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Review of literature on illegal drugs in the Region



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drugs & 
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This document presents a summary of academic research papers on illegal drugs. All papers were published in 2018 and each one falls into one of three categories: production, trading, and consumption of illegal drugs. Descriptions and other related articles can be found in the appendix.

First, we present papers related to drug production: studies on the presence of coca crops and alkaloid processing laboratories. Colombia is perhaps the best studied country in this area. This section also reviews studies that describe how drugs are produced in the region.

The second section looks at articles related to drug trafficking, focusing on transportation, international drug distribution networks, and retail activities. Most of the studies presented in this section revolve around micro-trafficking in poor neighborhoods and areas with vulnerable populations.

Finally, we present studies on processes associated with possession and consumption of psychoactive substances. These studies do not seek to evaluate the consequences for those who consume these substances, but to quantify drug use and identify associated patterns to formulate public policy recommendations.

PRODUCTION

Some of the studies published in 2018 attempt at a historical reconstruction of the evolution of the coca leaf and cocaine markets. Andrés López Restrepo (2018), in *Disappointed Illusions: the rise and fall of the legal coca and cocaine trade in Andean countries*, makes a historical recount of the uses and forms of production of the coca leaf in Andean countries before and after colonization. He states that, in Colombia, coca consumption was widespread in pre-Hispanic communities but slowly decreased during Spanish colonization as miscegenation progressed. However, consumption remains significant in some remaining indigenous communities, especially those from Peru and Bolivia.

Another historical study analyzes the factors that have contributed to the armed conflict and violence in Colombia.

Cáceres (2018) says that coca crops for illegal purposes were introduced to the state of Putumayo at the end of the 1970s by the Cali and Medellín cartels, who gave farmers autonomy to cultivate and process cocaine paste. Once the product was collected and processed, it was traded by drug traffickers, paramilitaries, and guerrillas. This chain led to a war between illegal groups and the armed forces for the control of critical points and areas for the extraction and trade of cocaine paste.

Today, the connection between illicit crops and violence is still strong. Pinzón (2018), in his article "*Substitution of illicit crops and a culture of legality in Colombia*", says that the presence of crops for cocaine production is linked to problems with the land market, which is often obtained through the use of violence and the intervention of armed groups. Under these circumstances, some farmers have been forced to grow illicit crops to avoid displacement.

Juan Felipe Godoy (2018), in his article "*Violence in cocaine production: laboratories and armed groups*" analyzes the presence of laboratories in violent areas and estimates the effect that the destruction of cocaine hydrochloride and paste laboratories had on rural/municipal violence between 2000 and 2012 in Colombia. The author found that the number of clashes between guerrillas and paramilitaries had increased and recommended expanding laboratory dismantling strategies by the armed forces, focusing efforts on combating cocaine production, the main source of funding for illegal armed groups in Colombia. The author also proposes we continue studying the side effects of Government strategies to combat production.

Policy implemented by different administrations in their effort to end drug production, trafficking, and consumption has not been usually aligned with sustainable development and has often had negative effects on communities. An example of this is aerial spraying on illicit crops. In response, the International Group of Experts on Drug Policy Metrics (2018) proposes that the metrics used to measure the impact of drug policies be reviewed to evaluate limitations and negative effects they may have caused. The report presented to the International Peace Institute recommends that better metrics be studied within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

DRUG TRAFFICKING

The growth of production and consumption of drugs has brought criminal gangs dedicated to micro-trafficking to producing countries, in many cases increasing violence and urban crime indicators.

Narváez and Pérez (2018) describe how micro-trafficking works in Colombian cities, where distribution of illicit drugs occurs in neighborhoods, homes, corners or meeting points. In their work, they describe drug pushers as an economic class that threatens the basic norms of coexistence in sectors where they operate. They emphasize that these activities attract many adolescents with few opportunities for progress at a professional, social, and economic level.

On the other hand, López and Segura (2018) address the social aspects of micro-trafficking and propose control solutions for criminal gangs dedicated to the sale of narcotics in cities. The authors propose we calibrate theoretical models of irregular networks to study drug trafficking in Colombia, which could shed light on the design and implementation of citizen security policies.

Other papers present policy alternatives for the war on drug trafficking. For the Colombian context, Angarita (2018) suggests that decriminalizing possession of minimum doses can serve as a strategy to reduce micro-trafficking and reduce the influence of the main criminal gangs. Additionally, Angarita explains that the drug policy of the Alvaro Uribe government was not intended to control consumption but to control judicial decisions and limit the scope of the Constitutional Court in addressing issues that could prove controversial.

Micro-trafficking in other countries in the region was also studied throughout 2018. Marcelo Sain (2018) analyzes the militarization of drug controls during the 2015-2017 period in Argentina. His paper analyzes the tension between public security policy, which favored military participation in drug controls, and economic adjustment (2013-2017). The administration enabled the Air Force to intervene in aerospace surveillance and the eventual collusion of irregular flights within their national jurisdiction.

As for the international traffic networks, Cajiao, González, Pardo and Zapata (2018) identify ways to have better strategies in the control of transnational organized crime and drug trafficking networks between Colombia and Spain. This article is based on the existing literature review, as well as interviews with experts, academics and competent entities to address the complexity of this phenomenon. This study answers two questions: how has the evolution of organized armed structures in Colombia been? Moreover, what are the characteristics of the Colombia-

Spain drug trafficking networks?

In a study published by the Instituto Igarape, a drug policy think tank in Brazil, Portella (2019) looks at the relationship between malicious homicides, drug trafficking and social indicators in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. This analysis reached two main conclusions: first, that in neighborhoods where the proportion of black men aged 15 to 49 is above 60%, the homicide rate increased between 87% and 89% in relation to neighborhoods where the proportion is less than 60%; second, that in these neighborhoods, drug trafficking increased on average by 40%.

Finally, in a book called "The rise of the narcostate", John P. Sullivan collects studies and research done in Mexico, Colombia, Central America, and Brazil between 2017 and 2018. The book relates the rise of the narcostate (or the mafia state) where criminal organizations associated with drug trafficking and political elites cooperate with each other for the benefit of harming those countries' institutions.

CONSUMPTION

Drug use has increased on a large scale throughout the region in recent decades, with adolescents being the most affected population. According to Klimenko, Ochoa, Rodríguez and Calderón, in their work "Prevalence of substance use in adolescents between 13 and 18 years old belonging to the municipality of Puerto Rico, Caquetá" (2018), young people constitute a group vulnerable to drug use, showing a greater propensity towards biological, psychological, or social risk factors at the individual, family, and social levels.

Daniel Gómez Acevedo (2018) in "Drug Policy in Colombia", analyzes the laws, decrees and rulings regarding possession of drugs for personal consumption. During 2018, the government of President Duque signed a decree authorizing seizure and criminalizing minimum doses, with the intention of reducing consumption and the power of micro-traffickers. However, criminalizing the minimum dose may be counterproductive. Restrictions motivate new micro-trafficking schemes, more sophisticated and difficult to control, and it also promotes the use of new drugs that occupy smaller volumes to avoid being detected and represent a greater risk to consumers' health. In their work, "Alarming drugs in the last decade, what do we know about them?", García, Navarro and de la Rubia study the constant surge of new synthetic substances produced in clandestine laboratories that have a more intense psychoactive effect than that of more traditional drugs (cocaine, cannabis and ecstasy). This work advances knowledge on emerging drugs to study therapeutic paths (Pardo, Selfa, & Ortí, 2018).

Some papers present mechanisms to reduce drug use. Spinal and Patiño in “Intervention model to prevent the demand for synthetic drugs”, propose developing a prevention and intervention model for consumption of synthetic drugs using qualitative methods, while prioritizing the understanding of consumption patterns.

Cocaine use is a multidimensional problem that starts at the coca leaf, making its way towards final distribution through drug trafficking networks, and therefore requiring complex solutions (Pinzón, 2018). The particular opinion here is to consider education as a main resource in the fight against drug trafficking networks, as well as to reevaluate criminalizing minimum doses. Rubio (2018), who agrees with this idea, proposes that drug policy contemplate a differentiated treatment for each division of the trade and production of drugs, approaching it through a human rights perspective. A treatment totally opposed to prohibitionist and militaristic policies.

CONCLUSIONS

In the Andean region, the Colombian case attracts most academic production on illicit drugs. Most of the studies published in 2018 analyze problems related to drug production and trafficking; yet there are not many studies that look at consumption, and there are no rigorous publications that have shown whether drug use trends are really changing. Regarding consumption, literature should focus on education and prevention, which are the least developed areas, given that the government has focused on “iron fist” policies. As studied by Muggah, Garzón and Suárez (2018), despite their immense popularity, “iron fist” interventions in the fight against drugs are rarely effective and often have unforeseen consequences such as armed violence and homicides. We need public health strategies that can be used to prevent consumption and further analyze initiatives such as the Mobile Centers for Drug Dependents (CAMADs), which seek to reduce overdoses and the spread of disease.

Although Peru and Bolivia are two other major coca leaf and cocaine producers, studies on these countries are scarce. Academic literature is also lacking in comparative analysis of the region and on potential contributions between countries, even more if we consider the balloon effect, which constantly displaces the problem in answer to market demand. In this region, countries are indeed very much connected and neglecting so inhibits opportunities for creating effective national or regional policies in the fight against drugs. For example, studying how our country could benefit from policies implemented in Uruguay, Portugal and some states in the U.S., which are less restrictive towards cannabis consumption, production and marketing, could lead to real changes for Colombia.

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