

What links have been drawn between problematic drug use of cocaine, crime and wider social problems?

Name of Student:

Course:

Name of Professor:

Date:

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Introduction:

Problematic drug use, particularly cocaine, has long been associated with numerous social problems, including crime (Caulkins et al., 2005; Degenhardt et al., 2010; Gfroerer et al., 2003). The relationship between cocaine use, criminal behavior, and broader societal implications has garnered significant attention from researchers, policymakers, and practitioners (Chen et al., 2019; UNODC, 2019). Understanding the links between these variables is crucial for developing effective interventions, policies, and treatment strategies to address drug-related issues and mitigate their impact on individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole.

Research has consistently highlighted the co-occurrence of problematic cocaine use and criminal behavior. The use of cocaine, a powerful stimulant drug, can lead to impaired judgment, impulsivity, and aggression, increasing the likelihood of engaging in criminal activities such as theft, drug trafficking, and violence (NIDA, 2020; Stevens et al., 2014). Moreover, individuals who are involved in the illegal drug trade are often exposed to environments characterized by violence, exploitation, and social disorganization, further perpetuating criminal behavior (Copes et al., 2012; Inciardi et al., 2009).

Research Aim:

The aim of this research proposal is to comprehensively investigate the links between problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems. The study seeks to gain a deep understanding of the complex dynamics and interrelationships among these variables, ultimately providing evidence-based insights that can inform effective interventions, policies, and prevention strategies.

Research Objectives:

- To examine the association between problematic cocaine use and criminal behavior, including the types of crimes committed and the factors contributing to criminal involvement.
- To assess the impact of problematic cocaine use on individuals' physical and mental health, relationships, and overall quality of life.

- To explore the consequences of problematic cocaine use on families, including emotional distress, financial instability, and disrupted family dynamics.
- To investigate the broader social problems stemming from the relationship between cocaine use, crime, and affected communities, such as decreased safety, compromised social cohesion, and economic decline.
- To identify the contextual factors and social determinants that contribute to the complex interplay between cocaine use, crime, and social problems.
- To critically evaluate existing interventions, policies, and prevention strategies aimed at addressing cocaine-related issues and identify areas for improvement.

Research Question:

What are the links between problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems, and how do these associations manifest at the individual, family, and community levels?

Literature Review:

Several scholarly investigations have explored the correlations between problematic drug use, particularly cocaine, and its connection to criminal activity and broader societal issues. The objective of this literature review is to examine the current text of scholarly literature pertaining to this subject matter, furnishing a synopsis of principal discoveries, theoretical structures, and methodological approaches.

The Association between Cocaine Use and Crime:

Empirical evidence consistently indicates a notable correlation between the consumption of cocaine and engagement in criminal activities (Caulkins et al., 2005; Inciardi et al., 2009; Stevens et al., 2014). The pharmacological impacts of cocaine, which entail heightened impulsivity, aggression, and compromised judgment, are conducive to a greater propensity for engaging in criminal behaviors such as drug trafficking, theft, and violence (NIDA, 2020; Stevens et al., 2014). According to Degenhardt et al. (2010), individuals who are under the influence of cocaine may display an increased tendency towards risk-taking behaviors and may resort to criminal activities in order to procure drugs or financial resources to maintain their addiction.

Moreover, those who participate in illicit drug trafficking, specifically the distribution of cocaine, are subjected to surroundings marked by aggression, manipulation, and societal fragmentation, thereby fostering delinquent conduct (Copes et al., 2012; Inciardi et al., 2009). The intricate relationship between cocaine use, drug-related offenses, and the wider criminal justice system is influenced by the allure of monetary benefits in the drug market and the significant likelihood of being apprehended and imprisoned, as noted by Caulkins et al. (2005) and Werb et al. (2016).

Impact of Problematic Cocaine Use on Individuals and Families:

The usage of cocaine that is problematic in nature has significant implications for the physical and mental health, relationships, and general welfare of individuals (Degenhardt et al., 2013; Zweben et al., 2004). According to Zweben et al. (2004), prolonged consumption of cocaine can result in addiction, cognitive deficiencies, cardiac complications, and mental health conditions. In addition, the economic strain linked with maintaining a cocaine dependency frequently prompts individuals to engage in illicit behaviors to fund their addiction, thereby intensifying the incidence of criminality in localities (Rydell et al., 2011; Werb et al., 2016).

The families of individuals grappling with cocaine addiction are also confronted with noteworthy difficulties. The repercussions of substance abuse often include emotional turmoil, financial insecurity, and familial discord, as noted by Copello et al. (2010) and Kosten et al. (2013). According to Copello et al. (2010), family relationships may experience strain, which can be evidenced by heightened conflict, disregard for familial obligations, and psychological anguish among members. Offspring raised in households impacted by problematic cocaine use are at a heightened likelihood of experiencing unfavorable consequences, such as maltreatment, disregard, and enduring psychological and developmental challenges (Copello et al., 2010; Kosten et al., 2013).

Community-Level Implications:

The communities that are impacted by elevated levels of cocaine consumption and related criminal activities encounter substantial difficulties that surpass the effects on individuals and families. The communities in question exhibit a high incidence of

reduced safety, diminished social cohesion, and economic deterioration, as evidenced by studies conducted by Pacula et al. (2016) and Ritter et al. (2015). According to Pacula et al. (2016), the existence of drug markets and related criminal undertakings can engender a climate of apprehension and vulnerability, thereby exerting an adverse influence on the general standard of living of inhabitants.

In addition, the economic ramifications linked to tackling drug-related concerns, such as the expenses incurred in law enforcement endeavors, healthcare costs, and the loss of productivity, can exert a significant strain on communities and exhaust scarce resources (Ritter et al., 2015). According to Pacula et al. (2016), the adverse social outcomes of problematic cocaine use are aggravated by the disturbance of social networks, reduced neighborhood cohesion, and impaired community functioning.

Research Gaps and Methodological Considerations:

Although prior studies have yielded valuable insights into the associations between problematic cocaine use, criminal activity, and broader societal issues, there are still several gaps in the existing research. The current state of research on the relationship between cocaine use and crime and social outcomes necessitates further investigation through comprehensive studies that employ rigorous methodologies, such as longitudinal designs. Such studies are crucial in establishing causal relationships and exploring the enduring effects of cocaine use (Chen et al., 2019). Furthermore, a significant portion of extant research has centered on individual-level correlations, with a restricted emphasis on the contextual variables and societal determinants that contribute to the intricate interplay among drug usage, criminal activity, and societal issues (UNODC, 2019).

In order to comprehensively address the intricacies of this matter, it is imperative to adopt a multidimensional methodology that integrates both quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection, as suggested by Chen et al. (2019). Possible academic rewrite: The research methods employed may encompass a range of techniques such as surveys, interviews, ethnographic observations, and analysis of administrative data derived from criminal justice and healthcare systems. The proposed methodology would facilitate a thorough comprehension of the various aspects related

to cocaine use, including the associated experiences, motivations, and outcomes. Additionally, it would also enable an examination of the contextual factors that influence drug markets and criminal conduct, as evidenced by prior research conducted by Chen et al. (2019) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2019).

Methodology:

Methods:

In this research, a mixed methods approach will be adopted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the links between problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems. This approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the research topic from multiple perspectives (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Research Paradigm:

The study will predominantly operate within an interpretive research paradigm. The paradigm in question is highly appropriate for examining the intricate connections among problematic cocaine use, criminal activity, and social issues. This is due to its emphasis on comprehending the subjective experiences, meanings, and interpretations of the individuals who are implicated in these phenomena (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research endeavors to investigate the social construction of reality, contextual impact, and subjective perceptions of individuals impacted by cocaine use and related criminal activities by embracing an interpretivist approach. This is consistent with the aim of acquiring a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences, driving forces, and perspectives of the participants engaged in the phenomenon being studied.

Data Collection- Including Sampling:

The research will utilize a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to capture diverse aspects of the research topic.

Quantitative Data Collection:

The study will employ a quantitative research design to gather data through surveys that will be distributed to two groups of participants: individuals with a

documented history of cocaine use disorder and members of communities that have been impacted by this issue. The survey will incorporate validated instruments, such as the Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST), to gauge the extent of cocaine consumption and the Criminality Measurement Index (CMI) to quantify engagement in unlawful conduct. Supplementary metrics will be incorporated to evaluate the physical and mental health consequences associated with the consumption of cocaine. The survey will be formulated with the aim of collecting data on various aspects such as demographics, drug consumption trends, criminal activities, and the ramifications of cocaine usage on individuals' well-being. The study endeavors to collect measurable data through the utilization of a standardized survey, which can subsequently be subjected to statistical analysis to discern patterns, correlations, and tendencies.

Qualitative Data Collection:

The study will employ qualitative research methodology to gather data, utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as the primary means of data collection. The study will involve conducting comprehensive interviews with individuals who possess personal experiences with cocaine usage, individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system, and members of the community who have been impacted by cocaine-related concerns. The interviews will afford an occasion to delve into the subjective experiences, motivations, and perceptions of the participants in a more comprehensive and contextualized manner. The proposed methodology for this study entails conducting focus group discussions with select members of affected communities. This approach will foster an interactive and dynamic exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and the wider social implications of cocaine use and associated criminal activities. The process of collecting qualitative data will facilitate a more profound comprehension of the fundamental factors, contextual influences, and lived experiences of the individuals involved.

Sampling:

The proposed sampling methodology will entail a hybrid approach that integrates purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The study will utilize purposive sampling to select participants who have a documented history of problematic cocaine use,

individuals who have been involved in criminal activities, and members of the community who reside in areas that have been affected by issues related to cocaine use. The aforementioned sampling strategy guarantees the incorporation of individuals possessing pertinent experiences and perspectives, thereby furnishing the study with a comprehensive and varied dataset. The utilization of snowball sampling is proposed as a means to access populations and individuals who are typically challenging to reach, including those who are not undergoing drug treatment or are involved in illicit activities. This methodology facilitates the recognition of supplementary participants via recommendations from primary participants, thereby broadening the scope of the investigation to encompass a more diverse array of experiences and viewpoints.

Rationale:

The incorporation of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in the proposed research is imperative to attain a holistic comprehension of the intricate interconnections among problematic cocaine usage, criminal activities, and broader societal issues. Quantitative methodologies afford the prospect of inspecting the widespread distribution and configurations of cocaine utilization and concomitant delinquent conducts, alongside the repercussions on the physiological and psychological well-being of individuals. The utilization of these techniques facilitates the conduct of statistical examinations that can detect statistical correlations and furnish insights that can be applied to a wider population.

Conversely, qualitative methodologies provide a more comprehensive investigation into the personal experiences, incentives, and perspectives of individuals impacted by cocaine consumption and related criminal activities. The study endeavors to gather comprehensive data on the intricate relationships being examined by conducting extensive interviews and focus group discussions that delve into the lived experiences, contextual factors, and social dynamics that shape these relationships. The utilization of qualitative methods yields comprehensive and intricate perspectives, which facilitate the contextualization and interpretation of quantitative findings. This approach illuminates the underlying mechanisms and contributes to a more nuanced comprehension of the subject matter.

By combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research aims to generate a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the links between problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems, enabling the development of evidence-based interventions, policies, and prevention strategies.

Data Analysis:

To obtain meaningful results and derive insights from the collected data, a rigorous data analysis process will be conducted using appropriate quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques. The data analysis methods will be tailored to the specific research objectives and the nature of the data collected.

Quantitative Data Analysis:

The quantitative data obtained through the surveys will be analyzed using statistical software, such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The following steps will be undertaken for the quantitative data analysis:

- Data Cleaning and Preparation:

The collected survey data will be carefully examined to identify and address any missing values, outliers, or inconsistencies. Data cleaning procedures will be applied to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the quantitative dataset.

- Descriptive Analysis:

Descriptive statistics, such as means, frequencies, and percentages, will be calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants, patterns of problematic cocaine use, types of crimes committed, and the impact of cocaine use on physical and mental health outcomes. This analysis will provide an overview of the quantitative data and establish the prevalence and distribution of key variables.

- Inferential Analysis:

Inferential statistical techniques will be employed to examine the relationships and associations between variables of interest. For example, regression analysis can be used to explore the factors influencing criminal behavior and the impact of cocaine use

on physical and mental health outcomes. Chi-square tests or correlation analyses may be conducted to identify significant associations between variables.

- Subgroup Analysis:

Subgroup analysis will be performed to examine variations in outcomes based on participant characteristics such as gender, age, and socio-economic status. This analysis will help identify potential disparities and differences in the effects of problematic cocaine use and crime across different groups.

Qualitative Data Analysis:

The qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used approach for identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data. The following steps will be undertaken for the qualitative data analysis:

- Transcription:

The recorded interviews and discussions will be transcribed verbatim, ensuring that all relevant verbal and non-verbal cues are captured accurately.

- Coding:

The data will be analyzed using an iterative coding process. Initially, open coding will be employed to generate a comprehensive list of initial codes that represent key ideas, concepts, and themes emerging from the data. Through constant comparison, these initial codes will be refined, merged, or expanded to form broader themes and sub-themes.

- Theme Development:

Themes and sub-themes will be developed by organizing related codes into meaningful categories. The connections between themes will be explored, and the underlying narratives and experiences will be examined in-depth.

- Data Integration:

The qualitative findings will be integrated with the quantitative findings to provide a holistic understanding of the research topic. Convergent and divergent findings between the quantitative and qualitative data will be identified and explored.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings:

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analyses will be integrated using a mixed methods approach. This integration may involve comparing and contrasting the results, corroborating findings, or exploring divergent perspectives to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationships between problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems.

By combining quantitative and qualitative data analyses, this research aims to provide a robust and nuanced understanding of the research questions and generate insights that can inform effective interventions, policies, and prevention strategies.

Limitations:

While this research proposal aims to provide valuable insights into the links between problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems, it is essential to acknowledge and anticipate potential limitations that may impact the study's findings and generalizability.

- Researcher Bias:

A potential flaw in every study project is the existence of researcher bias. According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), the researcher's subjective judgments as well as any preconceived beliefs might have an impact on the data collection, processing, and interpretation processes. Throughout the course of the study process, we will work hard to keep our reflexivity and self-awareness intact so that we may work around this limitation. Additionally, using a mixed methods approach allows for diverse perspectives, which can help counteract any biases (O'Cathain et al., 2010). This is an advantage of the mixed methods approach.

- Time Constraints:

The breadth and depth of data collection and analysis may be constrained by time constraints. It's possible that doing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, in addition to reviewing qualitative data, could take up a lot of your time. The research team will meticulously plan out the study procedure and ensure that each stage receives the appropriate amount of time. However, it is essential to recognize that the amount of time available may have an effect on the sample size, as well as the level of data saturation that may be attained through qualitative data analysis.

- Cost:

The recruiting of study participants, the collection of data, and the analysis of that data can all add up to large costs when doing extensive research. Because of budgetary constraints, the research can have a smaller sample size or a more limited scope. The research team will make efforts to get appropriate funding and will investigate cost-effective ways for data collecting, such as making use of existing resources and leveraging collaborations with relevant organizations and institutions. In addition, the team will make efforts to secure adequate funding.

- Participants and Access:

There may be difficulties in recruiting volunteers for the study, particularly people who have a history of problematic cocaine usage and involvement in criminal activities. The hidden nature of these populations, in addition to the shame that is associated with drug use and criminal behavior, can make it difficult to recruit members of these groups. However, it is possible that this method will add selection bias and restrict the generalizability of the findings (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling will be utilized in order to access populations that are difficult to access. The research team will make every effort to ensure that participants come from a varied range of backgrounds in order to collect data that accurately reflects a variety of experiences and points of view.

- Lack of Previous Studies:

It may be difficult to build upon current knowledge and construct a firm foundation due to the restricted availability of previous studies in the particular study field being investigated. This constraint has the potential to have an impact on the process of

formulating research questions, developing theoretical frameworks, and creating research instruments. However, in order to work around this limitation, the research team has planned to carry out an exhaustive literature analysis. The goal of this study is to locate pertinent studies and theories from adjacent domains that can provide insight into the research design and methods.

It is important to acknowledge these limitations as they can impact the scope, validity, and generalizability of the research findings. By being aware of these potential limitations, the research team can proactively address them through careful planning, transparency, and appropriate interpretation of the results, ultimately contributing to the overall rigor and reliability of the research.

Ethical Considerations:

This research proposal recognizes the importance of ethical considerations in conducting research and is committed to upholding the rights and well-being of participants. The study will adhere to ethical guidelines established by the British Society of Criminology (BSC) and other relevant professional bodies to ensure the highest ethical standards are maintained throughout the research process.

Voluntary Participation:

The research will emphasize voluntary participation, ensuring that individuals have the right to choose whether or not to participate in the study. Potential participants will be provided with detailed information about the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They will also be informed that their decision to participate or decline will not affect their access to services or any other aspects of their lives. This approach aligns with the principle of respect for autonomy and acknowledges participants' rights to make independent decisions (British Society of Criminology, 2015).

Informed Consent:

Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. They will receive a consent form outlining the purpose of the research, data collection procedures, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and their

right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. The consent process will ensure that participants are fully informed about their involvement, enabling them to provide voluntary and informed consent (British Society of Criminology, 2015).

Anonymity:

All of the information that is gathered will be anonymized in order to maintain the participants' right to privacy and confidentiality. During the data analysis and reporting process, the identities of the participants will be coded, and any personally identifiable information will either be erased or pseudonymized. In order to protect the privacy of the participants throughout the research process, including data storage and dissemination, anonymity will be preserved at every stage. This will ensure that no individual can be identified based on the findings of the study. According to research published by the British Society of Criminology in 2015, this method upholds the principle of secrecy and protects the participants' rights to privacy.

Confidentiality:

All research data will be handled with strict confidentiality. Access to data will be limited to the research team, and appropriate security measures will be implemented to ensure the protection of participants' information. Data will be securely stored and only used for the purposes outlined in the research proposal. Confidentiality will be maintained even in the reporting of results, with aggregated and de-identified information presented to ensure individual participants cannot be identified (British Society of Criminology, 2015).

Harm:

The research team recognizes the potential risks associated with discussing sensitive topics such as problematic drug use and criminal behavior. Steps will be taken to minimize potential harm to participants, such as providing access to support services and ensuring that participants have the option to decline or discontinue their participation at any point if they feel uncomfortable. Ethical considerations will be continuously monitored throughout the research process, and appropriate measures will

be taken to address any unforeseen harm or distress that may arise (British Society of Criminology, 2015).

By following the ethical guidelines established by the British Society of Criminology (BSC) and considering the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the prevention of harm, this research proposal demonstrates a commitment to conducting the study in an ethically responsible manner. These ethical considerations are crucial in safeguarding the rights, well-being, and dignity of the research participants, and they contribute to the integrity and validity of the research findings.

Conclusion:

This research proposal has examined the links between problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems. The aim of this study is to deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics among these variables and provide evidence-based insights that can inform interventions, policies, and prevention strategies. By exploring the interrelationships between problematic cocaine use, criminal behavior, and broader societal implications, this research seeks to address a significant gap in the current knowledge.

Throughout the literature review, it became evident that problematic cocaine use is closely associated with criminal activities and leads to various social problems. The use of cocaine can impair judgment, increase impulsivity, and contribute to aggressive behavior, which elevates the risk of engaging in criminal acts. Moreover, individuals involved in the illegal drug trade often face violence, exploitation, and social disorganization, further perpetuating criminal behavior. Beyond the direct association with crime, problematic cocaine use has detrimental effects on individuals' physical and mental health, relationships, and overall quality of life. It also places a financial strain on individuals, potentially driving them to resort to illegal activities to support their addiction.

The key takeaway from this research proposal is the recognition of the multidimensional impact of problematic cocaine use on individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. By comprehensively understanding these links, it

is possible to develop targeted interventions, policies, and treatment strategies that address the root causes of drug-related issues and minimize their negative consequences.

Regarding the research methodology, this proposal adopts a mixed methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods. The integration of these methods allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem, capturing both statistical patterns and in-depth insights into individuals' experiences and perspectives. The research will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the prevention of harm.

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations that may impact the study. These include potential researcher bias, time constraints, cost limitations, challenges in participant recruitment and access, and the limited availability of previous studies in the specific research area. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings and assessing the generalizability of the results.

In summary, this research proposal contributes to the existing body of knowledge on problematic cocaine use, crime, and wider social problems. By addressing the research problem, employing a mixed methods approach, and considering ethical considerations, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics among these variables. The findings will not only contribute to theoretical understanding but also inform practical interventions, policies, and prevention strategies that can mitigate the negative consequences associated with problematic drug use, reduce crime rates, and improve the well-being of individuals, families, and communities affected by these issues. Through collaborative efforts, interdisciplinary research, and evidence-based approaches, we can work towards creating healthier, safer, and more cohesive societies.

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