



WP5 2nd COUNTRY REPORT

Germany

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1. RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLE

This national report on drug use patterns of young people in touch with the criminal justice system in Germany is based on only 12 qualitative interviews with delinquent juveniles. On average, all of the interviews took about 45 minutes (range: 35 minutes to 2 hours). All of them were recorded, transcribed and then systematically encoded and analysed according to a coding book previously discussed with all partners. All interviewees provided written informed consent before interviews were conducted. The audio files were deleted after transcription and all identifiers were removed from the transcripts for data protection reasons.

The main reason for this relatively low number of qualitative interviews is that the German research team did not get the permission to conduct interviews in youth prisons in any of the German federal states. Therefore, the German research team has been unable to conduct a high number of interviews at some single places, but had to recruit interview partners via alternative recruitment channels. This proceeding, however, proved to be difficult for several reasons. First, there are only very few interventions projects in Germany that explicitly deal with drug use among delinquent juveniles or delinquent juveniles in general (also see German national report WP4). While we were able to recruit 10 interview partners via these projects, this recruitment channel was associated with several challenges. To the time the interviews were mainly conducted only few young people participated in these projects, so that we were unable to reach a high number of potential interview partners via these projects. Moreover, many of these participants were not willing or motivated to conduct interviews or simply did not show up once interview dates were arranged. This problem of motivation only slightly changed after we promised to pay € 10 for each interview partner and was aggravated by the fact that most of these projects are located in Berlin. As we had to travel to Berlin for a large number of interviews (9 out of 12), we did not have the opportunity to be completely spontaneous and, therefore, probably missed some opportunities to conduct interviews. At least, some interview partners were not willing to wait some days as they claimed that they were “too busy to wait”. Second, we contacted social service organisations for young people in general that probably also deal with young people in touch with the criminal justice system. Due to data protection reasons, however, even the staff of these organisations does not know if there are delinquent juveniles among their clients. Via this channel it is, therefore, not possible to contact potential interview partners directly. Third, we contacted the “Jugendgerichtshilfe” in several cities



(a special youth service provided by the youth welfare office that is involved in all youth court proceedings). As most clients of the “Jugendgerichtshilfe”, however, are in ongoing criminal procedures, they are in general not very willing to conduct interviews about illegal behaviour and, consequently, we were only able to recruit 3 interview partners via this channel. Moreover, we posted calls to conduct interviews in Facebook groups of former inmates of youth prisons and contacted therapeutic clinics offering “Therapie statt Strafe” (therapy instead of punishment, see German National Report WP4), but did not get any positive feedback via these channels.

However, up to date the sample consists of 12 interviews. As shown in table 1, most of the interviewees are young men aged 15-17. Only one young female was interviewed, but this low number of women in the sample corresponds to the general characteristics of young offenders in Germany (see German National Report WP4). Most of the interview partners got in touch with the criminal justice system several times due to different types of crimes (especially dealing, robbery and/or assault), but only 2 interview partners are former inmates. All interview partners were born in Germany, but the vast majority of them are second-generation immigrants with parents from Turkey or Arabic countries.

Table 1. Sample description – Sociodemographic data

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Age</i>		<i>Partner</i>		<i>Children</i>		<i>Education</i>		<i>Migratory background</i>	
Male	11	15-17	10	yes	0	yes	0	primary	3	yes	10 (all born in Germany)
Female	1	18-25	2	no	12	no	12	secondary	9	no	2
								high	0		

Table 2. Sample description – Information about crime and penalty

<i>Crime</i>		<i>First penalty</i>		<i>Measure</i>	
dealing	9	yes	7	Prison	2
robbery	5	no	5	Alternative measure	10
assault	4				



2. RESULTS

2.1 Drug careers

Onset of drug use

All interviewees began to use drugs when they were between 12 and 14 years old. Nearly all interview partners describe cannabis as their favourite drug. Only the interviewed young female claims that she has been addicted to alcohol and still consumes it extensively. Most interviewees also experimented with other drugs than cannabis or alcohol (especially with speed and cocaine), but seemingly did not associate much pleasure with these substances and, consequently, only experimented with them. Only two interview partners report that they tried NPS once (Spice in both cases), but experienced this use as very negative and, therefore, never want to try NPS again (GER_02; GER_03).

Strikingly, all interview partners describe that drug use was (and in most cases still is) common in their circles of friends and social networks. Wordings like “All my friends use cannabis”, “Just everybody I know uses drugs” or “Smoking weed is like a ritual among my friends. Whatever we do, we always smoke weed” are to be found in each interview transcript. This normalization of drug use among their peers is directly associated with the onset of their own drug use by all interview partners. They describe that they started to use drugs (i. e. cannabis or alcohol) because just everybody was doing it and they, accordingly, simply had the opportunities to try drugs, were curious about their effects of using or felt pressured to use them (peer pressure). Gradually, they then began to relish using cannabis (or alcohol in the case of the young female) due to its relaxing effects and because everything was more easy and funny under the influence of drugs. Over time, most of them became used to always using drugs (i. e. daily and in all circumstances) and, accordingly, extensively used (or still extensively use) drugs. Indeed, most participants report that they daily use(d) between 10 and 25 grams of cannabis during their heydays and the young female used to drink up to 1,5 bottles of vodka daily. Only one interviewee “only” smokes one or two joints daily. Just to give an example, one interviewee describes this route to a quite extensive drug use in the following way:

“It just so happened, that I began to smoke weed. I saw my friends using it and wondered why there are laughing all the time and all these things. Then I thought that



I can also try it – just to see what happens. Then I tried it once and I liked it so much. Then I tried it the next day, and then again the next day and so on. (...) Now, it's like a ritual. You get up in the morning, you take a shower, and then you call your friends: Man, what are we going to do now? Smoking weed is always part of that. It's always the main thing we do." (GER_06, line 24-37).

Drug use patterns before getting in touch with the CJS

As described above, drug use became common and quite extensive among nearly all interview partners before they got in touch with the CJS for the first time. Concerning the motives for using drugs, the motivations initially were mainly **curiosity and peer pressure**. While also acknowledging negative side effects of their drug use (see below), all interviewees, secondly, appreciate that **drug use gives pleasure to them**. In this vein, interviewees emphasize that they associate drug use with relaxation and recreation as well as disinhibition. Some interviewees also describe that using drugs allows them to feel and perceive things more intensely.

"You don't have so many things on your mind. You simply are there. You can laugh, you can sleep and food is very tasty then. Sometimes I feel so good then that I laugh all the time. That's why I do it. Wow, and that feeling when it enters your head and relaxes your whole body until you are apart of this world." (GER_09, line 183-190)

"Everything is so relaxed when I smoke weed. Everything is so beautiful then, especially when you watch action movies in the night. It's so intense when you smoked a blunt. That's why I smoke and I also can sleep better then." (GER_07, line 38-42).

Another important motivation for using drugs among the interview partners simply seems to be **boredom in a structureless daily life**. Most interview partners describe their daily lives as kind of unorganized and state that they do not know what to do with their time. Some of them found no job after school (or prison), while others think about school as a boring and more or less useless place and, consequently, do not put a lot of effort into school and go there unregularly. Accordingly, they describe their daily lives as mainly consisting of hanging around in the streets which is obviously perceived to be somewhat frustrating by most interviewees:

"I'm hanging around, you know. I meet these friends and that guys and then we hang around together and see if something happens. We smoke weed and sometimes one of us knows of an opportunity to make some money. Or we do nothing, and that's too boring. I don't know what else to do." (GER_10, line 73-79).



„I chill all day long. I chill in my house, but mainly in my area. And I sell my weed there and I smoke there. That’s all I do, I don’t do something else. Uh, that sounds boring now” (GER_08, line 220-222).

Fourth, **perceived stress** seems to be an important trigger to use drugs for nearly all interviewees. Nearly all interview partners describe various sources of trouble in their daily lives that they can handle more easily by/when using drugs. In this vein, most interview partners come from so-called “broken homes” with a lot of intra-familial conflicts. While three interview partners grew up as children in care, all others describe their parents as either not really caring, being absent or having troubled relationships to their step-parents and associate these family backgrounds with their drug use.

“My mother always brings other guys to our home. These guys don’t treat her good and want to tell me what to do, but I’m not a child anymore and I’m not their son. They can’t tell me what I should do. I hate that and I always feel very stressed then, so I prefer to stay in my room and smoke some weed.” (GER_02, line 198-201)

“In my family, there’s trouble all the time. All the time, really. My father is an Anatolian numbskull, very traditional. And this causes a lot of problems because he always wants to control us. When I smoked something, I can withstand this better and sometimes I can also laugh about him then” (GER_01, line 19-24).

Among all interview partners daily life problems, for example in school or with administrative bodies, also constitute triggers for using drugs. One interview partner, for example, thoroughly describes that he did not come to terms with administrative issues after he was released from prison because he did not understand the language used by public bodies and states that using cannabis helped to come down in such situations (GER_07, 160-180). Similar accounts are given by other interview partners concerning trouble in school (e. g. GER_01, GER_02, GER_03, GER_06) or regarding conflictive situations with friends and peers (e. g. GER_05, GER_011; GER_012).

The continuous experience of “bad things” (GER_05, line 403) is another important stressor mentioned by four interview partners. These interviewees account that they regularly have been witnesses of violent acts that seemingly traumatized them and perceive drugs as a vehicle to endure these experiences. The interviewed young female, for example, states:

“I had seen so many things when I was younger. That’s so strange – I think that young girls should never see such things. And I guess my way to come to terms with these things was drinking alcohol. (*Interviewer: What kind of things have you seen?*) Well, I was always hanging around with older guys and I had always seen how they bashed and racked people – not me, but other people. And this was not good. I think I have seen more cruel things than many people aged 50 or 60. And this is not good. This



makes an empty space inside me. I think that I'm 18 years old now and have seen so many things and it gets me down because somehow life is not funny anymore" (GER_05, line 410-422).

In a similar vein, one of the interviewed young men declares:

"Last year, for example, I had brawls every day. Every day, really. Not just a bit nudging, but hard brawls (*interview partner shows off his cicatrized fists*). It's not that I want it this way, but there are too many people out there who look askant at you and try to beat you. And I really don't like that and I guess smoking weed eases me. It's really good to come down when shit happens all the time (GER_11, line 316-321).

Moreover, nearly all interview partners got into trouble with the police several times and perceived these encounters to be rather stressful. Accordingly, they describe drug use as a way to cope with these experiences:

"When something happened and I have severe stress with the police, a blunt removes everything. For a while, it fades away everything. You are able to forget it and you think, fuck you all, fuck what happened and all these things" (GER_02, line 50-53).

Lastly, four interview partners interestingly describe their drug use as **a kind of self-medication** related to deep feelings of aggression (GER_03, GER_05, GER_06, GER_012). One interview partner, for example, puts this motive for, in this case, using cannabis in the following words:

"When people came to me and simply looked at me, I directly attacked them. I did not talk. But this changed when I began to smoke weed. I was always relaxed then and there was no stress anymore. I never looked at someone anymore or things like that. (..) When I don't smoke weed, I have to hit someone. So I have to decide: Do I smoke or do I hit the one who crosses my way? (GER_06, line 240-251).

While keen to describe the positive aspects of drug use, most interview partners also readily acknowledge negative consequences of using drugs. Most importantly, nearly all interviewees share the view that their continuous drug use makes them "silly" and less capable. Accordingly, sentences like "I'm a bit disabled when I smoked weed, I only have grout on my mind then" (GER_012, line 273-274) or "You have to imagine that you are completely away and 1000 people can come to you and ask you something, but you don't understand anything. That's the way I feel when I smoked weed" (GER_10, line 160-163) are part of all interviews. As a consequence of this drug-induced mood, many interviewees report problems in school as they are not able to concentrate themselves anymore (GER_01, GER_02, GER_06, GER_08) or state that they do/did not care anymore about everyday duties (GER_03, GER_05, GER_08, GER_011). In this regard, the interviewed young female, for example, reported:



“I had been continuously drunken. I couldn’t do anything else, I couldn’t do anything, I was hardly able to keep appointments. I couldn’t do anything regularly. I mean I worked a bit, but this didn’t stop me“ (GER_05, line 74-80).

In this vein, one could argue that drug use amplifies the pre-existing structurelessness of the daily lives of the interviewees described above. Moreover, two interviewees describe beginning thefts (GER_07) and drug dealing (GER_011) as a consequence of their cannabis use because they saw no other opportunities to afford their drug use (also see chapter 2.3).

Drug use patterns after entering in the CJS

Having described drug use patterns and motivations for using drugs before getting in touch with the CJS, the next chapter describes changes in drug use patterns of the interviewees after entering the CJS.

As laid out in the previous chapter, all interviewees were regular and quite heavy drug users before they got in touch with the CJS. Based on the empirical material, two ways of changes in drug use patterns associated with entering the CJS could be identified. In 8 out of the 12 cases, drug use persisted (or even intensified) after entering the CJS, while drug use decreased in only 4 cases.

Concerning **the pattern of “persistence”**, the experience of becoming convicted (defined here as “getting in touch with the CJS; being captured by the police alone, hence, does not qualify as “contact with the CJS”) obviously did not change drug use patterns (whether in terms of an increase or a decrease). In this vein, interviewees of this pattern just continued drug use as if nothing happened after entering the CJS. Interestingly, all interview partners fitting in this pattern were convicted (mainly for various times, but in two cases also for the first time) to relatively mild forms of sentences like, for example, social working hours or anger management training. In three cases, however, the experience of being convicted seemingly tended to increase or at least reinforce drug use. Strikingly, in all these cases (GER_02, GER_09, GER_10) the interviewees had also been convicted relatively mildly for several times, but they know that they will probably end up in youth arrest or prison if they are convicted one more time. Similar to the drug use motive of being in trouble with the police mentioned above, this knowledge obviously just constitutes another stressor in the lives of the interviewees. In this regard, one interview partner, for example, describes that he is now classified as a so-called “BASU21” (particularly salient offender below 21 years). This



concept allows for a neat police observation and obviously causes a lot of stress for the interviewee which he tries to tackle by smoking weed (GER_09, line 67-93).

In four cases, however, drug use decreased after entering the CJS. Yet, in two cases this **“pattern of decrease”** is not directly related to the experience of being convicted. Rather, these interview partners already began to reflect on their drug use before they were convicted and came to the opinion that they want to change (not to stop) their drug use due to its negative side effects (GER_01, GER_03). Accordingly, they voluntarily applied for prevention programs before they actually were convicted.¹ In these cases, hence, drug use did actually not change due to the experience of being convicted, but because of personal will and self-control strategies. In the two other cases in which interviewees now aim to “control” their drug use (i. e. consuming in less harmful ways, not stopping it) both interview partners were convicted to relatively long prison sentences for two times each (GER_05, GER_07). Strikingly, in both cases interview partners were regular and “heavy” drug users before entering youth prison for the time. They then severely reduced their drug use during imprisonment (i. e. they only used drugs in prison when they had the opportunity to do so), but returned to their former drug use patterns after being released from prison. Only during being in prisons for the second time, they obviously began to reflect upon their lives because they “do not want to end up like these people there” (GER_05, line 182) and identified regular drug use as a hindering factor in building up new structures. This new thinking concerning their drug use, however, is not associated with specific prevention or treatment programs in prison, but seems to be the result of a general reflection upon their lives. As a consequence, both interview partners now want to control their drug use, but cannot imagine stopping it completely.

To conclude, the experience of getting in touch with the CJS can influence drug use patterns in various ways. “Hard” convictions, however, do not seem to be an appropriate way to reduce drug use. To the contrary, in three cases the knowledge of probably being imprisoned only constitutes another stressor for the interviewed juveniles and in two other cases drug use only decreased after being imprisoned several times.

¹ These are not only personal opinions. The supervisors of both interviewees confirmed these accounts.



Summarizing reflections on increasing and decreasing factors

Strikingly, drug use patterns of all interviewees developed in rather similar ways. Drug use is and was common among peers and in social networks, so that interviewees easily had the opportunity to use drugs and became curious to use them or felt pressured to do so. Moreover, it is apparent that all interview partners are of a relatively low socio-economic status. While their socio-economic status is not directly associated with their drug use by the interviewees themselves, they report a bundle of factors that increase or at least sustain their drug use that are typically associated with households of a low socio-economic status (also see the reflections on associations between drug use and crime below). In this vein, nearly all interviewees associate their drug use with a structureless daily life, their so-called “broken homes”, and various other instances of stress in daily life, including among others experiences of continuous violence.

The empirical material tells comparably less about decreasing factors, but personal will and reflection seem to play a major role in changing drug use patterns among the interviewees. In two cases, interview partners voluntarily opted for prevention programs out of personal will because they aim at controlling their drug use and hope that these programs support them in achieving this, while two other interviewees began to develop the will to change their drug use (as well as their lives in general) during being imprisoned for the second time.

2.2 Young people’s opinions and life experiences relevant to prevention

As only four interviewees participated in interventions concerning their drug use, empirical data for this report does not tell a lot about young people’s opinions about concrete elements of interventions. Those four young people participating in an intervention, however, uniformly appreciate that they are not forced to completely stop their drug use, but motivated to control their use. They, therefore, feel free to openly talk about the pros and cons of their drug use and the reasons for using drugs (GER_01, GER_05, GER_06, GER_09). Moreover, they emphasize that the intervention is characterized by confidence and that they feel treated on eye level so that they “really can talk about many things. Not only about drug use, but also about myself” (GER_05, line 227-228; also see GER_01, GER_06).

While all other interviewees up to date did not participate in drug use interventions, their accounts of their drug use nevertheless enable reflections about general principles of interventions



concerning drug use among people in touch with CJS. Firstly, none of the interviewees can imagine being completely abstinent. Yet, most of them readily reflect about the negative sides and consequences of their drug use and many of them even aim at controlling their drug use. It may, hence, be useful for interventions to focus on harm reduction instead of abstinence. Indeed, the aim of abstinence is explicitly the reason to reject “classical” drug counselling for two interviewees (GER_02, GER_03) while the principle of “harm reduction” is acknowledged by some interviewees. Secondly, interventions should be based on strict confidence and it should be guaranteed to all participants that talking about their drug use has no (further) legal consequences. The fear of further legal consequences when openly talking about the use of illegalized substances is a hindering factor for some interviewees to look for support and talk about problems associated with drug use (GER_04, GER_08, GER_10). Third, it seems to be a necessity for interventions to not only focus on drug use, but on the general lifestyle and living conditions of young people in touch with CJS as, as shown above, drug use is influenced by a range of structural factors. A multi-faceted approach not “only” focusing on the personal will of young people is, therefore, needed.

2.3 Interplay between crime and drug use

Possible associations between drug use and crime are widely discussed in the literature. Hypothesis on the connection between drugs and crime can be divided into three groups. Some authors suggest that (1) there is a direct causal link between drug use and crime in that drug use either causes delinquent behavior (e. g. Goldstein 1985) or – vice versa – crime causes drug use (e. g. Menard et al. 2001). Others assume that there are only indirect associations between crime and drug use as both behaviors are caused by common factors like, for example, low self-control (Gottfredson/Hirschi 1990). The third group argues that the relationship drug-crime relationship is not causal, but rather complex and somewhat spurious because some sociocultural environments provide a general context for both drug use and crime (e. g. White/Gorman 2000).

As indicated above, only 2 interviewees fall into the first category of possible associations between drug use and crime. As argued by Goldstein (1985), those interviewees describe it as a kind of economic necessity to resort to delinquent behavior (i.e. petty thefts and dealing in these cases) as they see no other way to afford their drug use because of otherwise missing resources (GER_07, GER_011). All other interview partners, however, seem to fall in the third category of explanations.



When talking about their routes to delinquent behavior they refer to quite similar reasons as in the case of their drug use while their accounts do not indicate direct associations between both behaviors. As in the case of drug use, most interviewees interestingly claim that crime is just something common among their peers and in their neighborhoods and that they, therefore, “learnt” early how to be delinquent. As one interviewee, for example, puts it: “Everybody around me is involved in that (*in crime*). So I always saw what is possible and started to do my own things (*petty thefts*)” (GER_09, line 187). Second, most interview partners associate the beginning of their criminal careers with a low socio-economic status and claim that they then became used to be able to spend money they made out of criminal activities:

“I never had the things I wished to have. So I learnt that it is useless to wish things, but that I have to get that things. When I was 11, 12 years old, it was harmless. Together with friends I went to nick some things. It was fun and we had some money in our pockets. Then we continued with housebreaking, then with robbery, many things. And suddenly a lot of people are involved, even people I don’t really know. Then you become hints – Ey, go to this guy, he can maybe help you. Then you make the thing with that guy and you make 2000 € out of it. But after two weeks you have spent all of it and then you need 2000 € again, you know?” (GER_011, line 104-121).”

“I had no money but saw other people spending money. And when I had money, I thought that’s pretty cool to have money. And I was shit when I had no more money. And with 13 or 14 ages, it is quite difficult to get a job or something. It’s hard to earn a lot of money when you are young. So I guess that crime was the fastest and most logical way for me (GER_08, line 380-385).

Looking at his social networks, another interview partner vividly describes this link between socio-economic status and crime with the following words:

“When people like me start working here in Berlin, everybody starts to work for security companies. Every *Kanake* (*pejorative word for foreigners*) works for security companies because you earn at least some money. In general, people like me earn about 50 € for working 6 hours. You stand there 6 hours and you pack bags. But when you work for security companies you earn 15 € per hour. Well, 15 € are better. But nevertheless many opt for the criminal way. It’s more easy, it’s faster. And nobody plays the boss that treats you like a dog” (GER_06, line 164-174).

Moreover, again similar to accounts of their drug use, many interviewees claim that they just felt bored and they started to engage in criminal activities because “silly things” entered their minds. In most cases it, hence, seems to be the case that drug use and crime are enabled by similar factors without being directly associated.



3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This report aimed to describe and reflect upon drug use patterns among young people in touch with CJS. As drug use indeed seems to be common and quite extensive among those young people there is an urgent need for effective interventions targeting drug use and its harms. Such interventions, however, should be based on the principles of harm reduction to effectively reach young offenders. Yet, it does not seem to be an appropriate strategy to solely focus on individual-level interventions as the interviews indicate that drug use as well as crime are enabled and sustained by several socio-cultural factors that hardly can be tackled by interventions focusing on individuals and their personal wills. In fact, research among (former) prisoners shows that the most effective way to prevent (harmful) drug use among is social integration (instead of participating in interventions). In this vein, the interviews clearly indicate that there is a need to tackle social structures and offer alternative lifestyles in order to effectively challenge drug use, crime, and associated harms. As one interview partner put it:

“I have never made other things (*than dealing and smoking weed*) although I want to do so many other things. I don't know, doing sports or hiking in the mountains. Or going in the forest, that's also cool. But I know nobody who wants to do such things with me and I never knew how to organize it. It would be a good thing to have better things and opportunities than cannabis, but I don't see how to do this. I really don't see (...). It's the only thing I know.”

LITERATURE

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