

The war on drugs: illegal opium markets



Introduction

Opium (and opioids) which are obtained from the sap of the poppy plant have routinely been used to control pain in countries throughout the world over many centuries. Opium, also, has historically been used in a social context illustrated by the ‘ opium dens’ in China which has lead to it becoming a trade-able commodity with high values over recent eras. Opioids have therefore developed both legal and illegal global markets and through studying where this stands in society both now and historically it will assist the reader to interpret what is determined to be crime and subsequently justice.

The notion of Crime has traditionally been regarded as “ an offence which goes beyond the personal and into the public sphere, breaking prohibitory rules or laws, to which legitimate punishments are attached and what a society considers to be a crime is socially constructed” (Scott & Marshall, 2009). Crime, however must not be considered in isolation and can be defined by the power inequalities amongst stakeholders in both how local and global relations cause tensions or aid policies and practice which result in violence, the so called ‘ white-collar’ crime. Wars have been attributed to the opium trade and these contested matters on both individual and national levels cause both social and personal harms (The Open University, 2009(a)).

In order to critically analyse opiate use we must understand what constitutes legal and illegal drug use. Legal use can be considered to be prescription drugs, drugs available over the counter (OTC) and other socially accepted means whereas in contrast what is construed to be illegal has constantly in

flux and is determined by those in power who attempt to isolate and control behaviours that are out-with social norms (The Open University, 2009 (b)).

It is perhaps not by coincidence then that throughout history certain cultures, communities and specific groups have been actively targeted and by penal measures in the justice system or other socially constructed ones held accountable for wrongdoings whereas those in power both in (inter)national corporations and governments have often remained unaccountable for their actions.

The war on drugs, who does it really affect?

The link between global relations and the illegal opium markets have recurring themes through history. War is one of these and in America in the 1970's there was a real threat to the stability of the preceding government so a decision was made by President Richard Nixon to declare a nationwide “war on drugs” across the whole of America. Under the guise of this war the regime targeted dissident groups including the Black Panthers and those who canvassed support against the Vietnam War (The Open University, 2009(c)).

Wars have both intended and unintended consequences, in this case the government has assisted indirectly in encouraging more violent traits with emerging gangs seeking fresh territory in order to traffic drugs illegally (The Open University, 2009,(c)). On a local level drug trade can be essential for the community to be self-sufficient, especially in poverty stricken areas and those with higher crime and deprivation levels. Such complex relations and competing power balances allow for corruptness to occur in high level

positions of authority therefore benefiting those who are involved in dealing or importation, the counter argument provided by individuals living in these deprived areas of Afghanistan are that if work was provided, housing and other human essential's then they wouldn't need to be involved in illegal activities. It is clear that these communities are treated less favourably than more powerful corporations and governments who also break or influence the law.

Crime involving drugs are generally associated with anti-social groups, the underclass or those with low income as opposed to the wealthier and subsequently more influential classes, therefore there is just cause in suggesting that class bias occurs when treatment is needed involving opioids. A further relative example is that in the USA black people were, and remain, disproportionally represented in the jails (The Open University, 2009(c)).

Why are the powerful able to get away with ‘ Crime?’

The powerful, those with money, those in high positions or with influential sway are seemingly able to get away with crimes which affect locals, crimes against humanity, they hold the responsibility for punishing and regulating others. The question that must be asked is who regulates them? The truth is that they aren't and if they are found at fault the problem can be made to go away. The Open University (2009, (b)) argue that there is there is a clear difference between how the justice system treats the perceived legal and illegal elements.

There appears to be no regulation in how the pharmaceutical industry can be allowed without question to be involved in the Prescription Drug User Fee Act from 1992 which is linked to the Food and Drug Administration, therefore its accountability to be examined. From this it is clear that large influential corporations whom evade any punishment through the justice system, but internal corruption is more prevalent due to the lack of regulation or risk of punitive sanction within the trade. Corruption is a key area in how corporations and the illegal hierarchy together are able to by-pass the justice system allowing for the trading in opiates to continue despite strict measures attempting to prevent it (The Open University, 2009(b)).

Another example in quantitative terms of justice being avoided is highlighted when Purdue Pharma, an international company was fined \$600 million because they had deliberately misled their customers by stating that Oxycontin was less addictive than other competitors products. This deception caused several people to lose their lives and many people to subsequently become addicted, all from what consumer would of believed to be a reputable organisation (The Open University, 2009(b)). Again no custodial terms were handed out to the persons responsible which is in stark contrast to the less powerful groups who in the main are targeted as being accountable. This also demonstrates how the global (international) can affect the local (national).

Global relations in the form of large corporations and drug cartels, those who together both distribute drugs when analysed actually are more similar than dissimilar, together they want to:

provide a reputable service leading to repeat custom;

sell their product (often for a profit);

manage the risk of harm, violence or penal sanction by having management structures in place, for example those at the top have the most assets but are never seen getting their hands dirty, where the foot soldiers are placing themselves at the higher end of the risk spectrum

increase professionalism in product manufacture and marketing

(The Open University, 2009(b))

Why do drugs go where the trade goes?

The production and use of opium has a complex interrelationship with the 19th Century colonisation where the British began to import opiates into China from its Indian colonies. The Chinese Emperor banned this import of opium due to his country suffering high addiction levels. The British government believed in free trade and took action to ensure that the Chinese would accept opium imports whether it was legal or not (The Open University, 2009(b)). Because Britain was able to exercise this power it continued to be detrimental to China. Ironically centuries later the British Prime Minister Tony Blair cited the same example the Chinese emperor had used in that Britain was being harmed therefore it was necessary to start military action in Afghanistan in order to destroy the Afghanistan opium crops. Both times our government was answerable for causing harm to another nation but not held at legal or moral fault. Instead it was held that it

served as in the interest of the nation rather than criminally wrong (The Open University, 2009(b)).

Trade boundaries in global affairs are not only influenced by their respective governments. Both Turkey and India contribute to the destruction of Opium crops in Afghanistan and consequentially by restricting this market globally they have control over pricing of opioids, as opposed to higher competition lowering the cost of each unit. Violent clashes followed involving the farmers and government officials but this action only harmed locals by physical violence but taking their only available source of income.

By examining Tajikistan which is a country lying to the north of Afghanistan it will assist in understanding how illegal trafficking occurs. It has isolated borders and no road networks between border nations but it is the gateway to the rest of Asia and then Europe. The Tajikistan authorities “ seize more illegal shipments than all the other Asian counties together” (The Open University, 2009(c)). When the Soviet Union collapsed, Tajikistan was devastated and they were exposed to incentives to support illegal activities by trafficking drugs. This meant that more drugs are freely available which has altered the patterns of consumption and the need for stronger drugs like heroin. Global trade in different cultures and countries therefore affects both the illegal and legal methods of importation and drug usage / dependency (The Open University, 2009(a)).

Tajikistan itself is a large scale drug industry that again shows how corruption at all levels of society and particular within the police and governments i. e. Border guards and their senior officers demonstrates a

blurring of who is at fault, social harms are being created at all levels and if faced with the option to survive or not locals are always going to be found at fault by influential officials (The Open University, 2009(b)).

Conclusion

Today, we live in a world of global trade and national exchange. I have demonstrated that where open trade occurs then so does the illegal drug market, you can't have open trade and no drugs. Crime is therefore to be considered as a global concern not a local one.

In critically reviewing both legal and illegal opium markets it is fair to argue that the power disparities within localities allows for social harms to be created, on a global level what takes place in one country can have a direct impact on another leading to violence and damaged communities. Power is a key theme and is shown during the closing of the Chinese boundaries but Britain still continued to force trading relations alongside the destruction of communities in the USA, Tajikistan and Afghanistan as a result of poverty and corruptness by authorities.

The definition of crime at the start is given as its socially constructed and personal, this essay opens up this theory and shows that crime through illegal and legal methods of opioid use is actually a global concern; Tajikistan following Soviet collapse shows the global implications of Crime and Justice.

Approximately 1750 words not including the question or brackets.