

English summary

The organisational patterns of drug crime

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Money constitutes the motive force underlying drug crime. This type of crime is organised in the form of both dense and relatively loose-knit networks, and project-like organisations that are to be found across the whole of Sweden and that work across national borders. Drug crime is deeply rooted within the criminal community and its informal rule systems. It focuses on smuggling, distribution and the sale of drugs in the wider community. It is a multi-faceted, multi-cultural and multi-national phenomenon.

This book describes and analyses this form of crime. The book concludes with proposals for offensive measures to combat drug crime. The study proceeds on the basis of the international research literature on organised crime in general, and organised drug crime in particular. In the context of three empirical studies, we have examined the organisational patterns of drug crime in Sweden. These studies comprise a survey of all court judgements and pre-trial investigations published and conducted in 2002 (serious drug smuggling offences), a charting of existing networks (network analysis) and an extensive interview study (based on almost 50 interviews) with inmates, customs officers, police and prosecutors. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet – BRÅ) often presents results from studies in a condensed form. On this occasion, the Council has chosen to present a more comprehensive report, since no scientific description of organised drug crime in Sweden has previously been produced. This detailed presentation has also been necessary since our proposed strategies to combat organised drug crime are based on the empirical findings from these studies.

Extensive criminal networks

Both in Sweden and abroad, there exists a criminal milieu which constitutes a hot-bed for organised drug crime. Our network analysis, which focused on the 127 individuals convicted in connection with serious drug offences or serious drug smuggling charges in 2003 (in the county of Stockholm), showed that these individuals had together been in contact, directly or indirectly, with at least 7000 people who had at some time or other been suspected of committing criminal offences. In addition to these, there are all the people that the police have no record of. Thus within this criminal community, an individual always knows another member of this community, who in turn knows someone else. These individuals together constitute a network. From Stockholm, these criminal contacts extend across the entire country, but first and foremost to the metropolitan areas of Göteborg and Malmö. It is particularly important to have contacts in the county of Skåne, due to its strategic position in relation to smuggling activities. Having international contacts is also very important.

Activities organised in the form of projects

The work of drug crime is conducted in project form in groups which purchase, smuggle and sell-on drugs to smaller-scale wholesalers. It is common for purchases to be made from a group outside Sweden, which may also bring the drugs into the country, at which point the Swedish group takes over. These drug purchases take place as a consequence of personal contacts between actors in the non-Swedish and Swedish groupings. The projects assume organisation-like forms characterised by a division of labour and within-group hierarchies. The groups may be either large or small. There are also variations in the degree of specialisation. The projects may be of a temporary nature or more long-term. The non-Swedish groups are more organisation-like and hierarchical than the domestic Swedish groups.

Group members have often grown up together

Trust is of central importance within the criminal community, since the rule of law characteristic of the rest of Swedish society does not apply in this milieu. The theft of criminal proceeds or of consignments of drugs cannot be dealt with by the authorities and adjudicated in the courts. It is therefore essential to be able to rely on those one works with. Since activities are criminal, they must constantly be shielded from the authorities and it is thus necessary to choose people who will remain silent whatever the situation. One basis for trust of this kind is that the individuals concerned come from the same country, region or city, that they have grown up together, that there are family ties, common interests or that there are other factors that unite them.

Group leaders shield themselves

One distinguishing characteristic of organisations of this kind is that their leaders employ various measures to protect themselves. They do not act in direct contact with subordinate individuals such as couriers, but rather have others take care of these contacts for them. The organisations are held together by the common interest in smuggling and selling drugs for profit. The central rule is that silence is maintained in relation to outsiders. If this rule is broken, the individual concerned is punished. Threats and violence constitute the means of exercising power, and they are used as and when the need arises.

Specialisation is required

Within the sphere of organised drug crime there are many jobs to be done and special tasks to be performed. These may be divided up into research and development work, financial functions, dealing with logistics and information during smuggling operations.

As in other areas of the economy, organised drug crime makes a distinction between management and the shop floor. The core members of the groups plan, organise and finance the operations. Orders are passed from the upper level to the individuals who carry out the concrete tasks. The most risky jobs, such as working with storage or as a courier are as a rule poorly paid, and the individuals who do them often have no knowledge of the rest of the “firm”, but only of their own small part of the operation.

The wider community is exploited

The wider community provides organised drug crime with a large number of benefits. Legitimate businesses may be exploited for the transportation and storage of drugs. Individuals working within such businesses are recruited and made use of in the context of this criminal activity. In the legitimate business community, money cannot be made as quickly as in the criminal sector, but earnings are more secure. Profits from drug crime are therefore invested in the conventional economy. A research project at present underway will be examining these links between the criminal community and the legitimate business sector in more detail.

The National Council's proposed countermeasures

If this is the nature of organised drug offending, what can be done to prevent and combat this form of crime?

- The idea that it is possible to knock out these networks and groups via the arrest and punishment of individual actors is like believing that business activities in the centre of Stockholm could be seriously disrupted by simply removing a number of office staff at random. Strategies must be

focused to a much greater degree directly at the networks, by arresting large numbers of network members.

- Many believe that if only the bosses could be arrested, major damage would be done to these networks. The recruitment base for future bosses is large, with individuals who constitute regional and local contact points being the most important actors, due to their local knowledge and contacts.
- If trust constitutes the glue that binds these groups together, one strategy suited to breaking them up would be to undermine this trust. This might be achieved by conducting more work with informers and by offering “defectors” greater benefits than is the case at present.
- Many are of the opinion that the greater the number of drugs seizures, the more successful is anti-drugs work. Such seizures most commonly only lead to the arrest of couriers and other subordinate and uninformed individuals. The central actors attempt to stay clear of the drugs themselves, but not from the money generated. One strategy would therefore involve concentrating more resources on the central element in these criminal operations, namely the money, since such a strategy would also get at the central actors.
- The recruitment base is comprised of youth groups with criminal characteristics, of adults who spend time in criminal environments and of individuals from other countries who have the kind of contacts that provide the opportunity to establish drug operations. In order to reduce the size of this recruitment base, opportunities must be improved for study, work and personal development. Integration into society and the availability of good legal opportunities to earn a living are important factors.
- The business community can help to prevent these crimes by focusing more attention on vulnerable groups working with packaging, warehousing, and logistics. Individuals with substantial levels of debt in particular constitute potential targets for the criminal recruitment process.
- The use of threats and violence constitute an instrument by which power is exercised in order to prevent future disloyalty within drug crime networks. The tough reputation of these groups is thus enhanced by exposure in the media. One strategy would therefore be to avoid sensationalising internal disputes and punishments meted out within the criminal networks. At the same time, criminal investigations focusing on these incidents should be given particularly high priority since they fulfil the dual function of tackling a phenomenon that both constitutes a crime against specific individuals and also a demonstration of power directed at the entire network and at society at large.
- We are living in a multi-cultural global community in which there are no borders other than those where commercial markets begin and end. It must therefore be made less profitable to smuggle drugs to Sweden and conduct drug business here. This can only be achieved by means of a long list of measures, not least among which are measures whose focus lies outside Sweden.