

The Link Between Drug Dependency and Criminality: A Systematic Review

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Drug dependency is a complex and challenging condition that is strongly associated with increased criminal activity. The present review using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines summarized the link between drug dependency and criminality. Keywords such as “drug dependency,” “criminality,” “drug-related offenses,” “psychoactive drugs,” “model of addiction,” “illicit drug,” “drug abuse,” and “crime” were typed into the Sage, Wiley Online Library, and PubMed databases to find information related to the link between drug dependency and criminality. The search covered open-access published articles from January 2018 to August 2022. The results indicate that a high proportion of drug-user crimes involve offenses such as crime against persons (e.g., murder, rape, and assault), property, and drug-related offenses. In light of these findings, greater consideration should be given to drug dependency, as it is a significant risk factor for criminal behaviour. Furthermore, the search results produced the identification of how different types of drugs may give rise to different patterns of criminal offending. Through this review, it is apparent that individuals with poly-drug consumption have a higher likelihood of engaging in diverse offense types. Thus, the key indicators of drug use and criminality should be explored in greater detail, particularly when the offense is disaggregated by types of crime. Moreover, there is a need to improve our understanding of the association between distinct drug-use types and various crime categories to circumvent naïve assumptions about drug-using offenders.

Keywords: criminality, drug dependency, drug abuse, risky behavior

Extensive criminological literature has shown a strong and consistent correlation between drug use and criminal offenses (Hechanova et al., 2018; Yunos et al., 2018). Compared with the general population, drug use is more prevalent among individuals involved in criminal offenses (Liu & Visher, 2021). According

to Anderberg et al. (2022), roughly 55% of inmates have a history of drug use compared with 12% of non-criminal adults. Anderberg et al. (2022) noted that 50% of property offenders, 40% of violent offenders, and 50% of drug offenders reported using drugs at the time of committing their offenses.

A burgeoning line of research has consistently revealed that drug use typically begins during adolescence (Anderberg et al., 2022; Kuettel, 2021). Adolescence is a unique developmental phase in which an individual undergoes multiple biological and cognitive changes (Bennett & Holloway, 2018). Adolescents are at a higher risk of engaging in risky behaviours, such as drug use or criminal behaviour, due to shifting peer affiliation, identity transformation, and increased responsibilities (Bennett et al., 2018). Additionally, adolescents who consume drugs are more likely to experience negative consequences, resulting in physical harm (e.g., drug overdose), mental health conditions (e.g., suicide, depression), and dangerous behaviour (e.g., impaired driving, high-risk sexual behaviour; Alamdarloo et al., 2019).

In general, an individual may become psychologically and/or physiologically addicted to diverse types of psychoactive drugs such as stimulants, opioids, and/or marijuana. Drug abuse may increase violent behaviour among users in both public and private spaces. Indeed, violent behaviour is related to illicit drug use with a medium effect size ($d = 0.45$; Sibley et al., 2020). With respect to the causality between illicit drug use and public violence, drug dependency contributes to half of violent crimes by increasing the likelihood of aggressive behaviour (Felson et al., 2018; Sibley et al., 2020). Sibley et al. (2020) have noted that drug use induces disinhibition causing impaired decision-making, agitation, and inappropriate social behaviour. A myriad of research elucidate the common characteristics of hardcore

drug users including: (i) displaying a similar prevalence of drug use and offending; (ii) exhibiting a greater variety of drug use; and (iii) presenting a gradual reduction of drug use and offending as they transition from adolescence to adulthood (Felson et al., 2018).

The psychological model of addiction maintains that addiction stems from maladaptive coping mechanisms such as anxiety, poor emotional regulation, low self-esteem, and lack of resilience, whereas the sociological model upholds that drug abuse stems from the maladaptive coping skills that attend with macro-level issues, such as homelessness, poverty, social conflict, social trauma, family trauma, peer pressure, and sociocultural norms (Ibrahim et al., 2020). On the contrary, the moral model maintains that addiction is a consequence of character deficiencies, personal choice, lack of positive values, and personal failure (Ibrahim et al., 2020).

The response from community members toward drug addicts has generally been negative, as these individuals with substance abuse disease have encountered discrimination, stigmatisation, and social rejection (Li, Zhao, & Zhang., 2020). Similarly, meta-analysis results demonstrate that even health professionals' attitudes towards individuals with substance abuse disorders are generally negative and mainly focus on elements of blaming (Li et al., 2020). Acknowledging the role of drug dependency and criminal behaviour, the current study seeks to develop an improved understanding of drug-related crime to impart significant