

Increasingly the issue of drugs has come to the centre of debates about crime, social cohesion and social change. Often influenced by what some see as the increasing 'Americanisation' of the issue, policies have oscillated between the extremes of fatalism and pragmatism. Despite the fears that the problems related to increased drug use in Britain are rapidly intensifying, the amount of solid empirical research on the subject in this country is minimal.

One of the few detailed empirical studies which are being carried out is 'The Alcohol, Young People and Offenders Project' based at Manchester University. Drawing on this research **Howard Parker** claims that a major social transformation is underway and that today's young are engaging in different patterns of drug use producing different social concerns and consequences. One of the central concerns which is evident is the relation between taking drugs and crime. **Joy Mott**, a Principal Research Officer at the Home Office, explores this relation in her article on 'Drugs and Crime'. She points out that different drugs are related to crime in different ways and suggests that policy options need to be responsive to these variations.

Developing a sustained policy response to different types of drugs has proved extremely difficult. At present the debate oscillates between decriminalisation, legalisation and suppression. In a provocative article, **Commander John Grieve** of the Metropolitan police invites us to 'think the unthinkable' and consider the licensing of certain drugs by medical authorities. In contrast the articles by **Geoffrey Pearson** and **Nigel South** suggest that a more effective and realistic policy is 'harm reduction'. **Maggie Lee** examines the underlying tension in the CJA 91 between treatment and control in dealing with drug offenders.

Within the 'drugs' debate there is a tendency to concentrate on drugs such as heroin, cocaine, cannabis and amphetamines. But according to **Fiona Measham**, there are signs that there are significant changes underway in the consumption patterns of alcohol, particularly by young people. Changes in

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the patterns of consumption and supply of cocaine are also indicated by **Philip Bean** who has carried out two research projects in Nottingham. He sees these changes being linked to the emergence of a new type of professional drug dealer who may be linked to an expanding international market system of supply. The level of seizures by the customs of cocaine over the past few years indicate that whatever the level of consumption of crack/cocaine in this country might be, the signs are that the international movement of cocaine is growing rapidly. **Nicholas Dorn** examines the developments which have occurred in

Europe which are linked to the policing of drugs. He suggests that the establishment of new alliances and treaties within Europe have influenced the ways in which drugs are regulated and the prosecution of drug related offences.

The final article in this special issue looks at the changing use of drugs in prison over the past three decades from the 'inside'. **John David** who has spent a number of years in prison describes how his patterns of consumption have been influenced by his experiences inside.

Roger Matthews & Julia Braggins

*Each issue of CJM focuses on a special area of criminological interest. CJM 13 will consider **Crime in Northern Ireland**. This issue is being produced by the Northern Irish branch of the BSC. Contributions to the letters page are welcome and will be required by 1st September 1993. To advertise, please phone Jan Hewitt, ISTD 071 333 4890*

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