
Home Office Research Study 227

Middle market drug distribution

Geoffrey Pearson (Goldsmiths College, University of London) and
Dick Hobbs (University of Durham)

with the assistance of Steve Jones, John Tierney and Jennifer Ward

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

Contents

Foreword	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Contents	iii
Summary	v
Introduction and background	v
Key findings	v
Recommendations: policy and practice	ix
Future research indications	x
1 Introduction: background and methods	1
Previous research on drug dealing	1
Selecting research methods	3
Conducting prison interviews: the present study	5
Characteristics of the prison sample	6
Law enforcement interviews and other contacts	9
2 Defining the 'middle' market	11
Middle market drug distribution and organised crime	11
Where is the middle market?	13
Making sense of differing perceptions of the middle market	16
3 The organisation and price structure of UK drug markets	19
Heroin	19
Cocaine	20
Heroin and cocaine: summary	21
Ecstasy	22
Amphetamine	23
Cannabis	23
Conclusions	24

4	The internal organisation of drug dealing networks	27
	Family and ethnicity	27
	Imprisonment as a facilitator of crime networks	30
	'Clubbing' as a system of fraternity	31
	Size and division of labour	32
	Cash transactions and credit cascades	33
	Single-commodity and multi-commodity markets and dealers	34
	Regional variations and cross-regional networks	37
5	The role of violence	41
6	'Middlemen' and 'go-betweeners': the strategic role of the middle market drug broker	49
	Middle market drug brokers	49
	Brokers and runners: partners or wage labourers?	51
	Different types of 'middleman' linkage	52
7	Conclusion: a fragmented picture	55
	Appendix	
	Case studies and vignettes	59
	References	75