

Psychological Research on Drug-related Crimes in Vietnam from the Criminological Perspective



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ABSTRACT: In recent times, despite the situation of the Covid-19 epidemic has had serious developments on a global scale, drug crimes in the world, in the region and in the country have continued to be very complicated. Southeast Asia is considered one of the world's major illicit drug production centers. Vietnam is not in the group of large illegal drug producing countries, however, with its unique geographical position, border, road and sea routes stretching from the north to the south, causing difficulties in fighting drug crime.

Research on drug offenders from the perspective of criminology shows that the psychological formation of drug crimes comes from reasons such as economy, society, culture, law, and people's intellectual level. On that basis, the article proposes some solutions to improve the effectiveness of the prevention of drug-related crimes.

KEYWORDS: Drug-Related Crime; Psychological Perspective; Crime Prevention; Vietnam

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, despite the situation of the Covid-19 epidemic has had serious developments on a global scale, the situation of drug crimes has witnessed the complicated changes worldwide and nationwide. In 2021, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) released a report with an estimation around 275 million people used drugs all over the world in 2000, with more than 36 million people suffered from drug use disorders. In addition, the report also showed that cannabis potency had reached four times higher in the last 24 years with a wide range of negative effect for long-term users.¹

Proactive crime prevention is an urgent requirement of Vietnam Communist Party and State in order to minimize the damage caused by crimes, and prevent, reduce and eventually eliminate this crime.² The complicated fluctuation of the political security situation in the world and the region have stronger and faster impacts on Vietnam security and social order, potentially causing political instability. The appearance of other factors, new negative impact on internal political security making the ability to control and prevent drug-related crimes more difficult.

II. THE DRUG-RELATED CRIMES SITUATION

According to the report by UNODC, by the end of 2020, there are about 275 million drug users in the world, accounting for about 3.5% of the world's population, and more than 36 million people suffer from drug use disorder. In recent years, an average of about 500,000 people have died from drugs, and illegal income from drug trafficking brings criminals a profit between 500 and 600 billion US dollar per year. Drug-related crimes are now identified as particularly serious crimes that have negative impacts on social life. Many drug-related criminal networks and organizations operate widely and cross-border, and the main trend is still the production, sale, and illegal transportation of narcotics.³

Southeast Asia is considered one of the world's major illicit drug production centers. In the report on the world drug situation, the United Nations assessed Southeast Asia as the second largest drug production center in the world with an output of 760 tons and about 20 tons of synthetic drugs worth about 2 million US dollar is produced from this area.⁴ Vietnam is not in the group of large

¹ UNODC (2021): World Drug Report: pandemic effects ramp up drug risks, as youth underestimate cannabis dangers. Available at <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html>

² Vietnamese Politburo (2019): Directive No. 36-CT/TW dated August 16, 2019 of the Politburo on strengthening and improving the effectiveness of drug prevention, combat and control

³ Zhang, G. (2019). The effects of a school policing program on crime, discipline, and disorder: A quasi-experimental evaluation. *American journal of criminal justice*, 44(1), 45-62.

⁴ Raffle, E. (2021). The war on drugs in Southeast Asia as 'state vigilantism'. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 92, 103114.

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illegal drug producing countries, however, with its unique geographical position, border, road and sea routes stretching from the north to the south, the terrain is rugged, making it difficult to control, so it has been facing challenges in preventing drugs from being smuggled from abroad and consumed domestically and continuing to be transported to other countries. As a result, it causes many difficulties for law enforcement to prevent drug trafficking, creating a complicated situation of drug crime in the country.⁵ Statistics of the Drug Crime Investigation Department - Vietnam Ministry of Public Security on the number of drug cases arrested on the border lines show a significant increase in both the number of cases and the number of drugs seized.

Vietnam shares the border with Laos and Cambodia more than 3,000 km long, stretching from north to south via 19 provinces, and many air and sea routes back and forth between other countries in the region. According to statistics of authorities on drug prevention and control, this is always a complicated and hot route for cross-border drug trafficking and transportation. Because this area is located in the center of drug production, known as the "Golden Triangle", and at the same time, the unique geographical position of the three countries Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam is one of the "gateways" to communicate to the world, making this area becoming a favorable area for organized crime groups to take advantage of illegal drug trafficking and transportation.⁶ The skyrocketing price of opium in Laos, Thailand and Myanmar has stimulated farmers to grow this crop. Accompanying the production of opium, the amount of heroin produced also increased. On average, Southeast Asia area produces more than 80 tons of heroin each year. In addition, Myanmar is the world's largest drug production center, which creates favorable conditions for drug dealers and transporters to other countries in the region.⁷ Drugs in many countries are cheap, while in Vietnam the price is higher, the conditions for prevention are still limited, the number of addicts is high, and the demand for use is high. Meanwhile, prices in Vietnam are high, affecting the crime of transporting and trading drugs in countries in the region into our country. The cost of drugs in some countries is higher than that of Vietnam (China, Canada...), Vietnam's geographical position is a favorable condition for transporting, forming lines and transshipping drugs from other countries in the area.

Facing with that situation, Vietnam cannot avoid direct impacts from the development of crime and drug abuse in the region. Although the situation of crime and drug abuse in our country has been basically controlled, there are still many complicated and unpredictable factors. On the Northwest and Northern Central area, authorities often detect drug trafficking lines within the country in large quantities.

The fight against crime, especially drug-related crimes, has always been directed by the Communist Party and State, and drastically implemented by ministries, branches and localities, many cases have been discovered, dismantled and combated seriously. According to statistics in the first 11 months of 2021, the National Drug Crime Investigation Police force detected 25175 cases, arrested 37046 offenders, seized 596 kg of heroin, 2,6 tons and 2,4 million synthetic drug tablets, around 1 ton of marijuana, 67 military guns, 07 grenades, hundreds of bullets and many related vehicles and properties. Particularly, the Drug Crime Investigation Police Department chaired and coordinated with related forces to arrest 74 cases, 213 subjects, seized 223 kg of heroin, 1,03 tons + 1,9 million tablets of synthetic drugs, 01 kg of opium, 13 military guns. Meanwhile, in the period 2017-2018, the whole country detected 19172 cases with 28579 offenders. Thereby, it shows that drug crimes always tend to increase in number of cases and also in number of offenders, especially the increasingly serious nature, the offenders still carry out drug-related criminal activities with regulations of law. The scale is getting bigger and bigger, more agile, sophisticated, defying the law and risking life to commit crimes. If in the past, huge drug lines, often originated from abroad, were brought to Vietnam for consumption, but recently, there have been drug lines whose bosses are directly Vietnamese, organizing the production of drugs, exporting and consuming in Vietnam directly.

Typically, a drug organization led by Van Kinh Duong (38 years old, born in Hanoi, Vietnam) was dismantled by Ho Chi Minh City Police on April 16, 2017. In this case, Duong has operated discreetly and sophisticatedly, each person has a stage and no one knows about other people's role. Chemicals are taken from many different sources, from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City, production workshops are changed continuously and located in dangerous places, difficult to penetrate, changing through many locations such as: Nha Trang, Dong Nai, Ho Chi Minh City (District 7, Binh Chanh district...). In order to avoid detection, Duong often rents villas with strict security guards, cameras, and especially not dealing with strangers. As for the chemical bottles, after using, Duong had to transport them to the western provinces to dispose of them, rather than destroy them on the spot. From this production and sale line, the Ho Chi Minh City police seized 2,6 billion VND, 10000 USD and many supercars and other valuable assets. Duong has successfully produced 120 kg of meth, between June 2016 and April 2017 successfully consumed 18 kg of ecstasy.⁸

⁵ Huyen, T. Q. (2019). International cooperation to prevent and combat transnational drug trafficking at border locations: A case study of Vietnam. *JL Pol'y & Globalization*, 85, 206.

⁶ Luong, H. T. (2020). The organisational structure of transnational narcotics trafficking groups in Southeast Asia: a case study of Vietnam's border with Laos. *Trends in Organized Crime*, 23(4), 385-411.

⁷ Raffle, E. (2021). The war on drugs in Southeast Asia as 'state vigilantism'. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 92, 103114.

⁸ <https://vnexpress.net/van-kinh-duong-khong-thoat-an-tu-hinh-4269893.html>

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL FORMATION OF DRUG-RELATED CRIMES

In the coming time, with the trend of integration and development in general, drug-related crimes are forecasted to continue to operate with more sophisticated and daring new tricks to conceal criminal activities as well as to deal with the authorities. Therefore, the fight against drug-related crimes will continue to be difficult and complicated.

Researching on drug crimes and drug crimes psychology has shown that there is a close and interconnected relationship, specifically: any drug crimes that occurs has the participation of criminal psychology.⁹ It demonstrates the relationship between drug subjects' perceptions and drug-related offenses. From a psychological perspective, we see that psychology has a dialectical relationship with behavior, all external activities are an expression of that person's inner psychology. A person with a positive mentality will also have positive external actions, a person with a negative mentality will tend to act negatively, in which criminal behavior. Human psychology originates from the outside, is formed and developed through individual activities in the environment. Therefore, it is necessary to change the external influences of the environment on the individual to form psychological adjustment, that is, to make the social environment healthy to form a positive psychology for the individual.

According to criminological perspective, the process of forming negative personal qualities is the cause and condition of the criminal situation. That is the impact and influence of factors in the social environment in which they live, study and work. It is the negative factors outside the environment that affect people to make them form their own negative personal characteristics, people with negative personal manners when faced with favorable conditions will form crimes. Drug-related crimes are the same, their criminal psychology is also formed from the effects and influences formed from certain social factors.

Researching on drug-related offenders has shown that the psychological formation of drug-related crimes comes from the following causes and conditions:

Firstly, the impact of the negative side of the market economy and the uncontrolled introduction of harmful cultural products has resulted in a number of young people who embracing and leading a pragmatic lifestyle, forming a mentality of enjoyment, easily getting involved in drug usage, gradually becoming a drug addict and drug dealer. Most of the retail transactions, the person who commits the crime is also an addict.¹⁰

In addition, the subjects who use drugs are usually between the ages of 15 and 30, this is the age when they are basically mature enough and aware of their jobs. However, the psychology of this age is to want to express yourself, to be curious, to take risks, to experience addictions to yourself, including the experience of using drugs. Therefore, many bad actors have led them into drug crimes to accomplish many different purposes, including drug-related criminal activities.

Secondly, difficulties and obstacles in dealing with drug addicts. Procedures for sending drug addicts to compulsory detoxification are difficult, while community-based detoxification is not yet effective, leading to addicts continuing to use drugs during community-based detoxification. This has created a huge demand for drug consumers, especially the diversity of drugs and forms of use has made it easy for drug users to access drugs.

Thirdly, the negative side of the process of international economic integration, the other side of it is the growing social division, imbalance in economic development between urban and rural areas. Misperception about the issue of freedom and democracy, forgetting the sense of law observance in a part of the people, forming the mentality of freedom to enjoy, lazy to work, want to get rich quickly along with super power. Drug profits make some people defy the law to carry out drug-related criminal activities.

Unemployment tends to increase, especially because of the difficult economic life in the part of people in the highland areas (Northwest) in the need to make a living, it is easy to be seduced, manipulated and even ready to make a living, willing to participate in the road of drug transportation, trading, gradually becoming professional and colluding to form transnational drug gangs and groups.

Fourthly, the majority of drug-related criminal activities on a large scale stem from the needs of drug offenders, which is a material gain that is too great, beyond the legal capacity and conditions of the drug offenders. themselves, seek to satisfy their financial and material needs with a tendency to deviate from social standards, and are willing and defiant when infringing upon the legitimate interests of others. Engaging in "out-of-the-ordinary" playstyles and expressions. Therefore, there is no sense of respect for the law and social moral standards.

Fifthly, the work of propaganda and education on the sense of obeying the law on drugs is still limited. A number of people were initially attracted to drug usage with a very simple perception that "drug only causes hallucinations, not heroin, so it is not addictive" therefore false perception causes many people have lost their lives by trying drugs, gradually become addicted and commit drug-related crimes. In particular, in remote and isolated areas, drug propaganda is still weak, the propaganda is not diversified, mainly on the mass media and in batches, has not gone deep into the key subjects and their role in people's daily lives. Drug prevention and propaganda work mainly belongs to the police force and the government, and has not yet mobilized the whole society to participate in this work.

⁹ Montalto, M. (2021). A Criminological and Psychological Approach to Criminal Offender Personality Traits.

¹⁰ <http://cksndtc.gov.vn/tin-chi-tiet-3231>

IV. SUGGESTION TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PREVENTION OF DRUG-RELATED CRIMES

Researching on the negative psychological formation of drug offenders shows that, in order to improve the effectiveness of the prevention of drug-related crimes, it is necessary to synchronously implement the following solutions:

Firstly, the propaganda on drug prevention and control needs to make it clear to the people that the responsibility for drug prevention is the task of the whole society. The work requires the coordination of departments and agencies, between schools, police forces and local authorities, focusing on propagating the awareness of drug harms among students, students and the elderly, paying special attention to densely populated areas, remote and border areas.¹¹

Secondly, families need to take care of their children in a comprehensive way. The basic problem of families in taking care of their children today is to pamper and create all favorable conditions for their children to study, creating psychologically dependent on the school in their children's education, willing to give money but do not check and monitor what it is used for, leading to dependent children, want to be served, enjoyed, selfish, lazy and irresponsible. Thus, for families, parents need to regularly care for, educate their children, correct and criticize their children's mistake, careless, and demanding attitudes... They also should allocate time for their children which is suitable for family activities.¹²

Thirdly, there is a very close relationship between drug and drug-related crimes. Most drug-related crimes operating in small numbers are drug addicts. The management of addicts and addiction treatment needs to have more appropriate and strict regulations. There is the need to amend a number of laws on documents and procedures for sending addicts to compulsory detoxification centers, because many regulations are not suitable with reality in Vietnam. Many localities are not qualified to prepare documents for sending drug addicts to a compulsory detoxification center. Currently, community-based detoxification has almost failed to achieve the desired results, while sending people to compulsory detoxification has many difficulties and shortcomings. There are many drug addicts in society has not been managed, so it is necessary to have regulations on sanctions for addicts who run away or fail to comply with the detoxification process in the community.

Fourthly, closely strengthen the relationship between schools, families and authorities in education and prevention of drug-related crimes. Departments and branches need to connect with families in educating young people about the harmful effects of drugs, especially at school age. At the same time, strengthen supervision measures by people in the residential community. Encourage people to denounce crimes, launch a movement for the whole people to detect and denounce drug-related crimes, and improve the effectiveness of self-management activities.¹³

Fifthly, strengthening policies on hunger eradication, poverty reduction and social security for ethnic minority and remote areas, especially border areas so that the people can rise up and not be bribed by drug offenders.¹⁴ In addition, paying attention to creating jobs, overcoming underemployment among youth is other solution. Investing funds and material foundations for drug prevention and control, addiction treatment and fight against drug-related crimes. Actively organizing training for functional forces to be qualified to take on assigned tasks.

Sixthly, the Police force investigating drug-related crimes should actively coordinate with professional forces inside and outside the force, especially forces such as: Border Guard, Customs in exchanging and providing information, grasping the situation as well as taking the initiative in fighting and dismantling drug gangs and criminal groups in the country and transnational lines.

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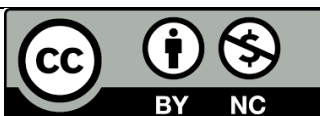
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