

**VIOLENCE IN THE ILLICIT DRUG MARKET AND PUBLIC POLICY RESPONSES  
AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY  
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**INTEGRATIVE SUMMARY**

In this annotated bibliography, I review the problem of violence in the illicit drug market. The purpose of the Summary is to discuss the problem of violence in the illicit drug market and related public policy approaches. All the articles reviewed and summarized address the problem of violence in the illicit drug market. The first article discussed interpersonal violence. The second article addresses violence in the illicit drug market, the involvement of gang leaders and public policy approaches.

There appears to be a controversy regarding appropriate approaches to limiting the violence in the drug market. In the first article, drug violence is recognized as a major public health issue. The article focuses on interpersonal violence and recognizes that violence in the drug market is due to a lack formal ways to resolve economic disputes in the illicit drug market. The second article argues that public policy approaches that try to prohibit drugs leads to increasing violence in the illicit drug market. The authors then propose that alternative approaches should be developed to mitigate violence in the illicit drug market.

Amanda Atkinson, Zara Anderson, Karen Hughes, Mark A Bellis, Harry Sumnall and Qutub Syed, **Interpersonal Violence and Illicit Drugs**, Working Paper, Liverpool John Moores University, (Centre for Public Health) 2009

This briefing summarizes the links between interpersonal violence and illicit drug use, identifies risk factors for involvement in drug-related violence, outlines prevention measures that address drug-related violence, and explores the role of public health in prevention. It discusses links between drugs and violence based on available evidence, focusing primarily on illicit drugs. In general, the illicit use of prescription drugs is not discussed.

Interpersonal violence and illicit drug use are major public health challenges that are strongly linked. Involvement in drug use can increase the risks of being both a victim and/or perpetrator of violence, while experiencing violence can increase the risks of initiating illicit drug use. The impacts of drug-related interpersonal violence can be substantial, damaging individuals' health and the cohesion and development of communities, whilst also shifting resources from other priorities, particularly within health and criminal justice services. Globally, interpersonal violence accounts for around half a million deaths per year; for every death there are many more victims affected by violence physically, psychologically, emotionally and financially. Illicit drugs are used by millions of individuals throughout the world, and both their effects and the nature of illicit drug markets place major burdens on health and society.

The lack of formal social and economic controls in illicit drug markets facilitates the spread of violence. Without legal means for resolving business conflicts within drug markets, there is a tendency for violence to emerge as the dominant mechanism of conflict resolution. Furthermore, gangs and individuals involved in the drug dealing often carry guns for self-defense from other groups or individuals who pose a threat to drug operations.

Dan Werb, Greg Rowell, Gordon Guyatt, Thomas Kerr, Julio Montaner, Evan Wood, **Effect of Drug Law Enforcement on Drug-Related Violence: Evidence from a Scientific Review**, International Centre for Science in Drug Policy, Working Group Report, 2010

Violence is among the primary concerns of communities around the world, and research from many settings has demonstrated clear links between violence and the illicit drug trade, particularly in urban settings. While violence has traditionally been framed as resulting from the effects of drugs on individual users (e.g., drug induced psychosis), violence in drug markets and in drug-producing areas such as Mexico is increasingly understood as a means for drug gangs to gain or maintain a share of the lucrative illicit drug market.

Given the growing emphasis on evidence based policy-making and the ongoing severe violence attributable to drug gangs in many countries around the world, a systematic review of the available English language scientific literature was conducted to examine the impacts of drug law enforcement interventions on drug market violence. The hypothesis was that the existing scientific evidence would demonstrate an association between increasing drug law enforcement expenditures or intensity and reduced levels of violence.

Many studies have found that increasing drug law enforcement intensity resulted in increased rates of drug market violence. About 82% of the studies employing regression analyses of longitudinal data found a significant positive association between drug law enforcement increases and increased levels of violence. One study (9%) that employed a theoretical model reported that violence was negatively associated with increased drug law enforcement. The available scientific evidence suggests that increasing the intensity of law enforcement interventions to disrupt drug markets is unlikely to reduce drug gang violence. Instead, the existing evidence suggests that drug related violence and high homicide rates are likely a natural consequence of drug prohibition and that increasingly sophisticated and well-resourced methods of disrupting drug distribution networks may unintentionally increase violence. From an evidence-based public policy perspective, gun violence and the enrichment of organized crime networks appear to be natural consequences of drug prohibition. In this context, and since drug prohibition has not achieved its stated goal of reducing drug supply,

alternative models for drug control may need to be considered if drug supply and drug-related violence are to be meaningfully reduced.

### Bibliographical Listing

1. Amanda Atkinson, Zara Anderson, Karen Hughes, Mark A Bellis, Harry Sumnall and Qutub Syed, **Interpersonal Violence and Illicit Drugs**, Working Paper, Liverpool John Moores University, (Centre for Public Health) 2009
2. Dan Werb, Greg Rowell, Gordon Guyatt, Thomas Kerr, Julio Montaner, Evan Wood, **Effect of Drug Law Enforcement on Drug-Related Violence: Evidence from a Scientific Review**, International Centre for Science in Drug Policy, Working Group Report, 2010