



Perspective of Drug Dealers on Dealing
Interviews with 8 dealers
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THIS IS WHAT I DO - END OF!



BACKGROUND

- While media attention sensationalises drug dealers and gangs, with few exceptions dealers' perspectives are rarely the subject of Irish academic research.
- Dealers have not been seen as a target group for most drugs or community services. Studies which attempt to gain this perspective often rely on views from 'user dealers' (HRB).



BACKGROUND

- Many obstacles in focusing research or services on this group.
 - Their success relies on their ability to avoid detection and so engaging for discussions around their illicit activities is difficult to achieve.
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Background

- In some jurisdictions services are looking at solutions to dealing other than the traditional. In the US, the Bureau Justice Agency (BJA) has designed an innovative programme which offers *exit pathways* for low level dealers as a way of arresting such a trajectory and dismantling drug markets in neighbourhoods.

BACKGROUND

- In considering the theme of this conference 'what has worked' we noted the exclusionary focus: what has worked includes only what one has worked on. Automatically then those who are not a target will be outside this frame. Dealer fall into this category so too do many others with drug problems that may not fit the service. Nevertheless we feel that dealers can be considered a big part of the 'drug problem' and so wanted to consider them in a kind of juxtaposition to the theme – 'what has worked'.



PURPOSE

- To engage drug dealers in dialogue about what they do
 - To begin to get a perspective on dealing without sensationalist journalism
 - To begin to understand a dealer's perspective on their activities
 - To explore potential for exit strategies from dealing
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METHODOLOGY

INCLUSION CRITERIA

- not drug service users (current or past)
- Earns majority of income from dealing drugs

SELECTION

3 trusted key contacts
identify criteria match



METHODOLOGY

INTERVIEW

- A 40 q questionnaire (open + closed questions)
- Interviewer administered
- Some participants completed questionnaires

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Activity of dealing referred to as 'fishing'.
- No names recorded
- No addresses/areas recorded.



RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

ECONOMICS

VIEWS

- *RISKS*
Rewards

- *Blocking*

- *Resignation*

- *Morality*



DEMOGRAPHICS

- Age range: 29-42 (mean age 33).
- Living arrangements: 6 with partner and children, 2 alone.
- Number of children: Range 1-3 (2)
- Age leaving School: Range 15-18 (16)
- Education: 4 yes 4no
(computer courses, FETAC and 1 participant did a Diploma (stating it was for court purposes)).

DEMOGRAPHICS

- Employment:
7 unemployed 1 self-employed
- Social Welfare :
 - 5 in receipt of job seekers
 - 1 in receipt of unemployment benefit
 - 2 not in receipt of any welfare assistance

ECONOMICS

- Drug dealing was the main source of income for the 8 respondents
- Income on a monthly basis was difficult to assess for respondents. It was clear that the drugs trade was not stable so as to give a steady monthly rate.
- *QUOTE: "the drug economy goes up and down. This time of year is the worst for selling drugs with school starting and people saving for Xmas. Sometime I make a couple of grand a week sometimes two hundred when I have to pay a 'bill'. Or I want new car then u use all your profit rather than by outright" (no 1)*
- There was suggestion that it was seasonal and had been hit by the session
- *'used to be in ten thousands lucky to get five now'*

ECONOMICS

- Earnings:
- Most earned low to moderate incomes 2000 – 4000 monthly. One said he earned 5000 approx. and another 16k per month.
- Credit or cash
- 4 usually paid for their product in advance .
- 4 usually got the drugs for resale on credit.
- Again there was a recessionary effect as respondents said they could only by smaller amounts with cash now and some had moved completely from cash purchase to credit

ECONOMICS

- Sole trader / others selling
- 4 has other selling for them
- 4 worked alone
- *"Usually alone now. For ten years had people work for me.*
- *I work alone now unless, I buy large amounts with others.*
- *The odd time if a pure product comes in that sells well I have others sell for me,*
- *Recession hits us all"*

HISTORY

- Respondents began dealing at a young age 10 – 19 (Ave 15yrs)
- For most there was not a categorical point when it became their main source of income. Some fluctuated trying to get other sources of income.
- *"I worked legit at times and when work was gone it became my main income"*

HISTORY

- *Reasons individuals became involved Included:
To be able to afford their personal recreational drug use*
- *A minority gave 'money' as the main reason to become involved*
- *"I wanted me own money, me ma and da never had any. I wanted hash and money and loads of airmax ha!"*
- *2 mentioned having family and friends already involved*
- *One described job satisfaction:*
- *'I enjoyed it, I hated school it was hard in school this way easy and I was good at it. I was always a bit wild and a fighter so that helped'.*
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PERSONAL DRUG CONSUMPTION

- *A drug problem*
- *No one categorically denied having a drug problem. The range of response went from*
- *"not really, recreation drug use"*
- *"kind of..(coke benders)"*
- *"coke benders. I take a lot of benzos now can't leave house without them most days to calm me down or help me sleep"*
- *The absence of Opiate use was significant among this group. Drug mentioned that were used by the respondents were MDMA E Cannabis Cocaine. This may have allowed for a non-categorical view of 'a drug problem'*
- *As one respondent noted*
- *"it depends what you would call a drug problem, I used to smoke hash and do drugs out in pubs and clubs"*

USE OF DRUG SERVICES?

- *Most said they would not use drug services because they could not risk people 'knowing'*
- *"Paranoia. People knowing your business. They would probably wonder why I was going in there they probably think I'm looking for custom"*
- *Others said they would go to a GP, abroad or privately*

'When I grow up' ?

- *All respondents said there was sometime in the past that they wanted to do something else, or indeed "anything else". Ambitions were not high, respondents wanted a "normal" or "decent" job.*
- *I wanted to play football thought about trades when I was growing up.*
- *Yes, I wanted to be a roofer and do patios too*
- *(struggles to remember) sometime I wanted to be in the army like my uncle, but I don't think about that much.*

BARRIERS

- *Respondents tended to blame themselves for their career 'choice'*
- *Barriers mentioned included their **own lack of capacity and desire for more money'***
- *"Not being good at school stood in my way"*
- *"But easy money stood in the way"*
- *Another points out that this was 'normal' in his family*
- *"Nothing stood in my way my brother was a dealer and so was my da before he died. Even if it was not drugs they'd always be up to something. It was normal in my house to sell drugs or robbed stuff"*

VIEWS ON DEALING

- *2 said they were happy in their line of work,*
- *"I am comfortable in it. I am not under anyone"*
- *3 said they were not*
- *"always chasing money. Hiding if you had no money to pay your bill. The Paranoia is big. Ye worry about the police or who your selling too"*
- *"I don't like hearing about people dying over or over dosing. Ye try tell yourself it is their own fault if they don't buy from you they will buy from someone else"*
- *2 said sometimes happy*
- *1 clearly did not like thinking about these things*
- *"I wouldn't say sad or happy. Is anyone happy in their work. These questions are kind of depressing. Ya get good at blocking the real world out. This is what I do end of"*



THEMES

RISK

REWARDS

WORRY

BLOCKING

RESIGNATION

MORALITIES

RISK

- ***Prison Death and Rats.** associated with dealing included: Prison was the biggest risk*
- *"Prison being away from your family, possibility of death from having debt, even if out of debt if the main dealer has any power over you you're not allowed stop you have to hold it or collect large amounts"*
- *"Becoming a target of jealousy or other people's paranoia. Kids trying to make a name for them-selves"*
- *"Being caught, its tough looking around corners. Or when a seller or holder is caught with your stuff. Them couple of days before you get to see them wondering if they will rat"*

REWARD VERSUS WORRY

- *MONEY*
- *STATUS*
- *INDEPENDANCE*
- *7 of the 8 said they worry.*
- *4 said they worry constantly*
- *"yes of course who doesn't worry about risks its always in back of head "*
- *4 occasionally*
- *" I don't worry if I'm careful :occasionally when purchasing"*

Rewards

- *Money and status and independence*
- *All said the money was a significant reward*
- *“the money and social status”*
- *“money drugs popularity sex girls rush buzz status”*
- *Being independent (not having a boss) was also important for 4 of the 8*
- *“no 9-5 you dictate your lifestyle”*
- *“doing what I want and not being looked over”*



RESIGNATION

- A recurring theme throughout was
An inability to see 'another way'.
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Benefits versus risks

- *2 said they were not*
- *" they used to. Not anymore not in relation to having piece of mind and a quiet life*
- *and the other 6 spoke of minimising risks by bein careful there by making them worth it*
- *" I make them out weigh it, in my head I know I have to pay the bills feed my kids etc."*

Moralities

- *Though all spoke about dealing simply as "a job" most believed it was 'wrong' on some level.*
- *Some showed moral judgements being made. None sold Heroin (possible ruled out by selection criteria and believed that to do so was morally wrong). One said he had stopped before because there was only crack and heroin to sel.*
- *"yeah (it is wrong) like I would only sell what I would take- I wouldn't sell crack or*
- *"me a parent says yes me as a dealers says no, it is what it is, drinking and smoking does as much damage"*
- *"of course (its wrong) if it wasn't it would be made legal"*
- *"nothing right or wrong about it is fucking life"*
- *"giving people drugs is wrong you're putting them in a situation you could be in yourself "*
- *"yes on every level but a lot of things are wrong with this world"*
- *Meth is big at the minute I keep getting offered but that stuff ruins communities.*

No way out

- *Now way out In doing this exploration we hoped to see if there was a way out or the potential for it for dealers, however these respondents did not give much hope for that. In asking why they reasons why they 'fished' today and whether there was anything that would make them consider stopping they provided a sense of being trapped. As one said*
- *-they had no other way to make a living*
- *- hooked by their 'bill'*
- *" its my job, too much depends on it. I have accumulated high amounts of debt it is like a revolving door. Your owed money and you owe money"*
- *There was also the sense that this was their identity not something that could be slipped out of*
- *"It s like asking a banker to become a doctor"*
- *"hahaha ye millions {barriers to exit}- how the fuck does someone get a new life job friends debt free"*
- *eh ye! Ask any career person can they just stop working. The country has nothing to offer no one especially not a grown man with nothing to show for his life.*

What can be done

- *They were not optimistic for exit strategies or programmes for dealers. Though some thought the idea was good on reflection they didn't see how they could work. When they tried to suggest ways of helping they suggested programmes for others (young without a bill / drug users) but not themselves. They were resigned to their fate.*
- *"Some people are just good at it and the people that aren't get out. If it works you won't stop don't think there could be a programme---. I can't see it any other way I don't know what would help"*
- *Others identifies prevention and the effect of role models*
- *"Yes {does think there should be programmes} but not sure it would work- maybe if schools knew how to work with kids like me we wouldn't hate it so much "*
- *"that would be great.. but it is fun when your just starting out. Kids now are surrounded by dealers not firemen or doctors. help the junkies not us.*

- *"yes defo {programmes} when you first become involved you don't realise the consequence. You don't think about prison. It would be good to show the dangers of dealing with ruthless people. Police judges parents everyone hates a drug dealer. Your labelled and your family are forgotten in the sense it does not matter you're a father"*
- *"yes they'd have to be young. You would never get big dealers out when their older, maybe small time ones that have no bill: programmes that young fellas will enjoy, that they will go to.. It is hard isn't it?? Young fellas around here don't believe they can be a solicitor or anything so what would help?"*
- *NOT for me*
- *Ill sell as long as I can I have no other choice now and I'm too old to think about stopping*

Conclusion / impressions

- *Successful in engaging with this hard to reach group in what we felt was honest dialogue.*
- *Irony in that their drive not to accept their pace in the order of things and strive for agency (through dealing) has left them trapped and resigned to their fate*
- *While initially liked the idea of programmes to provide a way out – struggled to see how they would work*
- *Though nearly all had limited options and restricted took responsibility for choices there was a sense of resignation to their life in which change wasn't really an option. (exceptions)*
- *Unexpected finding .. no heroin dealers.. we think this is because our criteria didn't allow the overlap that may exist between dealing and using services!*