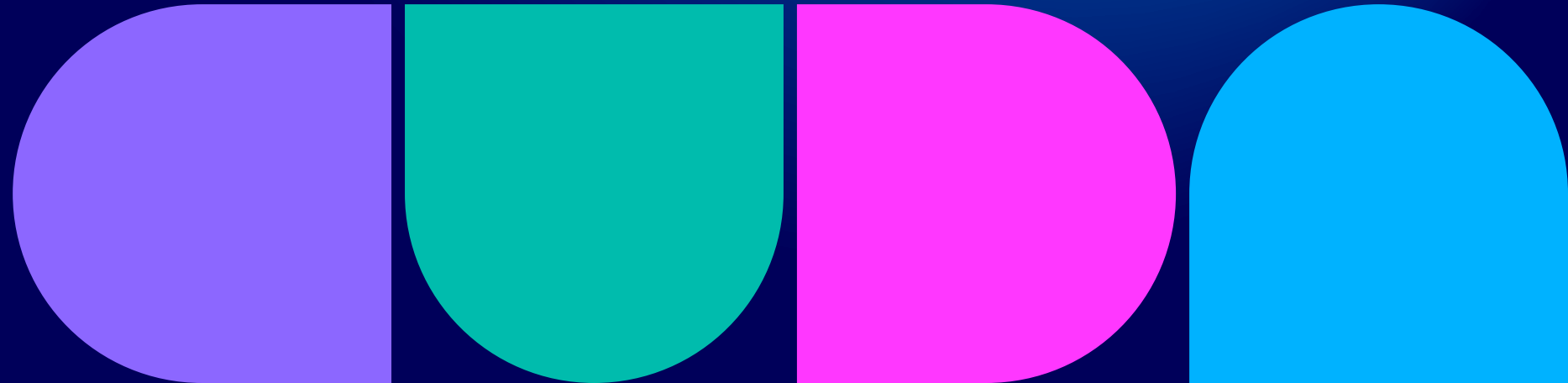


European Conference on Drug-Related Violence

This presentation was delivered at the European Conference on Drug-Related Violence on 26-27 November 2024 in Brussels. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.





European Conference on Drug-Related Violence

Brussels, 26-27 November 2024

Parallel Session 4:

Socio-economic aspects of drug-related crime

The gendered aspects of drug-related violence

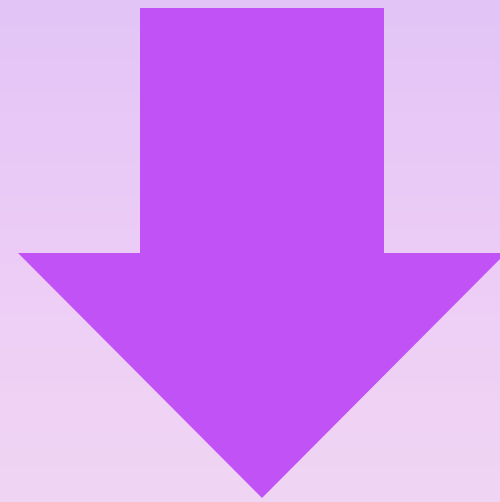
A focus on women

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The gendered aspects of drug-related violence



- The role of intersectional inequalities and gender asymmetries in drug-related violence
- Gender differences in drug-related violence

“Represent women experiencing drug-related violence”



“Here is the depiction of women experiencing drug-related violence, showcasing both their vulnerability and strength amidst a gritty urban environment.”



“Why is gender relevant in drug-related violence?” (Scopus AI)

“The relevance of gender in drug-related violence is multifaceted and encompasses differences in perpetration and victimization, social and cultural factors and policy implications.”

Gender differences in victimization and context (*e.g., private, public, work - drug use and trafficking contexts*)

Influence of gender on lifelong victimization and perpetration (*e.g., gender norms, power dynamics*)

Societal and cultural factors contributing to gender differences in drug related violences (*e.g., drug stigma, drug policies, gender policies*)

Implications of gender-specific approaches to drug-related violence prevention and intervention (*e.g., gender responsive assessment scale*)

The gendered character of drug-related violence underscores the importance of gender-specific approaches in policy and intervention efforts.

The gendered aspects of drug-related violence (Scopus AI)

- **Different Risk Factors:** Women involved in drug-related violence often exhibit different risk factors compared to men. Women with higher antisocial psychopathic traits are more likely to be involved in drug-related violent crimes, whereas men are more influenced by factors like frequent heroin injection and incarceration (Thomson, 2020; Marshall et al, 2008).
- **Victimization and Social Stigma:** Women who use drugs are more likely to suffer violence from acquaintances, partners, and sex trade clients, while men are more likely to experience violence from strangers and police. Additionally, women face social stigmatization and rejection, particularly when consuming illegal drugs, which exacerbates their vulnerability to violence (Caravaca Sánchez et al., 2014).
- **Structural and Environmental Factors:** Women's experiences with drug-related violence are influenced by their living conditions, social isolation, and exposure to drugs within their neighborhoods. These structural factors contribute to long-term substance abuse and domestic violence (James et al., 2004).

Centralizing the lived experiences of women involved in drug-related crime

- “Criminal women” are “too frequently stereotyped as “other” (Carlen, 2015, 2022) and experience aggravated social penalizations, pathologization and disproportionate punishments due to the gender-neutral character of the criminal justice system (Carlen, 2015; Matos, 2008; Grace et al., 2022)



The need to centre women’s voices and lived experiences



- Intersectional inequalities (gender, class, racialization/ ethnicity and other social divisions) exacerbate the oppression and social control of “criminal women”
- Trauma and poverty as drivers for women’s offending
- The centralization of drugs in the crime trajectories of women in prison

Gender and drug-related crime

Women's pathways into drug-related crime marked by **generational cycles of poverty** and **gender-based violence** (Matos, 2008; Frois, 2017; Grace et al., 2022)



- Growing rates of women in prison for **low-level non-violence offences** - particularly **drug-related crime**
 - Involvement of women in the drug trafficking chain - increase of opportunities for low-income women in the informal drug markets since the 1980s (drug trafficking/smuggling activities)
 - Property crimes to finance drug use and lifestyles marked by street-involvement



OVER-INCARCERATION OF POOR WOMEN
EMPHASIS ON INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY



Lifetime gender-based violence or drug-related violence?

- **Adversity during childhood and adolescence**
 - Poverty, poor housing, parental drug use, parents in prison
 - Neglect and lack of parental support
 - Death or loss of loved ones or protective adults
 - School dropout
 - Intimate partner violence and childhood/ adolescence victimization (physical, sexual, psychological violence)
 - Teenage pregnancy
 - Early street-involvement
 - Early drug use

Matos, 2008; Frois, 2017; Grace et al., 2022 & Research data from the author

Lifetime gender-based violence or drug-related violence?

- **Intimate partner violence** - women may engage in street-involvement and drug-related crime to break with the violence cycle; the stress and dynamics of drug use and trafficking aggravates the violence from partners experienced by women in drug use contexts
- **Physical and emotional violence** in drug scenes often perpetrated by male counterparts (partners, clients, and other men)
- **Structural, institutional and community violence** - in drug trafficking areas women are exposed to threats, social humiliation, coercion and physical harms from the community (e.g. neighbours), criminal groups, police and service providers

Frois, 2017; Stallwitz, 2019; Grace et al., 2022; Plaza-Hernandés et al. 2023, & Research data from the author

Lifetime gender-based violence or drug-related violence?

- **Sexual violence and exploitation** - drug facilitated sexual assault (premeditated and opportunistic); coerced into sex work or trafficked for sexual exploitation (with drugs used to control or incapacitate them)
- **Economic violence and exploitation** - women forced in drug dealing by their partners or forced into sex work to raise money for drugs

Lifetime gender-based violence or drug-related violence?

- The androcentric character of drug subcultures perpetuates and aggravates the inequality and control over women through the use of violence
- These forms of GBV are interconnected and often result in a cycle of violence and exploitation, making it crucial to address these issues with targeted interventions and support systems
- What are the limits between drug-related crime and gender-based crime?
- Addressing GBV in drug use and trafficking contexts requires targeted interventions that consider the multifaceted forms of violence, the specificities of affected women and intervention with the perpetrator

Is prison a safe space for women?

Women have ambivalent and contradictory perceptions and experiences regarding prison

- Prison as a space of patriarchal social control and a barrier to social reintegration
- Prison felt as a safe space, free from the violence they experience outside, and giving them opportunities for stabilization and change (Matos, 2008; Frois, 2017; Grace et al, 2022)



THE NEED OF IMPLEMENTING GENDER-SPECIFIC APPROACHES:

Creating safe spaces outside prison

Providing trauma-informed care

Implementing the systematic screening for gender-based violence

Addressing poverty among mothers

“What are the types of drug-related violence experienced by LGBT people?” (Scopus AI)

“The types of drug-related violence experienced by LGBT individuals include psychological/verbal, physical, and sexual violence, with risk factors including drug use and experiences of violence. This violence has a significant impact on the mental health of LGBT individuals and has legal and policy implications. Tailored interventions and support systems, such as harm-reduction interventions and community-based actions, are effective in addressing drug-related violence experienced by LGBT individuals.”



Overlooked topic

Possible obstacles related with the binary character of studies focused on gender-based violence, drugs and the criminal justice system

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References

Scopus AI:

“Why is gender relevant in drug-related crime?”

“What are the types of drug-related violence experienced by LGBT people?”

Data from:

“The impact of COVID-19 among people who use drugs and harm reduction”

(UCP, PI Cristiana Vale Pires)

“The impact of citizen and political (i)literacy among women who use drugs in Porto”

(UCP, PI Cristiana Vale Pires)

Thank you!

Cristiana Vale Pires