to serve young males sexually. From her work with young women in a drug aware-

ness programme and other youth work, Madeline was saddened by the idea that young women felt they had few choices when it came to relationships, other than with young men who were involved in drugs:

...one of the big things for me this year was young women expressing to me that they would find it very difficult in this area to find somebody who, or being in relationship with someone, who didn't take drugs. And for me I found that very sad. And that for me this year was a big part of the empowerment program that I do within the drugs programme. I'm trying to educate young women that there are young men who don't take drugs (Madeline, youth work / drug education worker).





4. APPROACHES AND INTERVENTIONS USED BY THE PARTICIPANTS

Overview

The participants identified a variety of approaches to their work. They stressed approaches in engaging young people and building trust, and respecting young people's experience. Participants also underlined the centrality of creating progression routes to work and earning a living, together with ways of helping young people to keep themselves safe. Supportive relationships with young people was a general approach adopted and the centrality of this to engagement was stressed overwhelmingly by participants. As only two of the participants worked in dedicated drug services or teams, it was unsurprising that most participants stressed that their approaches continued to focus on the core principles of relationship building and the voluntary participation. Most therefore concentrated on established practice repertoires rather than adopting smart or new interventions or technologies for addressing the problems associated with drug selling. For example, Noel pointed out that there was too much condemnation of people and so a core value was to encourage the 'story' to be told: *"It's a way of thinking, a philosophy on this and so our work has told us that we get the narrative right"*.

Pathways to Work

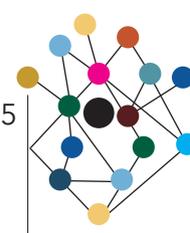
Participants in the research stressed the continued need for interventions to have realistic pathways to real jobs and career options. The overall sense from the interviews was that people were being drawn into the drug economy because their prospects in the labour market were poor. Participants felt that it was critical to give young people a strong sense of where they are situated economically, socially and politically in order that they would act reflectively in the world around them. For example, Lucy's service operated from a critical social education model – while running core activities for young people, the

approach stressed political and social analysis so as young people become conscious of their situation and overcome it. In addition however, Lucy's service was working pragmatically with employers to create employment routes in which they had some success, and named several companies, including a bank, with whom they have actively built an employment pathway. Building such links enable successful youth transitions and recognised as a *pathway out of crime* (France and Homel, 2007).

Keeping Young People Safe: Lifeskills, Education and Diversion

Participants stressed that they currently work towards keeping young people safe and helping them to make safe transitions. Helping young people to understand that accepting credit places them into an economic bond and was not an act of friendship, was underlined by several participants. Brief interventions do make a difference but also there was a need to ensure that structured curricula were also delivered on being able to identify risks and insecurities. Drug education and relationships education seem to need to go hand in hand, rather than separate curricula. Madeline stressed that it was critical for that engagement to take place while young people were in the school system. She said it was vital for equipping them with ways of keeping themselves safe, to understand risks and to ensure that they adopt safe standards for themselves. She describes it:

But I really think there's so much space for youth workers, to be in those schools to teach life skills. Things that are so important to them, things that will change lives, make them look at things differently, make better choices, look at what's in their lives and not see what's not desirable (Madeline, youth worker / drug education).



Again, stressing the importance of alternative routes, enabling educational pathways were also seen as a positive contribution. Overwhelmingly the interviewees in this research stressed the need to underpin these approaches and invest in providing educational routes out of crime. Working in a youth diversion project, Jenny stressed how critical it was to divert people early to supportive systems that can offer alternative pathways, stressing that education is a key aspect of this transition:

Sometimes you see when a young person presents with a drug issue to us it's not the drug issue that we focus on first. Like there's research to prove that education, a much more structured system in life would stop the kind of escalation into crime
(Jenny, youth diversion worker).

Supportive Relationships with both Vulnerable and Challenging Young People

Irrespective of current activities, youth workers and drug service practitioners stressed the centrality of supportive relationships, even with those who may have slipped into offending and even persistent criminal activity. The relationship enables engagement and opportunity for change it was stressed. Overwhelmingly, all of the practitioners interviewed were ideally situated to engage with the most marginal young people, and demonstrated a strong sense of mission to ensure that they were included. Noel described earlier, the need not to “cross the line” by naming someone as a drug dealer in public: a relationship of trust and engagement can lead to the issues being discussed as part of a professional relationship. This means, irrespective of their situation, that a degree of respect guides interventions with these young people: creating the right atmosphere and finding the right time is critical. Noel explains:

I might have said to you “you know I’m really worried about you because I think you’re a serious drug dealer and I think

that there’s only one place that you’re heading and that’s up to the North Circular Road”, right. And I might have that conversation if you and me were in here and you were that right, but I’d never do that in a public place
(Noel, youth worker).

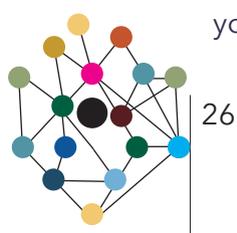
Critical moments in that relationship serve as an opportunity to name the issue, explore the options and change. The participants stressed how it is critical to keep relationships open and to journey with young people over the longer term. Helping people make realisations, it was clear from the interview data, can take some time. Chris said that this was often when a young person realises that their so-called friends betray them:

‘No no no it’s only me friend. He’s a buddy of mine, he wouldn’t do this and he wouldn’t do that’. And two weeks later he came in with two black eyes, I think he’d a fractured arm...[clicks fingers]. He knows then. Is he going to immediately walk from all of that

(Chris, local drug service).

A point made earlier was that young people, even if they have slipped into drug-taking and drug distribution, still have some constraints and attachments. Underlining again here what Aidan said about young people not being untouchable, our participants said that that young men especially in these situations still have aspirations and valued help to achieve routes out. This involved working in very small groups and achieving small steps. Aidan outlined a model that his service was working with. This involved:

- Working in very small groups of specifically targeted young men – sometimes just two or three persons at a time;
- Starting with non-threatening activities;
- One-to-one meetings with individuals to build relationships, respect and trust;





- Helping people to make realisations and encouraging desistance.

Aidan describes it:

We took a gamble and we said we'd take the two of them on, it was only limited budget so they worked two mornings a week and it was for four months [...]

There was two of the young men, one who particularly said that he wanted to stop, he wanted to stop his work I think he called it, so maybe his drug-dealing. He wanted to change things around... (Aidan, drug team).

Encouraging Insight and Enabling Desistance

Building upon the idea of respect and supportive relationships, most of the interviews noted that their interventions sought to give young people insight. Through this, it is possible to move people towards desistance from offending. This might result from an external pressure or a critical incident that sparks a request for help. For example, Jenny noted that the criminal justice system gets tougher for young people after they reach the age of eighteen:

We have seen some huge successes over the past couple of months or years if that's the way to put it. In terms of young people I suppose an issue with us, and research would also prove it, is that lot of young people involved in criminal activity under the age of eighteen will stop when they become eighteen because the system changes for them. That is an influencing factor sometimes (Jenny, youth diversion worker).

However against this is the lure of the group and the active seduction of drug selling peers. Chris says that it is a battle against the seductions from this narrative that appear to reinforce young people's techniques of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957). From their peer group, Chris says they are con-

fronted if they decide to stop: "Ah sure why would you want to stop. It's not causing you any hassle. It chills you out'. You know. Whatever reasons drugs is good for them, they're given that".

MODELS OF INTERVENTION TRIED, REQUIRED OR DESIRED

Overview

Once asked to outline some of the principles, values and techniques of current practice, participants were then asked to identify additional interventions that were required at any level to deal with issues of drug related violence and intimidation. Participants had no one intervention that they thought would deal with the issues identified in the interviews. Four key areas were prominent in the data: policing, justice and security; early intervention and wrap around preventive services; valuing and enabling young people's narratives as an alternative to the 'gangland' discourse; and meaningful work and employment.

To stimulate discussion on interventions, participants were shown a graphic of preventive interventions to intimidation at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The graphic was featured in a Health Research Board (HRB) literature review on drug markets and intimidation (Murphy et al, 2017) as outlined in Chapter 2 above. Participants were asked if they thought that the graphic represented both an analysis and a framework for action on drug related intimidation. In general there was strong agreement amongst the participants that this provided a good general framework to guide policy and interventions, including if necessary, targeted criminal justice, policing and security measures.

Policing and Criminal Justice Responses: Local CAB and Social Harm

The need to target those who cause most social harm was stressed by Robert and implied in the responses of others. This would involve developing a social harm index in

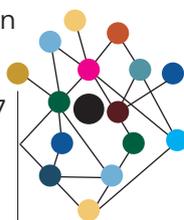
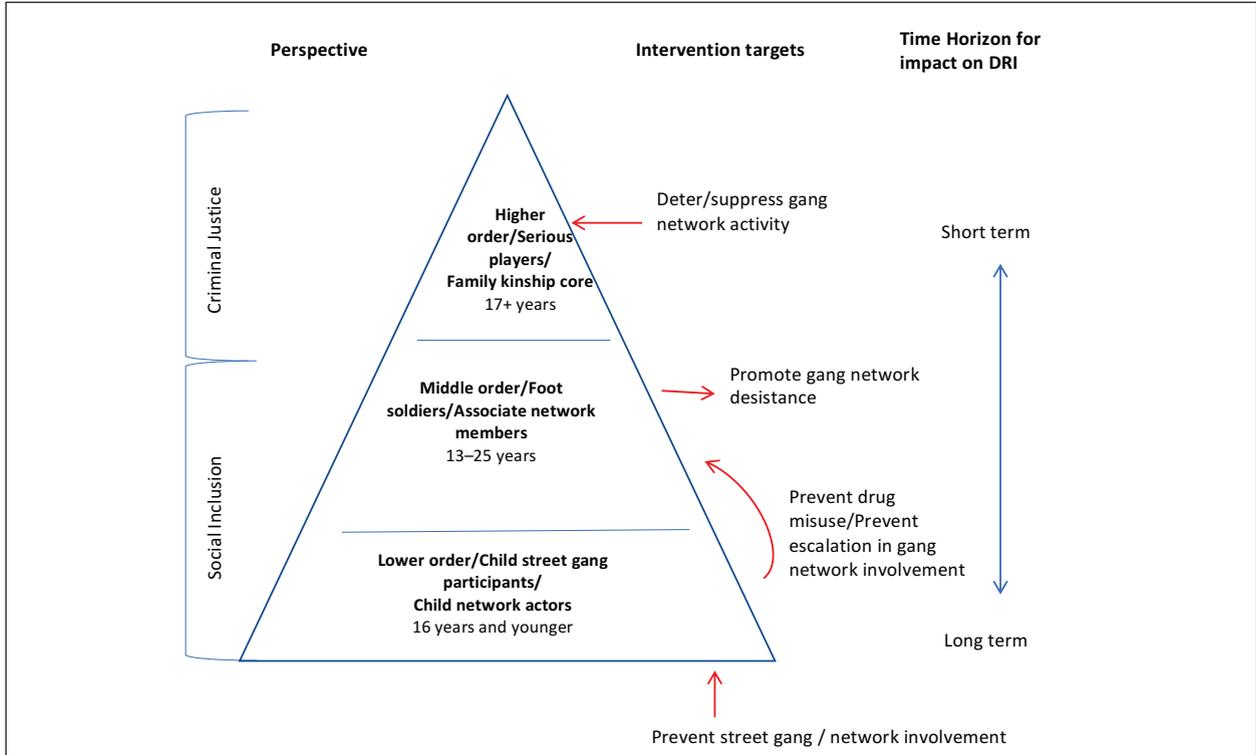


Figure 1: Framework for understanding drug-related intimidation and intervention targets



Source: Reproduced from Murphy et al (2017) with thanks to the Health Research Board.

relation to those using violent threats and then targeted by police who among other things, would assess the source of their assets. The use of asset profilers in An Garda Síochána was seen as a significant step in this direction but that there was also frustration that they have had a limited impact to date.

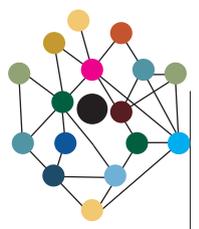
Some participants felt strongly that irrespective of the preventive and desistance measures, targeted youth interventions, relationship building and generic youth work, some key criminal justice measures need to be taken to create a deterrence effect. Robert captures this well by suggesting that what is required is a 'nodal' approach involving a range of agencies. This would require a model similar to the Criminal Assets Bureau, except working on a micro level to target those with unexplained wealth. This involves, for the participants who felt strongly about it, an input from housing authorities / agencies, social welfare, health and An Garda Síochána.

So if they're living in Corpo houses you take the Corpo houses. If they're getting medical card, just stop it. You do that

thing about hitting them and making implications for what they're doing. Now I am talking here about people who are selling big or selling heroin or selling serious stuff around and causing mayhem. That they are hammered and targeted. And then people will see that if you do that you get done. (...) to me that's the only way, the criminal end of it (Robert, social worker / youth worker).

Equally, Chris stressed the need for these kinds of criminal justice system and policing responses alongside people in the community saying that they are going to report intimidation. The prosecutorial system is seen as inadequate and that a focus on assets and sudden wealth becomes the centre of attention for policing. For Chris, the community needs to respond by saying that they will actively support reporting such sudden wealth if the authorities can do their bit to capture assets:

[people need to say] We are going to report drug dealing. We are going to report who drives up to the fucking





school in their bleedin' seven-seater jeep to collect their kids, who never worked a day in their life [...] 'where are they getting the money'? You're not going to be a glamorous drug user and drug dealer any more. We're going to take the rug from underneath you in that sense. (Chris, local addiction service co-ordinator).

Early Intervention and 'Wrap Around'

All participants were in favour of early intervention and the need for anti-poverty work with children and families at local level. Peripheral areas are still devoid of services and are relatively remote from general service provision. Here it was stressed that there was a demand for local service hubs to promote early interventions to prevent children and young people slipping into adversity. Participants also stressed that the Meitheal model [Tusla integrated services model] needed to settle-in, be resourced and given a chance to work with the view to preventing intergenerational poverty.

Young People's Narrative: Allowing Voices to be Heard

As outlined earlier, youth who live within a state of 'advanced marginality' are exposed to the effects of *structural violence* (Wacquant, 2008). This effectively involves a cultural war where state and media discourses dominate the definition of reality. Young people's experiences and narratives are thereby repressed by media, the state and professional expertise. Jenny talked about young people being stigmatised once they went beyond the traffic lights; Noel insisted that inner city young people's experiences were actively repressed in favour of official versions of events from the police. Active repression of the young people's narrative generates stigma, and it needs to be countered. Noel suggested that if there was to be a real engagement with these issues, and if they were to be addressed, there would be a need for young people to tell their story: and that it would be listened to and acted upon:

So but I think the narrative has to come out. Whatever their narrative is, and we've got to sit and listen to that narrative and we've got to take it serious whatever that narrative is, right. If we're not doing that, I don't believe we're getting to the young person, we're not getting the type of relationship we require to be able to be able to support them to pull back, to pull out right. And then the amount of work it requires to support them through that right, just the resources are not there. (Noel, youth worker).

Meaningful Work and Employment

As also outlined earlier, participants all stressed the need to create opportunities and pathways to enable young people to make the transitions to both education and labour market participation. Giving real work options with the chance to earn a living and to create meaningful creative engagement is required rather than precarious labour. Stressing the need to engage the most apparently difficult young men, caught in drug selling bondage is to ensure that they have such pathways: the alternative is that they create misery for themselves and the community:

if we don't work with these young people here it has the potential to bring a lot of things down, it has the potential to cause an awful lot of misery. Prison isn't a solution, we know all them things... I would have a programme that would concentrate on work for those young men (Aidan, drug team).



5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

The shift to polydrug use over the last decade has transformed the simple binary of roles played by those involved in the drug trade. Some users are at times dealers and the networked organisation of drug distribution is based upon peer-to-peer selling. Drug distribution operates in the shadow of the formal economy and involves the recruitment of labour based upon incentivising and enticing young people, sometimes involving holding cash, drugs or weapons. Participants in this research project viewed it as a type of work which is made attractive to young people.

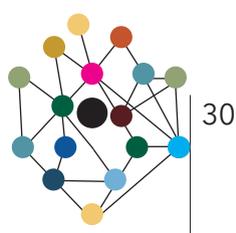
Participation in drug distribution is seen as an alternative means of accessing consumer goods. Young people's aspirations are such, that they are channelled into considering drug selling as an alternative to precarious labour, participants said. The formal labour market has seen a decline in traditional trade occupations, growth in managerial and technical, and a rise in more precarious service employment over the last two decades. Participants highlighted the need for real pathways to proper work with long term career prospects as a way of targeting marginal young people at risk of being subsumed by the drug economy. The same can be said for educational pathways as routes out of participation in drug distribution.

Credit or 'fronting' drugs for re-distribution or consumption was viewed as a widespread practice by participants in this research. From their knowledge and vantage points, it is the underlying financial structure that underpins drug selling. Recouping drug debts operates under the threat of violence. Parents come under pressure to pay drug debts and are sometimes advised to do so to de-escalate the threat of violence.

Drug related intimidation (DRI) and drug debt intimidation (DDI) are key to how drug distribution networks are organised. Systemic intimidation is a critical experience for young people and their communities as captured in the interviews. This involves *disciplinary intimidation* in relation to how those involved are controlled, and *successional intimidation* in how young people are recruited into drug distribution networks. We understand that this is critical in capturing the role of credit within drug economy because a reputation for violence is needed for disciplinary intimidation, where drug dealers govern through 'adversarial' strategies. We know less about alternative or 'co-operative' strategies that are deployed.

Dominant drug dealers appear to rule within communities through the secondary effects of intimidation or acts of physical violence. Acts of violence or threats might be seen as a type of symbolic domination as they are intended to create a sense of fear or affective insecurity. This situation is not helped, participants say, by the sense of abandon that working class communities have endured: the minimal state appears to wish to leave governing these issues to markets and civil society and the result may be to exacerbate the culture of silence forced upon the community.

Males are primarily victims of intimidation according to our interviewees. Young women are not protected by any form of paternalism and are potentially victims of violence and intimidation. Young women may have a distinct domesticated relationship within drug selling networks by 'servicing' those involved. In this regard, young women may be asked to provide sex to men in order to expunge debts. While it should be acknowledged that there is little definitive evidence of this practice there is sufficient concern and qualitative indications that warrants further consideration and investigation.





The findings highlight that drug education and prevention needs to refocus towards teaching young people about the broader economics and relationships that drug consumption and distribution involves, as much as it focuses on the pharmacological and health risks. Helping young people to develop a critical practice around credit and debt is key in this respect: in the context of peer-to-peer drug distribution, young people need to understand that credit is an economic bond and not an altruistic act.

The capacity to help people out of drug related harm, or to divert people who are more directly involved in drug distribution, is dependent upon the quality of the relationships that these young people have with their advocates. Participants underline that young people in this situation are not untouchable and are open to finding alternatives in many cases. Enabling their desistance is premised upon relationships with youth workers, drug services and youth diversion personnel together with family and other professional advocates. Critical incidents, our participants point out, serve as a means of creating insight which ignites the desistance process.

Key Areas Emerging from the Findings

In terms of policy and practice actions and models the research participants identified four key areas:

1. Policing and criminal justice actions need to target wealth and ensure that social harm is a key reference point in the criminal justice system.
2. Early intervention in child and family preventive services were seen as critical for ensuring timely supports are given to break intergenerational poverty.
3. Finding forms of creative expression and communication to enable young people's experiences to be voiced as opposed to the repressive nature of media and political narratives. The

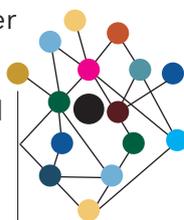
'gangland' narrative which narrowly frames public debate is a case in point here – the predominance of this story in media discourses especially is unhelpful to finding workable and practical solutions based upon real experiences.

4. Real education and work pathways are critical to creating routes out of the drug economy in order to help young people make meaningful and sustainable transitions.

A Model of Intervention Emerging from the Findings

In relation to the areas 2, 3 and 4 above, participants also indicated the need for solid engagement and relationship building with young people currently involved in drug distribution networks. As one of the participants pointed out, we cannot continue to regard young men as being 'untouchable'. It is essential therefore to find workable models that can add value to the work already under way, maintain links with young people and provide real alternatives and pathways to work, education and career routes.

An approach referred to by some of the participants which shows some promise in this regard is the *Lugna Gatan* ('Easy Street') model first piloted in Dublin by the Ballymun Regional Youth Resource. The model was transferred to Ireland from the Fryshuset group in Sweden and was developed in response to crime and nuisance behaviour on the Stockholm underground. The model involved young outreach workers acting as 'stewards' or hosts who would intervene to prevent crime, mediate conflicts, and engage marginalised young people (Roth, 2004). A recent report by Community Action Network, described the Easy Street model, as building positive relationships at street level and developing trust, leading to more constructive roles being played in their communities. A second pilot in the South Inner City of Dublin showed some possibilities for further



development and implementation of the model (Dorman, 2017). The approach is based therefore on outreach and bridging – making contact, building trust and then acting as a connecting node to enable young people to build wider social networks beyond the drug dealing / consuming groups they are currently in. This approach engages older young people for whom standard youth work approaches might not be appropriate.

While there have been no outcome studies of the model, and therefore it lacks a verifiable evidence base, it is still a worthwhile approach in the medium term in that it shows promise for adding value to the range of services already available at community level.

CONCLUSION

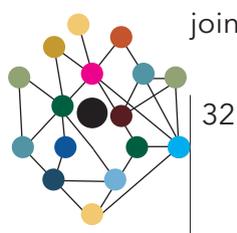
Young people's involvement with drug distribution networks is bound together with the precarious structural position in which young people in Dublin working class neighbourhoods are situated. In this research project we sought to get 'close to the action' and to capture the experiences of practitioners working at community level and to capture their collective and individual knowledge of the situation. Based upon their daily engagements with the young people and their situation, this report has found that you cannot speak about drug markets, distribution and consumption without talking about issues of health, education, training and housing. The current polydrug markets are providing an alternative stream of income and meaningful occupation: the education system and labour market have failed to absorb many of the young people who are left to find their own way outside of the formal opportunity structure.

Intimidation, violence and threats are critical drivers in the polydrug economy. Drug markets in the 1980s and 1990s were typified by distinct types of intimidation, associated with acquiring money for drugs and from the effects of the drugs themselves. This has been joined with systemic intimidation: threat and

physical violence as the means used to recoup debts, as a way of disciplining those involved in the distribution networks, and also as a 'secondary effect', keeping the community insecure, fearful and subordinate.

The issue envelops young men and young women differently. Young women's experiences in this economy according to the participants, is a domestic one – serving the men who are involved and perhaps also sexually exploited in order to expunge debts. Further evidence is needed on this issue and should be a priority for research and practice.

There is hope: the people we spoke to are just a sample of the many practitioners across the city and the country as a whole who every day are meeting young people, gaining their trust and helping them to make stable and safe transitions. It is understood from this short research project that the majority of young people known to our participants are neither out of control nor untouchable and that as a society it is worth investing in them and including them.





RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A Public Conversation: Young People's Accounts of their Experiences

The findings point to the need to speak directly to young people themselves and to ensure that these accounts are at the centre of public discourse on this issue. There is a need for a balance between intervention and research to capture the issues and to shape a public conversation in relation to the effects of drug markets on daily lives. Valuing young people's experiences is an essential first step in recognising their situation.

2. Investing in Current and New Approaches

It is vital to build on the existing resources at community level that are already embedded with these issues. The Health Research Board's evidence review (Murphy et al, 2017) highlighted a number of trialled models that have shown promise in dealing with drug related intimidation based upon universal, selected and indicated interventions (see p.13 above). These approaches can be adapted to deal with the Irish context in a way that builds on the work of practitioners in local communities. Specific investments need to be made to support practitioners and projects that are currently engaging young people who are involved in the drug economy, including the 'Easy Street' model identified earlier. Further evaluation and dissemination of their experiences, practices and impacts are also recommended.

3. Young Women's Experiences

There are specific ways that young women are engaged in or impacted by the polydrug economy. Further evidence and practice developments need to focus on these gender differences specifically. The research project highlights the need also to incorporate a curriculum on relationships into approaches to drug education and prevention.

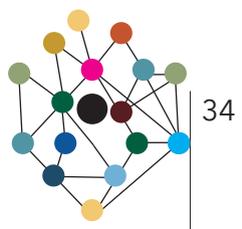
4. Education on Credit and Debt

The research highlights the need for young people to be able to recognise the risk associated with entering into drug debt. Debt imposes obligations and potentially exposes young people to violence. This is a particular challenge as young people appear to misrecognise that day-to-day supply through friendship connections is an economic bond rather than a gift. Drug education and prevention should therefore incorporate a curriculum on how debt and credit work as economic relationships.

5. Pathways out of the Drug Economy

The drug economy operates in the shadow of the labour market and provides an alternative, especially as many of the jobs available are precarious and temporary. The research highlights the need for a focus on proper - substantive and sustainable - educational and employment opportunities to support young people's transitions and as a way of providing pathways out of the drug economy.

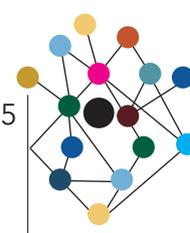




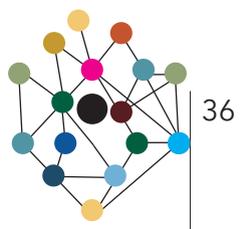


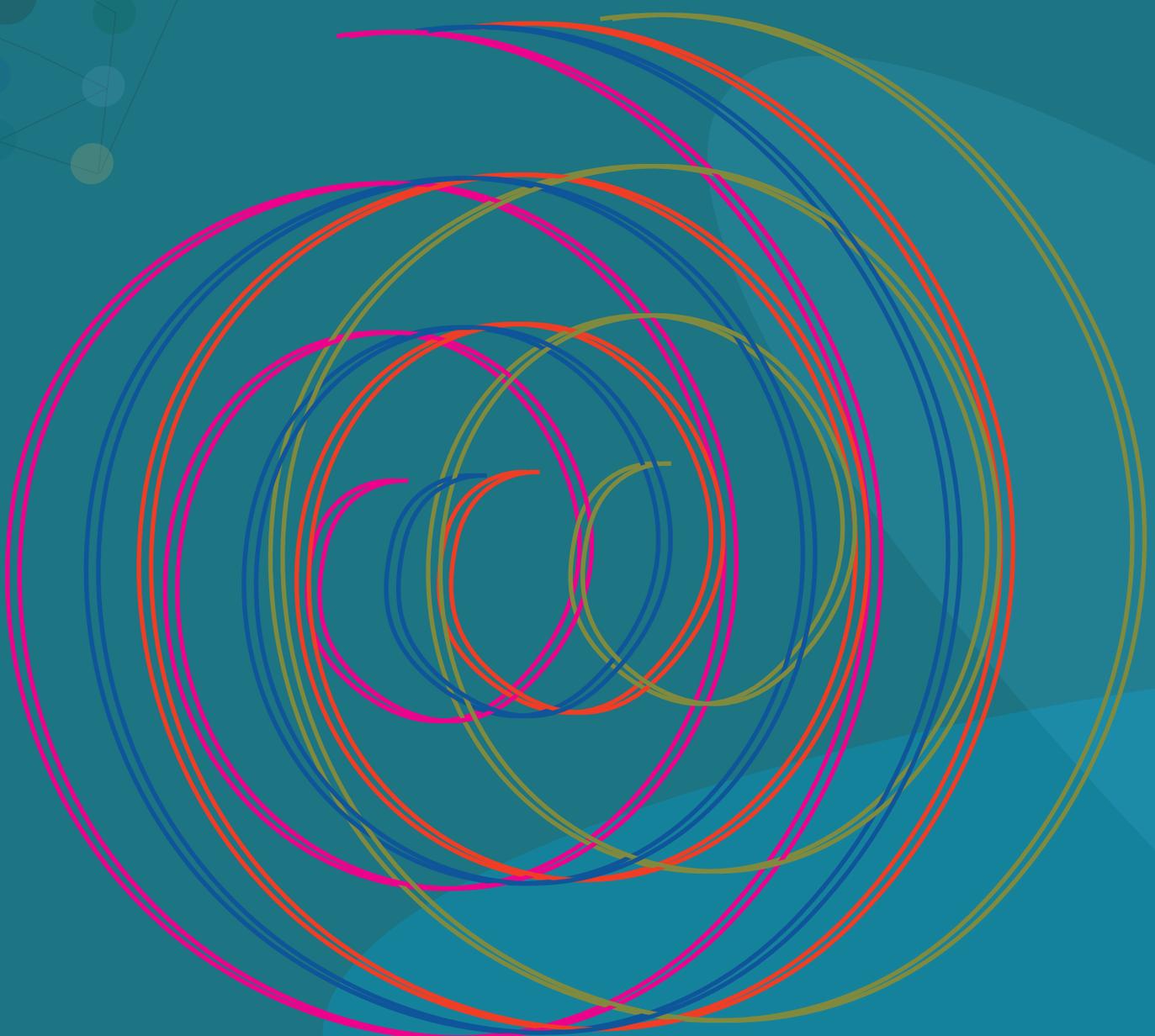
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