



WP5 2nd COUNTRY REPORT OUTLINE

Italy

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1. RECRUITMENT AND SAMPLE

The recruitment process took several months and many contacts for authorization, despite the fact that the director of the Penitentiary Administration Department (DAP) and one manager of the Department for Juvenile Justice and Community were part of the Advisory Group of the project and supported it. After having identified the two institutes selected as case studies, which were immediately available for the study (see WP5 first report), we contacted prisons and justice social services of the Piedmont region via the national and regional offices. Two out of four contacted prisons answered positively to the invitation, while the others answered either that the professionals were too busy to organise the interviews, or that they had no detainees with the required characteristics. In the case of social services in charge of external penal execution, the social workers reported difficulties in finding available interviewees, both because of the low number of young people and lack of willingness to participate. It was particularly difficult to reach female interviewees, which is not surprising since we know that women represent only a minimum percentage of the target (see WP4 national report).

In the end, 7 different institutions agreed to participate, including those selected as case studies and other services related to the CJS, as described in the following table.

Table 1. Recruitment

<i>Recruitment channel and city</i>	<i>No. of interviews</i>	<i>Case studies</i>
A special section of the prison called “Attenuated Custody” (ICATT), Padova	8	yes
A special unit of the local public addiction service called <i>Spazio Blu</i> (Blue Space) targeted at young users in touch with the CJS, Milano	7	yes
Juvenile penitentiary institution (IPM), Torino	9	no
Prison, Biella (BI)	9	no
Prison, Fossano (CN)	3	no
Juvenile social services office of the justice Department (USSM), Torino	1	no
Interdistrict office for external penal execution (UEPE), Torino	4	no

Social workers or other professionals, who helped us with the recruitment, were provided with a short description of the research design and aims together with a consent form. In the case of minors, the consent required the signature of a parent or guardian – which made it more difficult to get minors involved. Despite the initial difficulties in getting appointments, in some places (Torino IPM and Biella prison), once we started to conduct interviews other young people who formerly had not given their consent, asked to be interviewed. All the interviewees were collaborative during interviews and available to talk about their own consumption, while not all of them were willing to talk about their crimes. Besides, interviewees had different levels of skill expressing themselves in the Italian language, so that some interviews with migrant people are not very informative. Only one of the interviews made was not transcribed and included in the sample because the young interviewee was still very shaken by his recent dramatic migratory experience and needed to talk about that.



Two senior researchers conducted the interviews, the same ones who analysed the data and wrote the report. The interviews lasted on average 40 minutes, were audio-taped and verbatim transcribed. The coding was performed using ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software.

The final sample is made up of 41 valid individual interviews as described in the following Tables 2 and 3. Most interviewees are young male adults aged 18-25 detained in prison for dealing or robbery. In half of the cases this is not the first penalty; 17 out of 41 young people are immigrant, including 7 illegally present in Italy; 6 out of 41 are second generation.

Table 2. Sample description – Socio demographic data

<i>Gender</i>		<i>Age</i>		<i>Partner</i>		<i>Children</i>		<i>Education</i>		<i>Immigrant</i>	
Male	39	15-17	3	yes	14	yes	4	primary	8	yes	17
Female	2	18-25	38	no	27	no	37	secondary	25	no	41
								high	8		

Table 3. Sample description – Information about crime and penalty

<i>Crime</i>		<i>First penalty</i>		<i>Measure</i>	
dealing	21	yes	20	Prison	29
robbery	13	no	21	Alternative measure	9
armed robbery	2			Home arrest	2
aggravated robbery	2			Community	1
aggravated injuries	3				
attempted murder	1				
aggression	1				
trafficking in migrants	1				
extortion	1				
rape	1				

2. RESULTS

2.1 Drug careers

- *Onset (ONSET)*

All the interviewees' experiences with illegal drugs started with smoking either hashish or marijuana. Age of onset ranges from 11 to 22 years, but most frequently is close to 14-15. The context is in most cases that of the peer group, that is, in company of schoolmates or friends. Places of consumption are typically squares or parks. For some interviewees, migrants from other countries where not all teenagers attend school, drug consumption may have happened even earlier at the work place. This is the case, for instance, of interviewee no. 34, who started smoking at 10 years old when working in a joinery.



Usually this experience happens secretly, without the knowledge of parents, but, according to our interviewees, it is taken for granted among young people, it is something really “ordinary” and therefore, somehow, ineluctable. For this reason, details of how the real first time happened were not so clearly remembered by all of our interviewees.

“It is difficult to tell it, because I do not remember it very well, it is like driving, it’s not that I remember... but I think the first time is something you do not look for... when a friend offers it to you” (IT_13_CS2_M_21)¹.

In this sense, first order discourses speeches about drug use onset - namely discourses that are not solicited by the interviewer (Allen, 2007) – do not include specific motives to try drugs and explanations are, for example, “*just to try it, as everyone does*” (IT_38_PRI_M_19), “*they [my friends] passed it [a joint] to me*” (IT_27_PRI_M_18), “*it’s normal when you live on the street*” (IT_28_PRI_M_20).

The company kept by young people is usually a key factor in starting. Someone related his/her first experience to the desire to become part of a group and/or to grow up. Indeed, in retrospect,, many interviewees related their onset to keeping company with older friends; somebody else attributed it to her need “*to become uninhibited and not being worried to be judged*” (IT_20_ALT_F_25). These “second order” explanations, that is, “reasoned reasons” provided to the interviewer at a distance of time (Allen, 2007), include explanations like “*for foolishness*” (IT_1_CS1_M_23) or “*because of boredom*” (IT_20_ALT_F_25).

Obviously, motives for smoking become clearer once the user has experienced the cannabis effects. Therefore, for many, the reason to start smoking is simply “*because it is funny*” (IT_11_CS2_M_21) and “*it makes me laugh*” (IT_31). However, there is also another immediately perceived effect, which was reported by several interviewees to justify their drug use onset, which related to the will to “*forget problems*” (IT_2_CS1_M_19), which often meant dealing with parents:

“If I started is also for my family, depressed mother at home, my deaf father absent” (IT_20_ALT_F_25).

It is worth noticing, however, that not all the interviewees reported being able to recognize or to appreciate cannabis effects the first time used. Despite this, they all continued. Which contributes to framing most of the first experiences within the context of normalized use of cannabis rather than in a deviant context (Williams and Parker, 2001; Parker et al., 2002; Duff, 2005).

- *Drug use patterns before entering in the CJS*

Three main use patterns emerged from the data with regard to preferred substances. There are interviewees who used only hashish and/or marijuana, others who used almost exclusively cannabis combined with cocaine and/or crack and, lastly, those who had used a number of different substances,

¹ Quotations are accompanied by a code indicating the country, the interview number, the measure (home arrest - HO, therapeutic community - CO, prison - PRI, other alternative measures -ALT, case studies – CS1, CS2), gender (M/F) and the age (no. of years).



including legal ones (alcohol) and prescription drugs. Also within the third category, only a small minority of interviewees had ever used or even knew NPS.

Only smokers of hashish and/or marijuana, about 1/3 of the sample, can be found both among Italian and immigrant, younger or older interviewees, with more or less severe penalties. However they are especially frequent among Italian younger interviewees who committed a crime when minors. The typical reported settings for smoking cannabis are 1) in public places with friends – to increase fun – and 2) alone, at home, in order to get to sleep. It is worth noticing that also students without economic or family problems reported the latter use.

Recreational use, relating to increasing fun with friends, is prevalent at the beginning of careers, when smoking is an occasional activity, while, with increased consumption, tranquillizer use takes the main role. Problems to escape from by using cannabis can be very different, varying from those with the justice system to those with a girlfriend.

Cannabis is also used to increase self-confidence. One brilliant university student used to smoke in order prevent anxiety and study better (IT_14_CS2_M_20), another told us that it gave him *“much self-confidence, both in terms of image and psychological self-confidence”* (IT_13_CS2_M_21). A boy coming from Africa, smoked both in his country of origin and in Italy, in order to *“make the brain work better”*, since *“marijuana always gives [him] a good advice”* (IT_36_PRI_M_22).

Doses change among interviewees and with time; however, the majority of interviewees ended up smoking joints instead of cigarettes, many times a day, reaching in some cases 10 grams a day. Since negative effects were not commonly perceived – at least during the consumption period – self-control strategies were not generally reported with respect to cannabis quantities. However, many interviewees underlined that they were very attentive to quality. Furthermore, most of them think that cannabis does not cause really severe consequences, so that the only reason to quit was having legal problems. Others recognize that smoking too much distracted them from school or other activities, luring them. For this reason, they believe that a harm reduction strategy can be to smoke only in the evening. Supply strategies obviously change according to the phase of the user’s career. For instance, students - once they became everyday users - usually started to buy hashish or marijuana personally and to sell it to friends in order to get their doses for free or to get money for their own supply. In any case, getting hashish or marijuana was not difficult under any circumstances.

Even obtaining cocaine was not difficult, rather, in certain contexts, cocaine *“turns around you”*:

“I was on a street where all were drug dealers, I was looking for hashish and they told me ‘No, there is only crack’ and by the time I finished the street I would like cocaine” (IT_27_PRI_M_18)

Cocaine, as well as crack, are associated with different use values compared to hashish, but complementary. For this reason, those who at a certain point also started to use cocaine (or crack) did not quit smoking cannabis, and continued to use both substances. This combined pattern was reported by the large majority of our interviewees. While cocaine is used to being more active and “staying awake”, to become “brave” and “aggressive”, cannabis is useful to calm down and get asleep, or to “decrease the beats of the heart” accelerated by the first substance (IT_34_PRI_M_24).

For its effects, cocaine is more often associated to crimes, in the interviewees’ narratives:

“You like cocaine because it activates you, but you don’t reason anymore with your brain, you do anything” (IT_12_CS2_M_22).

Cocaine is also associated to symbolic values, especially in certain contexts like disco clubs:



“It makes you feel important, I do not know if it's the effect or because you have cocaine and everyone talks about it, cocaine, cocaine, the rich people's drug!” (IT_27_PRI_M_18).

At the same time cocaine is also a more powerful means to escape problems and an effective painkiller. However, within a brief period, the main reason for using cocaine is its addictive power, which is mainly mental, as emerges from the following quotation:

As long as you snort it every day for a week, it is not a leisure, it becomes a habit. You want to remove the pain. Your head hurts, your spine hurts, your heart hurts (...) if you want to quit, you suffer. You suffer physically, but more mentally, because you are always obsessed with it. (IT_35_PRI_M_23)

When cocaine users turned to smoke crack, the “*sense of omnipotence*” (IT_20_ALT_F_25) became even stronger, as well as the addictive power and unwanted consequences. Within our sample crack users are frequent among prisoners and immigrant interviewees. Indeed, many of them have been imprisoned just during a crack use peak, which can be 3-4 days of continuous smoking, without sleeping.

There are finally **polidrug users**, who represent about ¼ of our sample. Some of them used only heroin in addition to cocaine and cannabis, to counteract the unwanted effects of cocaine, such as insomnia. Others, besides the above mentioned substances, have occasionally used stimulants (amphetamine, methamphetamine, speed), dissociatives (ketamine) and/or psychedelics (ecstasy, mushrooms). The use context for these substances are generally disco clubs and rave parties and their use is associated to recreational purposes. Some exceptions include one interviewee who used (only) ketamine in order to cope with depression and a few interviewees who tried psychedelics with psychonautic purposes, such as personal development and curiosity.

Among reported drugs there are also prescription drugs, the most quoted being Rivotril, an antiepileptic drug belonging to the family of benzodiazepine. Its use is generally associated with street life and the need to sleep and not to feel pain (int. no. 36), but someone reported using it also during techno-parties. Intravenous methadone is also reported.

Alcohol is often used in addition to other drugs, with the exception of many interviewees who used only cannabis and did not like the effects of alcohol, especially when combined with cannabis.

NPSs are not very popular among our sample. Only 3 interviewees out of 41 used any NPS, while most of them never did it, either because they never had the occasion or, mostly, because they are not at all interested in synthetic drugs. Quoted substances are Amnesia (a synthetic cannabinoid), PCP (a synthetic hallucinogenic substance based on piperidine) and crystal meth. Amnesia was tried once by an interviewee (no. 21) who otherwise only used cannabis and alcohol. PCP and crystal meth were mentioned by two “experimenters” who used these substances occasionally, respectively, during a rave (int. no. 35) and in a disco club (int. no. 6). Some of our interviewees did not even know what NPS are. NPS representations are by and large negative since they are considered very risky, even by those who use regularly cocaine and/or heroin.

- *Drug use patterns after entering the CJS*

Most of interviewees quit using drugs after entering the CJS. This is true especially for those who are **in prison**, since only 5 detainees mentioned having used illegal substances inside (int. no. 2, 6, 17, 28, 35), which is, in almost all cases, cannabis. There is also a case of heroin use, which was also the interviewee's first use of heroin and continued after leaving prison (int. no. 6). Furthermore, even



among interviewees who declared that they had not used drugs in prison, a majority maintained that, nevertheless, getting drugs would have been easy, especially in big prisons compared to smaller ones. Overall, it is commonly known that illegal drugs can enter prison by different ways such as leave permits, ingestion, corrupt assistants, and drones.

The most frequent stance among our sample, therefore, is that taking drugs would be possible but there is no interest for several reasons. First, for many interviewees 1) imprisonment is an occasion to quit using drugs (int. no. 1, 3, 10, 17, 18, 26, 32, 34, 35, 38), and they are determined to do so. For the same reason, they did not accept any pharmacological therapy when it was offered and they are very critical towards prescription drugs - such as sleeping pills, painkillers, anxiolytics – as well as towards substitution treatment (buprenorphine, methadone). Generally, they think that prescription drugs are even worse than illegal substances in terms of unwanted effects and addictive powers.

There should not be pharmacological therapies in prison. Because if one has already used drugs, he begins to make use of psychotropic drugs, so becomes addict to the substances he took outside, and addict to those he uses here in prison. (...) [There are] people who used drugs outside and in prison start with methadone, and Subuxone, and then they are not able to quit. (IT_05_CS01_M_24)

As a result, several interviewees did not even declare themselves to be users and/or they refused any type of therapy, therefore choosing to go through a period of abstinence without external help. It is worth mentioning that many of them, even daily users of cocaine or heroin, did not describe this as a big issue.

I did not want to be helped because I prefer not to take medicines. Rather, I'm sick for three-four days, but on the fifth (day) I can already sleep. (IT_34_PRI_M_24)

Others, who initially accepted prescription drugs, autonomously decided to quit after a while.

‘I've been taking sleeping pills, then, when they asked me to work, then I said: ‘Why should I work while taking pills? So I gradually quit’ (IT_10_CS2_M_25)

Other reasons for not looking for drugs inside the prison are 2) avoiding the consequences on the sentence (e.g. revocation of permits), and 3) the need to be alert in a dangerous context where “drug addicts” are unpopular (IT_34_PRI_M_24).

Episodes of drug use in the CJS are more frequent in **therapeutic communities (TCs)**, since surveillance is less strict and there are more occasions to use, namely permits and visits. As a result, first experiences with new substances can occur in TCs. Substances mentioned as used in this context are mainly cannabis, but also cocaine, Rivotril (benzodiazepine), cocaine, speed (methamphetamine).

INT: Did your first experience in community help you in reflecting?

No, because there they made me try pills that sincerely I did not even know name (...) I went to TC to change, and I did not change at all there.

INT. Who did make you try?

These boys who took these pills that were opioids, like speed

INT. But were they with you in TC?

In that TC you could enter secretly. (IT_41_CO_F_18)

Also while under home arrest or subject to other alternative sanctions outside prison drug consumption is frequently reported, especially as a consequence of friends' offering. Motives to use drugs within the CJS, despite the risks, are rather similar to those for using drugs before entering the CJS – with the added stress of being in this situation in the CJS. However, there were also those who were able to limit their consumption after having had a legal problem. Self-regulation strategies



mentioned were: to cut relationships with friends who were users (int. no. 11), consuming lot of candies instead (int. no. 9), limiting use to the evening (int. no. 19), increasing physical activities and sports (int. no. 19). Somebody also tried to smoke legal cannabis, with a THC content of less than 0.6 percent, but urine tests resulted positive (int. no. 19).

- *Increasing factors*

Factors related to an increase in the interviewees' drug use careers can be classified into three main types: life contexts, life events, and factors inherent to substances.

Some recurrent features across the data show the influence of life context on the likelihood of increasing drug consumption over time. First, there is the **labor market** issue, which is crucial especially for immigrant interviewees who reported a vicious circle due to the fact that getting a job without a residence permit is impossible, as well as the fact that it is not possible to apply for a residence permit without a job. Loosing or not finding a job on the one hand fosters an increase in drug consumption aimed at coping with the privations and the anguish of a precarious life; like in the case of Int. 36, who, waiting for documents, ended up living on the street and dramatically increased his consumptions of alcohol and Rivotril.

On the other hand, in these cases, **dealing** becomes the only available opportunity to get an income, which, in turn, is mentioned as a factor increasing consumption because of proximity.

I was a barber in Tunis, I knew how to cut hair, but I did not have any documents for which no one took on me, so I started selling a bit of hashish. I started selling, and using it at the same time. Then after 3 years I started using cocaine because I was holding it, I was dealing it, and so it went on. (IT_03_CSI_M_23)

The experience of **migration** can increase drug use also for other reasons, above all the greater accessibility to drugs in Italy compared to in the country of origin, which was reported by three interviewees who come from northern Africa. In some cases, smoking hashish with fellow countrymen can even be a way of joining the community of origin in the new country. Furthermore, in many cases, migration implies separating from parents and freeing oneself from their control.

[In Egypt] my father was more breathing down my neck, so I was afraid of my father, if he knew something like that, he would slap me. And so, here in Italy, a bit of freedom, I began to smoke more often with friends. (IT_25_PRI_M_20)

A decrease in **parental control** associated with an increase in consumption was also reported by Italian young people with separated parents (int. no. 18), but obviously the influence of parents on sons' and daughters' drug use is not limited to the control aspect. Often peaks of consumption are associated to **problematic relationships** with mothers', fathers or stepparents, which can get worse when the consumption becomes known, like in case of Int. 2, whose father "shut him out of the home", thereby giving him even more freedom:

Things could have been different if my father had not left me out: 'Do what you want'. I mean, one who is 15-16 years old is not entirely aware of what is going on. But since my father used to say: 'At the age of 12 I was already doing, doing, doing...' right? 'Everyone had to be', 'I was not like that', I went more and more, more and more with hashish, then from hashish became both hashish and cocaine. (IT_2_CSI_M_19)



Sometimes it is not a problematic relationship, but the pain of the **death** of a parent (or a friend) that determines a peak in consumption (int. no. 37).

To **have been in contact with the CJS** seems to be a factor increasing use of drugs per se. Many turning points towards an increased use of drugs corresponded either to the arrival of a final sentence (int. no. 10, 11, 19) – which can occur long after the crime – or immediately after getting out of prison (int. no. 4, 10, 2, 35) or therapeutic community (int. no. 38). Furthermore, again with reference to the work sphere, having a criminal record also makes it very difficult to get a job (int. no. 1), with the same consequences mentioned above.

Increasing factors inherent in substances mainly relate to tolerance, craving and ‘addiction’, as defined by interviewees. These kinds of effects of drug use are reported by most of the sample. Addiction is mentioned with regard to crack (int. no. 5), cocaine (int. no. 35) and heroin (int. no. 37), but also about hashish (int. no. 11, 12), as well as tolerance, which was reported by 6 interviewees (int. no. 1, 19, 32, 35, 40, 41). However, turning points in drug use careers typically correspond to changes in the use of substances and, above all, to **starting to use cocaine**. This substance is typically added to cannabis and can even increase the perceived need of it, as well as that of alcohol (int. no. 41). Another important “jump” (int. no. 33) is **passing from snorting cocaine to smoking crack**, which usually corresponds to a dramatic increase in quantities used, indeed crack is said to give a “strong mental addiction” (int. no. 40).

I began to smoke from the bottle, the monkey took me from the bottle. When I no longer had the substance nearby, I started to go out to buy... When I snorted, 3-5 grams were enough, when I started with the crack, I saw that 5 grams were not enough for me, I had to go and buy again, again, again. I was doing 35 grams a day. (IT_5_CS1_M_24)

Trying new drugs or new consumption ways can therefore represent a “turning point” (int. no. 40) in a user’s career. This can happen as well in the case of onset of drug use, because of meeting new acquaintances in new contexts, such as school or disco clubs. Starting to attend music clubs, parties and concerts have been reported as an increasing factor especially with regards to stimulants and psychedelics.

- *Decreasing factors*

As mentioned in the paragraph on consumptions inside the CJS, for many interviewees **being in the CJS** was the main reason to cut or reduce their substance use. Imprisonment or being sent into a therapeutic community as an alternative programs represented an occasion to quit substances after having reached very high levels of consumption, and, for this reason, retrospectively some interviewees thought that coming into the CJS was fortunate:

Sometimes I think I believe God loves me, got it? If I had not come to jail, I do not know how I would have ended up. I would be dead somewhere! (IT_03_CS1_M_23)

Some of the respondents went through abstinence in prison and then, once they got out, they managed for long periods not to consume or to limit their consumption, at least “*until the problems started again*” (IT_33_PRI_M_22).

However, as mentioned by many interviewees, to quit using substances personal will is crucial even in some prisons.



If you really want to avoid it, you want to change [and] do not use anymore, you do not touch [it] anymore. It happened to me with cellmates that they were snorting and I was watching. (IT_04_CS1_M_25)

Obviously, a relevant deterrent to consumption in the CJS is the fear of being discovered and having repercussions on the sentence, for example losing the right for permits (int. no. 7), as well as, outside the CJS, the fear for administrative sanctions (the withdrawal of the license). Being in contact with the CJS acts as a decreasing factor also because of the shame, especially with respect to minors.

In the community I stopped automatically without being sick, the thing (my arrest) had so much struck me that I stopped automatically, nor smoked a joint or anything else. (IT_11_CS2_M_21)

In some cases feelings of shame are reported specifically regarding parents or other relatives. In these cases, **family support** and trust play a crucial role.

If I had had to stop spontaneously, it would have been difficult, but quitting with a problem of this weight, it was much easier, because my family was involved, and sometimes when you do not want to do things for yourself, sometimes you do it for people who love you. Because they all helped me, they always gave me a hand, even after the crime happened they did not react violently, in fact, they assisted me even more in everything I did, they still trusted me. (IT_15_CS2_M_19).

Like parents, also girlfriends who do not use can help to reduce consumption, as well as having **children** because of the responsibility (int. no. 17, 29). In general, the interviewees' drug use careers show an irregular trend and periods of lower consumption are identifiable which are not in relation to treatment nor to the CJS. The following quote clarifies how **getting an ordinary job** can create an opportunity to quit substance use, or to reduce consumption. Interviewee no. 1 is telling about a period of 6-7 months in which he got a regular job as a gardener.

INT. And in that period you did not use? Not even cannabis?

No, nothing, because I had pulled myself out, I was not interested anymore in that world because I was fine, I was working, I had my money (...) I was happy because I had my things, I worked – I worked a lot, 10-11 hours a day, but it was fine. (IT_01_CS1_M_23)

I worked the whole day, and I had learnt how to regulate with joints. I smoked when I did not work, I finished late in the evening, I smoked a joint and then went to bed. (IT_11_CS2_M_21)

Also illegal work, and even dealing, can be factors limiting drug use. Interviewee no. 34, engaged in organized criminality, after having been in the juvenile detention center decided to quit using heroin and cocaine and just smoke hashish.

...to be more alert. Since when you are under the effect you don't understand anything anymore. Also the profit, that profit is no longer so (IT_34_PRI_M_24)

There are two more decreasing factors, each quoted by only one interviewee, nevertheless important. One is conversion, occurred in a prison through a Catholic volunteer (int. no. 28). The second is a very painful abstinence episode told by an orphan, a very lonely boy, who, after a four-month period of daily use of heroin decided to quit alone without help, in an abandoned factory. After that episode, he decided to stop using heavy drugs and only continue to smoke joints in the evening.

The relationship between drug use and crime



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The relationship between drug use and crime emerged as various and complex from the interviewees' point of view. The collected data clearly show the limits of the traditional view, according to which the crimes committed by people who use drugs are a consequence of addiction (Seddon 2000; Allen 2007).

Only a few interviewees talked about a clear connection between their consumptions and the crime they were reported for. They are Italian students (int. no. 8, 13, 14, 15, 19, 39, 40) who only used cannabis. All their criminal careers started in a similar way. They started to smoke hashish or marijuana when they were adolescents, then – in a short time - they became regular smokers and their need of money increased, so they started to buy greater quantities in order to sell to their friends, thereby covering the costs of their own consumptions.

Marijuana is still an expensive drug, and this is a problem for many students, who often end up doing a group pot. As soon as you become a very habitual user, you have a problem with money, since anyway two joints cost 10 euros and often 10 euros are the half of young people's weekly pocket money. (IT_40_ALT_M_17)

However, once having discovered how you can make money easily, the purposes of dealing can go beyond the original ones.

After that, when I saw that to get money it was sufficient to do so, I became more obsessed – so to speak – by money than by the drug itself. (IT_39_ALT_M_19)

Exactly the opposite happened to other interviewees. They started to commit crime – usually thefts and robberies – before using any kind of drugs (int. no. 09, 16, 17, 28, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38). Among these, besides illegal immigrants who couldn't find a job, there are some young people from poor families, like int. no. 38, who did not want to ask for money from his mother, the only bread-winner in the family and abandoned by her husband; or like int. no. 37, orphaned by his father and mother and left alone with his brothers, who did not even have the money to buy a pair of shoes.

I did not have money for shoes, I went to school with perforated shoes, and wet socks. So I started to sell hashish to buy a new pair of shoes, not for other reasons. (IT_37_PRI_M_23)

There are also those who were not experiencing poverty but were equally attracted by money and by crime. This is the case of int. no. 34, who at 14 started to deal cocaine and heroin, even before trying to smoke hashish himself. At 16 he entered organized criminality and got his first gun. Likewise, int. no. 17, son of a robber, who came to Italy alone from Colombia at an early age and loved the thrill of robberies as much as drugs.

I liked to do robberies. Not cocaine nor marijuana can give me the drug [sensation] that robbery gives to me. That is a thing... How can I explain... it's like it was a drug. (...) There are people who carry out robberies to buy drugs. I don't, I do robberies to get money. I go to make money to spend. I like money, I like many things. (IT_17_PRI_M_19)

As an interviewee underlined, in certain cases drugs and crimes are simply aspects of the same context.

The underworld is that, that is, the underworld is built by lying people, naive, because they are people who do not grow up, who only know how to steal, make scams, drugs and drug dealing. These are the things, the context of the underworld is this. (IT_28_PRI_M_20)



Also as part of the “underworld”, crime can increase popularity, which is the case of int. no. 40, who especially liked being appreciated and respected as the school dealer, a sort of social supplier of recreational drugs (Coomber et al. 2016).

I really liked being able to work. Being able to do something that would make me feel more adult, that would make me be noticed, also because I had serious problems of bullying before (...). Then I realized that the dealer was just, almost a role, in the school society, that is... there was the nerd, the bully, the normal guy and the drug dealer, who - as opposed to how he was seen years ago... years ago the pusher was a bad person, that is, even the consumers were disgusted by the drug dealer, especially because the drugs were different. Now marijuana, let's say it' like alcohol for people. (IT_40_ALT_M_17).

Though in many cases criminal experience precedes drug use and is unrelated to it, some interviewees (IT_28, 33, 35) specified that after having started to use cocaine, crack or heroin, their criminal activities increased. Int. no. 33, started to deal at 15, then started to use crack and started to steal. Compared to cannabis and psychedelics, cocaine, as well as alcohol, and even more so the mix of the two substances, are reported as having a disinhibiting effect on crime (int. no. 24, 32, 33, 41).

It is crack that make you do this, it's not your will, it's the substance. You just think I want to smoke (...) it pushes you to do things that I would never have done. (IT_33_PRI_M_22)

Joints did not make me do crimes (...) when I smoked I was too frightened to do it (...) but when I took cocaine I was the one to say: “Let's go, we need money”(...) It made me feel powerful, very awake. (IT_41_CO_F_18)

Doing crimes under the effect or because of abstinence also increases the likely to be hold by the policemen, as told by some interviewees (int. no. 16, 17, 28). For this reason, interviewees usually separate the two activities.

Better to make the robberies without smoking, doing nothing, with all the senses on. (IT_17_PRI_M_19)

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

Prison

The **access treatment for detainees who use drugs emerged as a critical issue** in many ways. First, as already explained, many detainees complained about the professionals' overuse of prescriptions drugs, which in their view are as addictive and harmful as illegal drugs. Second, many interviewees did not even declare themselves to be users, either because they did not want to take medicines (and thought that they could do it alone) or because they were worried of being accused for this reason. Third, paradoxically, those who would like to have support, cannot get it if they cannot prove they have used drugs, which requires a test which they have to pay for (int. no. 32, 33). The following quote is from a detainee who wanted support to quit drugs, but he could not get it since to be treated it is necessary to do hair analysis and he did not have the money to pay for it.

INT. Did you get any kind of support because of your drug consumption?

No, because I made a request to the psychologist, but he called me after two months. I tried to tell I used to use and so on, the psychologist sent me to the educator and he sent me again to the same



person who told me again I needed the hair analysis. (...) Over time you start to get angry, the prisoners always say the same thing, the prison leads to make people wicked. (IT_33_PRI_M_22)

Another critical issue in prison is “to stay always with similar guys” (int. no. 28), which makes it difficult to change attitudes towards substances. Furthermore, when released, the risk is being alone with no other friends except those met in prison. After being in prison, interview no. 21, who had come to Italy from Morocco when he was a child, found a “different world”:

Those I knew had become drug addicts (...). It's hard when you leave the prison, because even the people who know you... my Italian friends looked at me differently, did not trust me, 'cause in the end prison remains the place of criminals. (IT_21_PRI_M_24)

If many interviewees maintained that imprisonment represented an occasion to quit a risky consumption style, as many interviewees are sceptical about the possibility of changing their lifestyle once they are released from prison, in **the absence of a reintegration project**. They are worried about being without any help and income again, so that they had to deal again, and because there were substances at hand. This concern is widespread above all among immigrants.

If I go out and I do not have my parents who help me and I do not have the chance to work, I think I'm going to deal again. (IT_32_PRI_M_21)

I have to find my way out [of drugs]. Then you will see what I have to do outside. I would like to change my life, but let's see... It all depends if you can find a job. (IT_34_PRI_M_24)

For this reason, interviewees claim more **work opportunities are needed** in prison, not only to gain experience and to fight boredom, but also to make some money.

I think that a detainee must have the possibility to put some money aside before leaving. How many detainees go out from prison without having a house? Maybe people who lost their family, like me. (IT_37_PRI_M_23)

Consistently, interviewees seem to appreciate especially interventions aimed at **planning the future** rather than digging into the past.

[The psychologist] was really a very good person and he helped me a lot. We talked more than what I will do one day when I'm out, we tried to build even if only theoretical, but still a project. (IT_1_CS1_M_23)

What some interviewees do not like about the Attenuated Custody (CS1) is the scarcity of activities other than counselling and groups. If some appreciate the opportunity to talk with psychologists and to take part in discussion groups – a much higher number compared to traditional prisons – others find it useless and complain that they do not have the chance to do more practical or **physical activities**, and the possibility to attend **school**.

More sports, which is better. It makes you forget lot of things, you let off steam. It makes you feel good. (IT_3_CS1_M_23)

They say that prison is school. However, if there's no school, they are wrong. If there's no school, there's nothing. (IT_5_CS1_M_24)

Vice versa, in ordinary prisons, individual meetings with psychologists, social workers or educators are rare, and detainees can feel abandoned, with no one to talk with about their problems (int. no. 38, 35).



Alternative measures²

The usefulness or otherwise of psychological support is discussed – with opposite opinions – also as regards Therapeutic Communities and the Local Addiction Service Unit (SerD), which is involved both in prison and in alternative measures. Some interviewees think that talking with psychologists is important “*to reflect*” (int. no. 10) and “*to change*” (int. no. 20), while others are convinced that they “*have to understand it alone*” (int. no. 27) or that they do not need help (int. no. 26, 37). There also those who have changed their mind about psychological support over time (int. no. 11, 15, 41), which they interpret as increased maturity. Indeed young people are conscious that as adolescents they were up against adults’ rules and suggestions in any case.

The usefulness of **peer groups**, organized by Spazio Blu (2nd case study), seem to be less questioned. It is considered very useful to give each other courage and also to help other young people not to make the same mistakes, to be more conscious about the legal consequences.

[Groups] also helped me because there was a boy, who was in my same situation, and talking to him - who is also very similar to me as a person, as goals, as values, as principles - I got along with him. Then we were both in remand, so one supported the other and we went ahead. At the same time I think that for the other boys - who might have made minor offenses compared to ours - it could also be useful to see what consumption can lead to, that it can lead to a crime (...). So I think it was very, very useful. (IT_15_CS2_M_19)

The **work issue** is crucial also in considering alternative measures in which voluntary activities can become an opportunity to gain experience and to activate work collaboration. Which is the case of interviewee no. 15, whose penalty included giving skateboard lessons to children as a form of social work. This also made him realise how useful **sport** is – even more than drugs – to relaxing and feeling good.

After probation, there would also be the opportunity to be paid by this association to do the lessons, which I like a lot, so I will probably continue it. (...) To do sport is fruitful, it makes you stop thinking as much as drugs, much more in fact, and, in addition, it is healthy and funny. (IT_15_CS2_M_19)

On the contrary, the lack of company and physical activity make house arrest very hard for a boy; it is unhealthy, and unproductive.

I may study, [also for] the driving license, which I have not, yet. I could do lot of things. But you know, it is not easy because the mood is always bad (...). You think, you are always at home, you could do everything, you could make physical training, you could study (...) but it is the mood to take away that desire. (IT_12_CS2_M_22)

On the other hand, being in a therapeutic community, with peers, can create other kind of problems. As we explained in previous paragraphs, we collected several stories of use of drugs inside TCs. Furthermore, according to our interviewees, episodes of violence can occur not only among peers but also from educators. This is what happened to interviewee no. 28, who after 4 months escaped from the first community where he had been sent.

*I could not take it anymore, I had 20 [boys] against me. (...)
INT. Did the educators not intervene when you were beaten?*

² Types of punishment or treatment other than detention, i.e. probation, home arrest, therapeutic communities...



They did not show up, one of them even tried to make me sexual abuse. But that's something I can not do... it's stronger than me; sex is a strong thing, and I [cannot] get myself abused (...)

INT. So that place was dangerous...

Like a prison. (IT_28_PRI_M_20)

Another critical experience was told by an interviewee who - after one year and a half of community - was sent to live together with another boy described as “*crazy and out of mind, severely alcoholic*”. This made him desist from his rehabilitation path and come back home, which caused him more severe legal problems (IT_11_CS2_M_21).

Suggestions to prevent drug use among young people outside the CJS

Most of interviewees' suggestions to prevent drug use among young people are about **parents**. Many of them maintain that a lack of parents' attention and care is the real origin of a problematic drug use career. This is true for both Italian students and young immigrants living in more difficult situations, for instance there are those who blame their parents for having given them too much freedom - that of emigrating, for instance – and those who think that their parents should have noticed their consumption earlier.

I've been here for 3 years, [I've] talked to many boys... drugs, why they have done [used], why they do, even cocaine, heroin, pills, ecstasy, and crack. And the reason is they are not looked after by the family. (IT_25_PRI_M_20)

According to interviewees, parents should get their children to do **sports**, provide them with stimulus, keep their time busy (int. no. 20, 27, 29, 32) – though not too much, otherwise it could have the opposite effect (int. no. 27). Somebody underlined that being close to children is especially important during adolescence.

I think that when I'll have children, when he arrives at an age, I will start to stay with him more time, I'll bring him to the gym, I'll show him other things, I won't show him the life I did. (...) Then, when he will be 18, he will reason with his head, but if he does not start [using drugs] earlier, in my opinion he won't even start later on. (IT_03_CS1_M_23)

Likewise, parents should be present but not too oppressive, otherwise “*you have to escape from them for sure*” (int. no. 41). Get the children go to **school** is another important issue to interviewees, but this is not enough, because children should also be educated to understand the importance of it, and rewarded.

The fact that I did not want to go to school anymore, did not help me. When I sometimes got a good mark, they [my parents] could have told me: “Good, you were good!” while they did not tell me anything, they just told me it was my duty. It did not make me feel that important. I despised the school, although now I would do everything to start again the high school. (IT_41_CO_F_18)

Lastly, parents should pay attention to their sons and daughters' **friends**, though the interviewees recognised that it is difficult for teenagers to accept advice from adults (int. no. 15).

The emphasis on the key role of parents and acquaintances – in addition to the importance of having a **job**, as explained before - makes it evident that interviewees are conscious that the context matters more than any kind of preventive intervention traditionally offered. Not many of them remembered being provided with **information** at school. Furthermore, the usefulness of conferences is



questioned, in the face of the need to find new channels to communicate with young people. According to the interviewees, prevention should be provided by young people with personal experience of use (int. no. 5, 37, 39).

When they bring you to a conference against drugs, this is the stupidest thing the school could do (...). Surely the person who speaks knows what he is talking about, no doubt. But not having an experience behind... according to me, a boy of twenty, would obtain more... I mean ... I have been following a youtuber since he started making videos in 2006, his name's Yotobi (...) who made a video against bullying. (...) He has 1.100.000 followers (...) he can catch [the young people's attention] much more than a conference, because he's young, he's closer to our age. (IT_40_ALT_M_17).

Even more important, they think that demonizing drugs, can be counterproductive *“because if somebody has already used, knows something about, knows that who extremes the terror about drugs is not exactly true, so he cannot take it seriously”*. (IT_19_ALT_M_25)

Indeed many interviewees draw clear boundaries between cannabis and other drugs, and maintain that **cannabis legalization** could be an effective prevention tool, both because it would diminish the fascination linked to prohibition and because it would prevent young people from ending up in the CJS (int. no. 13, 19, 30, 38, 40). Furthermore, it would decrease the risk of smoking bad quality cannabis, “without paraffin and plastic” (int. no. 19).

It is worth mentioning that some interviewees faced with the question “What could be done to prevent drug use among young people” were cynical – it is not possible to do anything, because you can even buy it on the internet – and very critical towards the State, accused of not wanting to stop drug trafficking and the fight against organised crime (int. no. 2, 8, 33, 35)

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The collected data offer many insights to better understand how, in certain circumstances, drug use can become problematic and interwoven with crime. The heterogeneity of the sample shows how much more varied and complex this relationship between drugs and crime is, much more than the predominant hypothetical-deductive approach, in the past, suggested, by assuming that drugs are addictive and that addiction generates crime (Allen, 2007; Hunt and Barker 2001).

First, drugs cannot be considered as a whole. Many interviewees think that cannabis is healthy and should be legalised. On the contrary, crack, cocaine and heroin are represented as addictive, risky, and related to loss of control. Particularly crack cocaine is associated with an increase of crime, because of its disinhibiting and addictive power and the consequential need for money. However, many regular users did not report great difficulty in quitting, if the substance is not available, to the point of refusing substitution treatments. NPS are not much known nor appreciated, even among polyusers and experimenters. Only three interviewees had any experience with these kind of substances, all of them occasional.

Second, drug use needs to be contextualized (Hunt and Barker, 2001). Stories of immigrants without regular documents recall the fact that drugs also represent economic opportunities (Storr et al., 2004)



and that dealing can be a constrained choice, resulting from the lack of a legal job and income sources (MacDonalds and Marsh, 2001). At the same time, living a precarious life can increase drug use to cope with difficult material and social conditions.

On the other hand, stories of young Italian people with no economic problems and living in “ordinary” families show how the recreational use of cannabis is so normalised among young people (Williams and Parker 2001; Parker et al 2002), that even good students can easily end up underestimating the legal risks they run as consumers and above all as sellers. It seems that cannabis use and even dealing can assume positive meanings not only within specific subcultures (Lalander, 2003). So that a “normal” student, coming from a “normal” family and social context can also become the school dealer in order to reinforce his identity.

When considering the context of use, the family takes a prominent role. Our interviewees often indicated parents as the original cause of their pharmaceutical use of drugs that, later on, led to legal problems. Many interviewees blame their parents for not having been more present, more careful. Immigrants reproach parents because they let them go away, while sons of separated parents – very frequent in our sample - are angry with them because they were absent or because they place them in a second position compared to a new partner. Some family stories include mental illness and abuse, making the link between affective deprivation and problematic use of drugs even more evident.

On the other hand family support emerges as a key factor when facing legal problems. Some Italian interviewees coming from wealthy families are conscious of the importance of having the money to pay a good lawyer and to have a house to go to when on probation. Others, less fortunate, cannot access alternative measures because they are alone and without social networks, so even though they are young, they are in prison, many without even being tried yet. In this sense, our sample reflects the general Italian CJS situation, where immigrants are sent to custody in jail or to a reception community³ more frequently than Italian offenders.

Finally, our interviewees’ stories are informative about the lack of specific treatment and preventive measures addressed to young people within the CJS⁴. Even where these measures could be provided, there are some obstacles that mean they are underused or not always effective. The most important are:

- Many detainees do not declare themselves as drug users for fear of worsening their legal situation.
- Many detainees do not declare their drug use since they do not want substitution treatment or other prescription drugs such as sleeping pills or tranquillizers, which they think are worse than illegal drugs.
- To be taken in charge as such, detainees have to prove that they are users by providing proof from hair test which they may not be able to pay for.
- Most young people in alternative measures for crimes related to cannabis think that their penalty is not fair, since the use of cannabis is normalised and should be legalised.
- Different types of drugs are also available within the CJS.
- It is difficult not to use drugs again once released, if the original conditions that led to drug use are not changed (e.g. not having a job).

³ See WP4 Italian report.

⁴ See WP5 Italian first report.



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