

Teacher: Dr. Hanane RABAHI – Specialty: Language Contact and Sociolinguistics Variation- English Language.

Part One: The drug problem

Lecture 2: Growing plants to produce drugs

Objectives

By the end of this lecture, the students should be able to:

1. Understand the three categories of drug production: plant-based, semi-synthetic, and fully synthetic processes.
2. Analyze the historical context and economic factors influencing the international movement of illicit drugs from the producer to consumer countries.
3. Recognize the complexities and methodologies involved in estimating illicit drug production, including technological and political influences.
4. Identify the three critical stages in the illicit drug production and distribution chain where interventions can be made, emphasizing the vulnerabilities at each stage.

Growing plants to produce drugs

Drug production can be classified into three main types: (a) processes that utilize only plant-derived materials, (b) semi-synthetic methods where natural substances are partially altered with synthetic compounds to create the final product, and (c) processes that rely solely on synthetic chemicals to manufacture drugs for consumption. Examples include (a) opium harvested from fields for personal use, (b) coca leaves processed to produce cocaine, and (c) narcotic or psychotropic substances created entirely in laboratories or factories.

Long before the effects of globalization on finance, markets, and products were felt in the global economy, illegal drugs were trafficked internationally from producer nations in less developed regions to consumer nations that were typically more affluent. Production from rural areas was transported and sold across continents, often marked by significant price hikes along the way, which offered traffickers substantial profits and risks. Frequently, the end consumer has been someone in poverty who prioritizes purchasing drugs over essential life needs.

Estimates regarding the production of illegal drugs are derived from various sources. Systematic efforts to gather data on the quantity of opiates or coca produced may utilize advanced satellite mapping, on-the-ground surveys, agricultural characteristics, or consumption statistics. Additionally, political considerations can influence the estimation process. Experts have described the process of estimating production as one that involves making "best guesses" (1, chap. 1).

Many specialists believe that the initial phase, where plants are cultivated in fields or drugs are synthesized in laboratories, represents the most susceptible point in the illicit production, distribution, and consumption chain. The second key phase, distribution, is also viewed by some as a significant opportunity for drug control interventions. However, the ease of transporting, concealing, and diverting drug shipments, along with the large volume of small drug shipments, reduces the effectiveness of enforcement efforts for each intervention. The third potential intervention stage occurs at the consumption level,

particularly when drugs are transferred from dealers to users. This phase is frequently targeted by law enforcement, especially when employing a "buy and bust" strategy.

Lately, there has been a focus on drug demand, particularly in public discourse and media commentary. While the responsibilities of parties to the drug control conventions regarding the reduction of illicit supply are explicitly outlined, the conventions do not clearly define the demand-side obligations for States parties. Instead, these obligations rely on the capacity of States parties to implement education, information dissemination, treatment, and rehabilitation efforts. Some analysts believe that this focus within the treaty framework suggests a preference for supply-side approaches. The implications of this perceived imbalance between supply and demand for integrating drug control with human and social development initiatives remain uncertain.

Given that certain drugs are more accessible and frequently utilized than others, several questions emerge: What are the pharmacological characteristics of specific drugs? What personal traits do users possess? What social or cultural factors in a particular country affect the appeal of a drug? Alternatively, why do users prefer certain drugs over others, and how does this preference affect their willingness to pay? Research indicates that the production and distribution of illegal drugs adhere to supply and demand principles, albeit with considerations for the product's illicit nature. Regarding their effects on global drug issues and significant financial consequences, opium-heroin and coca-cocaine are currently the primary substances of interest.

What is the quantity of opium-heroin and coca-cocaine produced, and in which locations? While exact figures for illicit production are elusive, estimates of the total amounts produced in various nations have been made. An expert (1, p. 12), drawing from data across nine country studies, has pointed out that numerous factors hinder the accuracy of any assessment efforts. Nonetheless, this study offers rough estimates of illicit drug production for coca, cocaine, opium, heroin, and cannabis in key supplier nations. When the gross estimates from these nine countries are combined, the total estimated opium production reaches 3,045 tonnes. However, this figure should not be interpreted as a global production estimate for two main reasons: (a) certain countries are excluded from these calculations (for instance, Afghanistan reportedly cultivated 19,470 hectares and

produced 640 tonnes of opium in 1992, according to the United States Department of State (2)); and (b) several unexamined assumptions were made in the development of these estimates. For heroin, the corresponding gross estimate for production across the nine countries is 246 tonnes.

Unlike opium production, the cultivation of coca leaves and the production of cocaine occur in a limited number of countries. The estimates provided by the previously mentioned commentator closely align with those from the Department of State regarding coca and cocaine. The combined total for the three main producing countries—Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia—is approximately 330,000 tonnes of coca leaves and 322 tonnes of cocaine. Several aspects of this situation are significant: (a) the primary sources of drug production are diverse, not confined to just one or two countries or a single region; (b) based on 1992 GNP per capita data, substantial opium and coca production is found in less developed nations, many of which face serious economic, agricultural, political, and social challenges; and (c) all estimates indicate that the overall production levels are exceedingly high. If we were to include the production figures for alcohol and tobacco alongside those for opium, cocaine, cannabis, and psychotropic substances, the resulting aggregate would reveal a staggering supply of these addictive substances.

A commentator has characterized the illegal drug trade in its production stage as "labor-intensive, decentralized, focused on growth, supportive of cottage industries, and generating foreign exchange—attributes that are beneficial for rural development in economically stagnant regions" (4, p. 57). He has identified consensus on the following aspects :

- 1) The production of marijuana, heroin, and cocaine/crack is on the rise, particularly cocaine/crack;
- 2) Cocaine traffickers, facing a significant surplus in supply compared to the current market demand in the United States, are actively seeking to establish new markets in Canada, Great Britain, and both Western and Eastern Europe, with Spain and Italy serving as key entry points for Europe;
- 3) The growing availability of illegal drugs in relation to current demand leads to increased violence as international cartels and local gangs clash over control of market territories;
- and 4) The policy measures implemented thus far to reduce demand,

curb trafficking, and manage the supply of illegal drugs have not yielded satisfactory outcomes (1, pp. 2-3).

It's important to highlight that the production of illegal drugs tends to be quite cost-effective. Labor expenses are minimal, and even when workers seek fair compensation, the proportion of total earnings allocated to wages and other costs remains relatively small.