
**Feasibility Research into the Controlled
AUSTRALIAN DRUG MARKETS
RESEARCH:
WHAT ARE WE DOING?
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
WHAT ARE THE GAPS?**

**Availability
of
Opioids
Stage 2**

**Working
Paper
Number 2**

**Proceedings of a one-day workshop held at the Scarth Room, University
House,
The Australian National University,
Monday 22 February 1993**

Editor: Gabriele Bammer

**National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health
The Australian National University**

Australian Institute of Criminology

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Australian Drug Markets Research: What are we doing? Where are we going? What are the gaps? Proceedings of a one-day workshop held at the Scarth Room, University House, The Australian National University, Monday 22 February 1993.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This one-day workshop examined Australian research on the structure and economics of drug markets, the interaction of drug markets and law enforcement and the impact of drug markets on health. An overview of available data bases and current research is provided. There are also consensus statements from discussions about methodological problems and research gaps.

The main findings from the discussion about methodological problems were that:

- Co-operative research between academics and the law enforcement community needs to be strengthened. This involves improved communication, collaboration in the use of data bases and funding support. Funding agencies could have a great role in facilitating communication between academics and the law enforcement community.
- There needs to be standardisation in units and techniques of measurement and in terminology.
- Academic researchers need legal protection from being summonsed, or having their information subpoenaed, by a court. The Commonwealth and ACT *Epidemiological Studies (Confidentiality) Acts* provide models for such protection.
- There is an inherent dilemma in much drug markets research: should researchers ask participants to provide information which could potentially be used against them or other illicit drug users? There is no obvious resolution, but this issue needs to be taken into account when researchers are establishing informed consent relationships with participants and when they are preparing material for publication.

The main findings from the discussion about research gaps were that:

- Research should be able to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and policies and to predict likely effects of new policies. To do this data collection needs to be strengthened at the local level.
- The impact of law enforcement on public health and vice versa needs to be investigated and documented. There was general agreement that in the current Australian situation the effects on public health of law enforcement strategies need to be considered and that strategies likely to have negative public health impact should be avoided.
- That there is a need to build and integrate health and law enforcement data bases, which should be regularly monitored and independently replicated.
- Specific gaps included the size and nature of the dealer population, polydrug considerations, price elasticity of demand, pricing differentials from export/import to street levels, changes over time, measurement of demand through consumption, focus on young drug users and hepatitis.

INTRODUCTION

This one-day workshop aimed to examine Australian research on the structure and economics of drug markets, the interaction of drug markets and law enforcement and the impact of drug markets on health. It was to give an overview of research and information available in these areas (What are we doing?), provide a forum for the discussion of methodological difficulties, and identify gaps and future directions (Where are we going? What are the gaps?).

The stimulus for this workshop came from our research into the ACT drug market. This is an important component of Feasibility Research into the Controlled Availability of Opioids, that is the investigation of the feasibility of an ACT trial to provide heroin to dependent users in a controlled manner (Our research in this area will be described in detail in another working paper). We had a number of informal discussions with other researchers and with law enforcement agencies and there seemed to be problems and areas of interest which might benefit from more formal airing and discussion.

Workshop participants were researchers who had direct experience in the drug markets area, police, and law enforcement intelligence analysts. The workshop also aimed to bridge the cultural divide between law enforcement and academic research.

The morning was spent with introductions. Researchers were asked to present work-in-progress and/or past relevant research. The police and intelligence analysts were asked to present information on the type of data they collect and use and how it might be useful for academic researchers. The afternoon was given over to two discussions. The first covered methodological problems and the second research gaps. The day's proceedings were off the record, but participants agreed to provide written summaries of their presentations and consensus statements covering the discussions were produced. These are reproduced here.

There was general agreement that similar workshops in the future would be valuable. The NSW Bureau for Crime Statistics and Research and the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre are exploring the possibility of co-hosting a follow-up workshop in Sydney in 1994.

These written proceedings provide an overview of the state-of-the-art of drug markets research in Australia, highlight the methodological problems of working in this area and point the way for future research.

Gabriele Bammer

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS

Workshop participants were asked to make brief presentations about the nature of their interest in drug markets research. A summary of these presentations follows.

Gabriele Bammer and Ayse Sengoz

Fellow and Co-ordinator of Feasibility Research into the Controlled Availability of Opioids and Research Assistant, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University

Our research addresses the following questions:

- what are the implications of the structure of the drug market for the feasibility of a trial to provide heroin to dependent users in a controlled manner?
- are overdoses resulting from fluctuations in the drug market an important health problem?
- if a trial eventuates, can we monitor and evaluate effects on the drug market?

To address these questions we are collecting data about the price, purity and availability of illicit drugs and monitoring changes over time. These can be linked with information about overdoses. Information about the structure of the drug market is also being collected.

We have access to the following data sources: participants among the drug using community, the ACT drug squad, the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence (ABCI), and the ACT Government Analytical Laboratory. Participants from the drug using community are interviewed approximately every two months about the price, purity and availability of illicit drugs. A 10 point scale, with end point labels of “worst ever” and “best ever”, has been working well to record purity and availability. The head of the ACT Drug Squad provides the squad’s assessment of the state of the market at approximately the same intervals. We can link this data with analyses of the purity of seizures provided by the ACT Government Analytical Laboratory. We are also negotiating to get comparable data from the ABCI.

Information about overdoses is available from ACT ambulance case sheets and from accident and emergency records at the two Canberra hospitals. We have agreement from the agencies to access these records, but still need clearance from the relevant ethics bodies. We also gathered information from a range of sources about three fatal overdoses which occurred in Canberra over Christmas.

We also plan to interview participants from the drug using community and the head of the drug squad in depth about the structure of the ACT drug market and we are investigating the feasibility of interviewing prisoners convicted of supply.

Jim Butler and Amanda Neil

Health Economist and Fellow and Research Assistant, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University

The proposal for a trial of the controlled availability of opioids in the ACT raises a number of issues concerning the economic analysis which might be conducted as part of a trial. Two postulated design

features of a trial have particularly important implications for such an analysis. First, the price of heroin will fall from the current street price to zero for users who satisfy pre-specified eligibility criteria. Secondly, the enforcement of eligibility criteria and possible constraints on supply imply that the quantity of heroin demanded at a zero price will not be satisfied. These design features proscribe to some extent the economic issues which can be addressed as part of a proposed trial. For example, because of non-price rationing and supply constraints, estimation of a price elasticity of demand for heroin will be precluded. However, it will be possible to study the effects of the trial on the black market for heroin, and investigate issues such as the importance of price versus purity as equilibrating mechanisms in the market for heroin.

Peter Byatt

Director of Information and Statistical Services, Australian Federal Police

Scope and coverage of AFP databases

Scope

AFP databases contain quantitative information on:

- drugs seized; for example: type, amount, form;
- circumstances of the incident; for example: where, when, origin, method of importation/concealment;
- characteristics of persons apprehended (as a consequence); for example: age, gender, citizenship, birthplace, occupation;
- drug-related incidents (where no drugs are seized);
- offences detected and subsequent legal processes; for example: charges preferred, arrests, summons.

Coverage (extent to which AFP data measures the drug scene)

AFP databases include:

- all drugs seized by the Australian Customs Service (ACS) and other Commonwealth Authorities and reported to AFP; and
- all drugs seized by AFP in the course of either its own or joint investigations with other State, Federal or International law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

Excluded from AFP databases are:

- drugs seized by other LEAs, irrespective of AFP involvement; and
- data relating to specific seizure records as a result of circumstances of the incident; for example: offender details are not available for the majority of drugs seized by ACS where no owner is identified or no investigation proceeds.

Hugh Conant

Senior Analyst, International Strategic Analysis and Assessment Branch, Australian Federal Police

The International Strategic Analysis and Assessment Branch is concerned with international drug production and trafficking, rather than events of law enforcement interest within Australia. Some major world wide trends have emerged in recent years and have had an effect on illicit drug trafficking to Australia. Such trends were the change from readily identifiable drug routes to Australia to the present situation where all types of drugs travel to Australia from almost any part of the world. The methods of concealment and carriage vary enormously. Production of heroin has continued to increase in the Golden Triangle (which might be renamed to Golden Rectangle if the increased opium production in Yunnan Province of China was taken into account) and there were reports that Afghanistan might overtake the Golden Triangle as the world's largest producer of heroin. The AFP's seizure of 2.5 tonnes of Afghanistan produced hashish in October 1992 in Western Australia shows that importations of Afghan heroin to Australia are quite possible. While no seizures of South American sourced heroin have been made to date, I believe that it is only a matter of time before this would occur. The Branch is working on a major study that would examine world wide trends, including political and economic factors in addition to drug production and trafficking, to try and identify future trends which would affect the importation of illicit drugs into Australia.

John Fitzgerald

Research Fellow, Department of Public Health and Community Medicine, University of Melbourne

A qualitative study of methylendioxyamphetamine (MDMA or Ecstasy) use in Melbourne was described. The use patterns of a small (n=30) group were examined over the period 1990–1992. Users were contacted using snowball sampling. Information was obtained in a semi-structured taped interview. Ecstasy was reported to come in 16 different types of tablet and 9 types of capsule, ranging in price from \$20 to \$65. Qualitative analysis of interviews provided information about the use patterns of ecstasy in Melbourne and about some of the factors contributing to the changing availability of Ecstasy. Several discussion points about the legal implications of ethnographic research were raised. Illustrations of both positive and negative interactions between researchers and law enforcement institutions were examined.

Julie Hando

Senior Research Assistant, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales

Two studies related to the topic of drug markets in Australia are currently being undertaken by researchers at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre and collaborating investigators. The first study examines purity issues and, to a lesser extent, price and quantity of amphetamines. This involves a chemical analysis of 110 samples of illicit street level amphetamines that have been seized by police in Sydney, and obtaining additional information from each offender about these samples. Samples are currently being analysed. It is hoped that this study will provide a better basis for judging the public health risk of amphetamine use, as well as some basic information about price/purity of a locally produced substance such as amphetamine.

The second study is a World Health Organisation study on international patterns of cocaine use. This includes an examination of factors associated with the availability of coca products, the nature of distribution networks and production/manufacturing processes in 17 different countries. Information will be obtained from a variety of key informants in each country using a standardised qualitative research instrument. This study will begin in mid-1993. It is hoped that this study will increase our knowledge about consumption and distribution patterns of cocaine use in a variety of countries, so that we can devise more constructive methods to minimise harms associated with cocaine use.

Wendy Loxley

Research Fellow, National Centre for Research into the Prevention of Drug Abuse, Curtin University of Technology

As part of a study aimed at exploring the HIV-risk behaviour of young people who inject drugs, convicted drug dealers in Perth prisons were interviewed to elicit their opinions about movements in the illicit drug market and, particularly, the displacement of non-injectable drugs with injectables during times of drought. Thirty-five dealers in four Perth prisons were interviewed, representing 56% of those eligible. Four were women. The 'stereotypical' respondent was an Australian born or English speaking heterosexual man, aged 25 to 35, who, prior to this conviction was either in full time employment or had been unemployed for longer than 2 years. He had three years of secondary education. He used cannabis, and his drug of choice was either heroin or amphetamines. He had been in treatment for his drug use. This profile is very similar to that found for the stereotypical Perth respondent in the Australian National AIDS and Injecting Drug Use Study.

The interview explored details about current prison sentence, personal involvement in dealing, opinions about the operation of drug dealing, opinions about influences on the types and quantities of drugs available, opinions about media representations of the market, and observed changes in the market over time. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis with NUDIST. The respondents were remarkably at ease with the situation and in most cases not reluctant to speak freely, although the extent to which respondents maintained innocence despite their conviction was unexpected, and made some interview topics inappropriate.

Paddy Mahony and Doug Hart

Chief Analyst and Intelligence Analyst, Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence

The ABCI is Australia's national criminal intelligence agency. Drawing on reports from all police forces, it provides intelligence assessments and recommendations on a wide range of organised crime matters, including drug trafficking, to those police forces and to the Australian Police Ministers Council.

In relation to the illicit drug market, the ABCI focuses on the following areas:

1. Purposes of data collection:

- establish characteristics of market per drug type;
- monitor changes in market indicators;
- match with external and domestic developments;
- interpret whole;

- examine implications;
- predict;
- recommend.

2. **Market indicators:**

- prices;
- availability;
- purity levels;
- seizures;
- arrests/charges;
- treatment and morbidity data;
- surveys.

3. **Types of data collected:**

- routine collection (electronic database ACID):
 - arrests (persons by age, gender, location, date, type of drug);
 - charges (can be grouped to show users, providers);
 - drug seizures (numbers, weights, jurisdiction);

Refinements planned in the future include complete entry by all jurisdictions and enhanced output modules.

- periodic collection (hard copy collection):
 - prices of major drug types:
 - . heroin; cocaine; cannabis leaf; amphetamine;
 - . by jurisdiction;
 - . every quarter.
 - price levels and basis (for example: controlled buy; arrest):
 - . 1 gm street;
 - . 1 gm dealer;
 - . 1 oz;
 - . 1 lb;
 - . 1 kg;
 - general description of events, trends, availability, purity levels.

Likely future refinements will be to expand the collection to include other drugs (for example: cannabis resin, MDMA and LSD) and to expand the collection of purity levels. The data could also be enhanced by expansion of information on drug-related crime, refinement of data on drug types and forms used and refinement of use frequency in surveys.

- project specific collection (market structures, dynamics):
 - collected when project aim and collection plan approved;
 - will expand on other collections by means of detailed questionnaire and interviews with expert sources;
 - will usually match domestic and external information (for example: drug production levels; amounts available for export; prices at points of export);

-
- will take account of: any changes in market structure or distribution arrangements; methods of transportation; effects of social developments; and government action.
 - intelligence (details of entities, events).

The results of a recent project, The Australian Drug Intelligence Assessment 1992, are due to be published in May 1993.

Peter Reuter

Co-Director, Drug Policy Research Center, The Rand Corporation

Only recently have there been systematic studies of drug prices in the United States. Working with data collected by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the only available data, analysts have found:

- prices are highly dispersed. For example, four purchases of heroin made in Washington DC on the same day showed a pure milligram price of between \$0.50 and \$2.00;
- expected purity rather than actual purity may be the most relevant variable for explaining price variation;
- as expected, prices rise as one moves down the distribution chain. However, there has been little progress in explaining the determinants of price (for example: enforcement intensity; distance from point of importation; size of market).

Bronwyn Say and Frank Hansen

Intelligence Analyst, Analysis Unit, and Chief Inspector and Staff Officer, Drug Enforcement Agency

Law enforcement has in the past made little effort to learn more from those arrested for property related offences. We tend to process these people through the judicial system, and then look at statistics to elicit trends. The Drug Enforcement Agency is presently researching methods which may provide a greater insight into the correlation between drug addiction and the commission of income generating crime, from those people arrested and charged for property related offences.

It became evident very quickly that there is presently insufficient information available to detail the relationship between drug abuse and crime. The information available is in many cases anecdotal and where studies or surveys have been conducted they have been one off exercises or involved differing collection methodologies.

The ability of law enforcement to assess the level of crime committed because of an associated dependency upon a drug of addiction is vital to the effective allocation of resources, the identification of new drugs, and the early detection of changing patterns in drug use.

The United States Department of Justice, through the auspices of the National Institute of Justice, has implemented a program known as Drug Use Forecasting (DUF).

For approximately 14 consecutive evenings each quarter, trained health professionals, on a voluntary and confidential basis, interview and obtain urine samples from those arrested for property

crime. Only those persons charged are approached. At each site approximately 225 males are sampled. In some sites, female and juvenile arrestees/detainees are also sampled.

The program has returned a number of positive results in the United States:

- an overview of differing drug use patterns (differing levels of drug usage found at different centres);
- changing percentages in the one city or testing centre (Omaha significantly decreased results over the past two years);
- trends in specific drug categories— amphetamine use was at its highest level among females in 1988. The overall trend has been a decline in amphetamine use;

The United States experience indicates that DUF can be used to:

- provide insight into geographical differences in drug use;
- provide an objective baseline for detecting the emergence of new drugs— for example: crack;
- provide law enforcement, health and education authorities with information on which to base resource allocation, strategies and activities to regional levels.

The DEA is presently working on a comprehensive proposal to obtain research funding to further explore the applicability of DUF to Australia and, if applicable, how best it can be implemented.

Bill Stoll

Commander, ACT Crime Division, Australian Federal Police

Police need to take advantage of research and seek to become involved in wider research areas. Law enforcement gathers and holds a vast range of information concerning drugs. We do not necessarily have the expertise or resources to interpret the data and to use that information as a basis for policy decisions. For example, in 1989 the AFP and Australian Customs seized 45 kilograms of cocaine; in 1990 about 66 kilos were seized and 69 kilos were seized in 1991. Since the beginning of 1992 the AFP in conjunction with overseas agencies and ACS have seized about 212 kilograms of cocaine. A number of large single seizures account for some of the increase, law enforcement initiatives account for a further part, however, irrespective of these influences there is reason to believe the increased seizures represent greater actual supply. Law enforcement needs assistance from experienced researchers to fully analyse the implications of changes in such seizure rates.

Funds, such as those from the National Drug Crime Prevention Fund, are available, and we would encourage all efforts to be taken to ensure that appropriate and relevant research is extended and made available to Australian law enforcement in all jurisdictions.

Grant Wardlaw

Consultant, Law Enforcement Policy, Federal Justice Office, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department

My comments are directed at discussing the value of drug market research as it impacts on law enforcement policy and practice.

There are basically four major areas for which data from drug market research are relevant:

- *operationally*— to help drug squads target their activities more effectively;
- *agency strategy formulation*— to help decide which markets, drugs, etcetera to target (in terms of criteria such as seriousness of the problem, vulnerability of the target to enforcement pressure, impact of the strategy on drug use or drug-related crime, etcetera);
- *to evaluate alternative strategies*— to help decide on the cost effectiveness of existing or proposed strategies;
- *national (and local) policy-making*— to decide on the *place* of drug law enforcement in an overall drug control strategy.

Often, the choice of one of these four areas as a focus for research will affect the methodology, the type of researcher and the type of funding source which is appropriate.

Most research programs in this area, if they are to have an impact on law enforcement, will require some level of cooperation with police. This may raise potential ethical problems for some types of research which need to be addressed squarely and protocols worked through between the parties. The issue of legislative protection for researchers involved in this field is obviously relevant here.

A major reason for conducting drug market research is not only to provide the data for operational or policy decision-making, but also to focus the attention of drug law enforcement decision-makers on the *aims* of their strategies. (The same should also, of course, apply to other areas of policy.)

For drug law enforcement, important questions include:

- what strategy is being used? (for example: interdiction; high-level trafficker targeting; street-level harassment; buy-bust; undercover; informant; phone-ins; development of intelligence; confiscation of assets; etcetera);
- against which drugs? (for example: heroin; cannabis; cocaine; amphetamines; etcetera);
- aimed at what target group? (for example: everybody; heavy chronic users; drug-using offenders; novice users; youth; etcetera);
- with what focus? (for example: drug use; drug trafficking; drug-related property crime and violence; prevention of spread of disease, etcetera).

Note the importance of making explicit the trade-offs and policy clashes that are involved in setting drug law enforcement goals in a strategic, comprehensive fashion (for example, is priority to be given to organised crime or to street crime). Similar competition between enforcement, health, education, economic and social goals of policy needs also to be resolved.

A central concern in drug enforcement strategy–setting is the absence of detailed local knowledge of how drug markets function. Without such knowledge, we tend to be overly influenced by United States data and the law enforcement practices based on them. There is a need for local studies to detail local market characteristics and also for overall comparative work which might inform national strategies.

While it is important to continue to fund research on *patterns* of drug use (especially for monitoring purposes), and indeed to carry out much more analysis of the data than we do at present, it is also important to sponsor research on the size, nature, economics, and dynamics of individual drug markets on a local, national, and international scale. The need is for a program of research into drug market characteristics which is comprehensive (that is, involves studies of different levels of markets, a range of drugs, and multiple locations) and ongoing (to monitor trends and impacts, and to ensure that strategy planning is based on current circumstances).

The following list of the types of information which we need indicates the scope of the research required:

- characteristics of buyers and sellers and the nature of relationships between them;
- effects of enforcement strategies on market conditions;
- reactions of buyers and sellers to enforcement pressure (differentially by strategy);
- effects of market conditions on consumption patterns (especially on substitution effects);
- the nature of violence in drug markets— how much? related to what market conditions?;
- information on the degree of separation of drug markets;
- geographic differences in drug markets;
- the impact of penalty changes on market behaviour (and an evaluation of the actual changes in penalty levels and user/dealer perceptions of the changes);
- perceptions of and levels of risks for users and dealers in drug markets;
- conditions facilitating entry to and exit from dealing;
- conditions facilitating initiation into and giving up of drug use;
- the nature and dynamics of pricing practices for illegal drugs.

These sorts of information, and the answers to many other questions, are needed so that decision–makers are able to answer the following questions when selecting strategies:

- which harms will the strategy reduce?;
- how and by how much?;
- at what cost (including indirect costs)?;

-
- with what side-effects?

What are the current gaps in drug market research in Australia? A cynic, looking at the lack of data of the sort listed above, might be tempted to say that there are no gaps in our knowledge, because we have *no* detailed knowledge of markets and how they operate here. This may be an unduly pessimistic view. The reality is that different people have different bits of knowledge about different parts of different markets. But it is true to say that we have no *systematic* knowledge about the markets, and none informed directly by a need to make detailed policy or operational decisions. The need is not only for more data, but for more analysis and integration and more understanding and cooperation between the different policy interests in the drug field.

Don Weatherburn

Director, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, NSW Attorney General's Department

Drug law enforcers in Australia rely heavily on interdiction and seizure as strategies for reducing the level of illegal drug use. The effectiveness of these strategies is popularly gauged by the number of arrests for illegal drug importation and the quantities of illegal drugs seized. Neither of these measures provides a satisfactory basis for judging the effectiveness of supply-side drug law enforcement. Both are as sensitive to the level of investment in such enforcement as they are to its effects. If, however, (a) heroin seizures exert significant effects on heroin supply (b) there is no significant stockpiling of heroin and (c) there is no monopoly control of the heroin market, then (d) large heroin seizures should be followed either by an increase in the price of heroin or a decrease in its purity or both. There are independent reasons for believing (b) and (c) to be true. The aim of the Bureau study, therefore, is to conduct a time series analysis of the relationship between seizures of heroin and heroin price and purity to test for (d). The study will last twenty-four months. Seizure data are being collected from the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence. Price and purity of heroin are being monitored, through undercover heroin buys and street-level heroin arrests in a major heroin distribution area of Sydney.

The following participants did not make presentations:

- Bob Douglas, Professor and Director, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, Australian National University
- David McDonald, Senior Criminologist, Australian Institute of Criminology

Duncan Chappell, Professor and Head of the Australian Institute of Criminology was unable to attend.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION ON METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN DRUG MARKETS RESEARCH

Rapporteur: David McDonald

A number of methodological issues need to be addressed in drug markets research. Common problems facing both academic and law enforcement researchers include establishing the validity of data (that is, the degree to which the data collected reflects the real situation) and its reliability (that is, the degree to which data collected about the same situation by different groups is consistent). The discussion covered six broad areas, namely: cross-sectoral research; communication; information sources; standardisation of measurement and terminology; legal confidentiality protection and ethical confidentiality issues.

Cross-sectoral research

Both the law enforcement and academic research communities undertake drug markets research, but much of it is done independently rather than in a cross-sectoral manner. Partly as a result of this, a comprehensive national overview of research in this area has not yet been achieved (although the law enforcement community, through the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence, has begun efforts towards this end). Nevertheless, similar methodological issues apply to each group of researchers, particularly regarding issues of reliability and validity.

It was suggested that much advantage could be gained through cooperative research between academics and the law enforcement community. An example of such cooperation is the heroin price and purity study currently being conducted jointly by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research and the NSW Police Service. Potential ethical problems in such cooperation are discussed below.

Participants pointed out that it is often difficult to attract research funding for drug markets research as it does not fall clearly into the 'health' funding priorities nor the 'law enforcement' environment. Rather, it straddles the two. Under the revised National Drug Strategy, however, this situation has been recognised and new funding, such as the National Drug Crime Prevention Fund, could support inter-sectoral research. This raises the issue of the potential broader role of funding bodies in commissioning or, in other ways, facilitating inter-sectoral research as a priority activity.

Communication

Communication between researchers from the academic and law enforcement communities is not as good as it could be. Indeed, part of the rationale for the workshop was to improve communications between these sectors.

It was pointed out that much social science and health research into drug use and drug markets takes substantial time— often a number of years— to complete. In the main, academics are reluctant to communicate their findings or pass on their data to others until studies are completed and written up for publication. This time frame is generally adequate for the development of new knowledge, but largely inadequate in terms of producing policy responses, a goal which is particularly relevant to many in the law enforcement research community. (There are examples of successful interactions between academic researchers and policy makers, such as the use of unpublished research results from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre in the development of the amphetamines campaign by the

NSW Department of Health.) Again, it was pointed out that funding bodies should be aware of research in progress and could fill a role in disseminating information about which researchers are engaged in what kind of research as a step towards reducing this information barrier.

Some discussion took place concerning the value of holding regular conferences at which people undertaking research in this area can share information about work in progress and completed projects. Reference was made to the First and Second (Annual) National Drug Indicators Conferences that were held in the late 1980s under the auspices of the ACT Drug Indicators Project and funded by the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse. These conferences produced the excellent publications *Epidemiology of Illegal Drug Use in Australia 1988* and *Epidemiology of Illegal Drug Use in Australia 1989*. The view was expressed that substantial value would come from the National Drug Strategy resuming these annual conferences, particularly in light of the revised strategy, which places more emphasis on the law enforcement aspect of national drug policies.

Information sources

Valuable discussion took place regarding sources of information about drug markets and drug market research. Members of the law enforcement community pointed out that extensive data sets relating to drug use and drug markets, offences, etcetera, exist but are rarely accessed by academic researchers. Law enforcement agencies rarely have the resources to fully utilise these data; they find this somewhat frustrating. Academic researchers indicated that they have not made use of such data because they are unclear what data are held, how available they are and how to seek access to such data.

A useful discussion followed in which participants sought to clarify the difference between data gathered routinely, on the one hand, and that gathered for specific criminal intelligence purposes. It is likely that criminal intelligence data would not be available to outside researchers, particularly if these data were still the subject of current investigations or likely to be used in criminal prosecutions.

Participants recognised that a number of law enforcement agencies publish reports which present summary data and conclusions drawn from them. While these reports were not generally publicly available, bona fide outside researchers were likely to be given access to them. However, for many purposes this is of limited utility to outside researchers: they frequently require access to unit record data. This is likely to raise privacy considerations, as unit record data generally relate to individuals. The states and territories have different legislation and procedures relating to privacy and these would need to be addressed by those seeking access to such data.

It was also pointed out that even full use of existing data sets would not be adequate for all research purposes. New research is required to answer new research questions. In this context, it was demonstrated that considerable value can lie in conducting qualitative research with relatively small numbers of participants.

Standardisation of measurement and terminology

It was also pointed out that it would be very useful if we could move towards the use of common data items and measuring techniques across various data sets. One of the obvious areas in which this could occur is measures of drug use. Another is the units of measurement of quantities of drugs that are traded within the illicit markets.

The degree to which this can be achieved in a meaningful way is limited by the unregulated nature of the illicit drug market; this leads to an inherent imprecision in weights.

Legal confidentiality protection

An over-riding issue of importance for academic researchers who obtain information about illegal activities is protection from being summonsed, or having their information subpoenaed, by a court. Related to this is the capacity to convince participants and potential participants that information that they provide will not be revealed to third parties. It was noted that the Commonwealth and ACT *Epidemiological Studies (Confidentiality) Acts* provide both forms of protection for studies which are specifically covered by either piece of legislation. Apparently no other jurisdictions have such legislation, which leaves researchers in those areas in a difficult and ambiguous position.

This problem is graphically illustrated by a decision made soon after this workshop relating to the current World Health Organisation international study on patterns of cocaine use (see presentation summary by Hando). All questions pertaining to the availability and distribution of coca products have been removed from the questionnaire after no guarantee could be provided by relevant law enforcement authorities that interviewers would not be subpoenaed for information from the study. Unfortunately, there are very few legislative provisions that allow police to be able to fully guarantee researchers legal confidentiality.

Ethical confidentiality issues

Participants discussed, at some length, the following dilemma, which some consider to be inherent in drug markets research. Should academic researchers ask participants to provide information which could potentially be used against them or other illicit drug users by law enforcement agencies? This can occur even when the information is written up in aggregate form and not revealing the identity of any individuals. There is no way that the academic researcher can anticipate or control the use made of published information by law enforcement agencies or others. This is a dilemma which has no obvious resolution, but which needs to be taken into account when researchers are establishing informed consent relationships with participants and when they are preparing material for publication.

Conclusion

The workshop concluded that serious methodological problems face researchers interested in drug markets. Some of these may be overcome through cross-sectoral research and better communication, between people with different orientations, in terms of obtaining and using information about drug markets. Funding bodies have the potential to operate in ways which will better facilitate research and communication in this area. Substantial ethical issues are involved in drug markets research and there is a need to address these so that they do not become absolute barriers to effective drug markets research.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION ON IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH GAPS

Rapporteur: Gabriele Bammer

Both general and specific research gaps were identified. The general gaps included: research objectives; the relationship between law enforcement and public health; building and integrating data bases; and strengthening local level data collection. Specific gaps included: the size and nature of the dealer population; polydrug considerations; price elasticity of demand; pricing differentials from export/import to street levels; changes over time; measurement of demand through consumption; focus on young drug users; and hepatitis.

General Gaps

Research objectives

Two important gaps in research objectives were identified:

- evaluation

Evaluation of both the effectiveness of law enforcement interventions and of new policies which could directly or indirectly affect the drug market is needed. There was agreement that there was likely to be a multiplicity of outcomes and that there might be contradictions between them (that is, some outcomes might be positive and some might be negative).

- prediction

There was a perceived need to be able to predict the effects of proposed interventions or policy changes.

The relationship between law enforcement and public health

It was agreed that law enforcement could impact on public health and vice-versa and that this needed to be investigated and documented. Some participants suggested that an example of a negative public health consequence resulting from law enforcement action was the apparent increase in use of amphetamines when law enforcement targeting reduced availability of cannabis; not all participants agreed that this was a valid example.

There was general agreement that in the current Australian situation the effects on public health of law enforcement strategies needed to be considered and that strategies likely to have negative public health impact should be avoided.

Building and integrating data bases

There was seen to be a need to build and integrate data bases. Their usefulness would be increased by regular monitoring and by independent replication.

In order to investigate the interactions between law enforcement and public health, there is a need to bring together health and law enforcement data bases. However, monitoring of immediate effects may be difficult because of time lags in data collection and time lags which often occur in obtaining permission to access data bases. For the monitoring to be useful in a policy context, such difficulties need to be overcome.

Strengthening local level data collection

It was agreed that data collection for evaluation and prediction purposes needed to be strengthened at the local level.

This was not to diminish the value of national and international data.

Specific Gaps

The size and nature of the dealer population

There is a dearth of information about drug dealing in Australia, including the numbers involved and the nature of their operations. The difficulties in obtaining this information are exacerbated by the severe legal and social sanctions against dealing.

Polydrug considerations

Participants noted that polydrug use is widespread in Australia. This has become particularly apparent with the increasing price of cannabis and the increasing use of amphetamines. In this context, drug substitution is a significant research issue.

Regarding drug markets specifically, it was suggested that polydrug marketing may be commonplace in Australia, in contrast to the USA. Research into polydrug marketing would require a good understanding of stockpiling of various drug types within the market. This information is generally not available and it is not clear just how it could be obtained.

Demand elasticity

Central to econometric models of drug markets is the concept of price elasticity of demand for drugs. Participants noted that very little information is available in this area either in Australia or overseas. Little progress has been made in research in this area and it appears that research technologies are not really available to obtain adequate information. In the absence of such information, there are limitations on the extent to which econometric models of drug markets can provide estimates of the price elasticity of demand.

Pricing differentials from export/import to street levels

While there is some understanding of absolute prices at each level in the drug market, there is little information about the determinants of these differentials.

Changes over time

There has been insufficient routine monitoring of changes in drug markets over time, of factors associated with changes and of the consequences of changes.

Measurement of demand through consumption

Such investigations would include the link between consumption and drug-related crime, estimates of numbers of users and measurement of trends in numbers of users.

Focus on young drug users

A proposal was put forward for the collection of drug use data on all young people brought to police stations for offences. It was suggested that both self-report and urinalysis should be used.

Hepatitis

It was proposed that public health concerns related to drug markets should be broadened from HIV/AIDS to include hepatitis, particularly hepatitis C.

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FEASIBILITY RESEARCH INTO THE CONTROLLED AVAILABILITY OF OPIOIDS

The Feasibility Research into the Controlled Availability of Opioids arose from a request to the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH) from the Select Committee on HIV, Illegal Drugs and Prostitution established by the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Legislative Assembly.

A first stage of research, conducted in collaboration with the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), found that a trial to provide opioids, including heroin, to dependent users was feasible in principle. It was recommended that a second stage of feasibility investigations to examine logistic issues be conducted.

The first stage investigations examined illegal drug use in the ACT, the arguments for and against the controlled availability of opioids as reviewed in the literature, the current Australian political context for a trial, the role of interest groups in social controversies, legal issues, possible options for a trial, ethical issues, attitudes to a trial in the general community and among key interest groups (police, service providers, and illegal drug users and ex-users), and evaluation by a randomised controlled trial.

In addition, a proposal for a trial was developed as the starting point for the Stage 2 investigations.

The research which needs to be conducted to determine Stage 2 logistic feasibility can be divided into five areas:

- core information (for example, estimating numbers of users, determining relevant characteristics of ACT-based users, documenting the known information about the psychopharmacological and toxicological effects of opioids);
- information relevant to trial design and evaluation;
- information relevant to service provision;
- information about relevant legal, law enforcement and criminological matters;
- community and key stakeholder acceptability of a specific trial proposal.

The Stage 2 research is also governed by the following principles:

- the research should have intrinsic value so that, regardless of whether or not a trial goes ahead, the research should be of value to treatment services or to drug policy generally;
- research should be conducted in all relevant disciplines and the disciplinary findings should be integrated to address the central problem;
- the process should involve to the greatest extent possible the key interest groups— illicit drug users, ex-users, service providers, police, policy makers and the community.

Stage 2 of the feasibility research into the controlled availability of opioids has many components. As significant advances are made in each particular substudy, we publish the results as a working paper, so that the information is available for discussion in the public arena.

PUBLICATIONS

Reports

- * National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (1991), *Feasibility Research into the Controlled Availability of Opioids. Volumes 1 and 2*. NCEPH, The Australian National University, Canberra.
- * Bammer, G. and Gerrard, G. (eds) (1992), *Heroin Treatment – New Alternatives*, Proceedings of a one-day seminar, Becker House, Canberra, November 1991.

Working papers

- * Larson, A (1992), *Estimating the numbers of heroin users in the ACT*, Feasibility Research into the Controlled Availability of Opioids Stage 2, Working Paper Number 1.

Published papers

- # Hartland, N; McDonald, D; Dance, P. and Bammer, B. (1992), 'Australian reports into drug use and the possibility of heroin maintenance', *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 11, pp.175–182.
- # Bammer, G. (1993), 'Should the controlled provision of heroin be a treatment option? Australian feasibility considerations', *Addiction*, 88, pp.467–475.

Newsletters

- # Newsletters reporting project results are also published from time to time.

- * These publications are for sale through:

Bibliotech
The Australian National University
ACT 0200

- # These publications are available free from:

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