Article

Narratives of Heroin Users in the Metro South in Cape Town, South Africa: A Subcultural Perspective

Dominique Caswell
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2715-2824
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Neil Henderson
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6566-5551
University of the Western Cape, South Africa
neilhenderson64@gmail.com

Maria Florence
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4854-7753
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Shakierah Booley
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8168-9978
University of the Western Cape, South Africa

Abstract

Heroin use in the Western Cape, South Africa, has grown exponentially over the last 10 years, more specifically in the Metro South of the Cape Metropole. The objective of this study was to qualitatively explore and explain the existence of a heroin subculture among people of colour in this particular district. The theoretical framework that underlies this study is subcultural theory. The study used snowball sampling with 15 participants (n = 15). In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants and transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed via a thematic analysis. Ethics considerations were adhered to. The findings indicated that the participants constructed a subculture in the Metro South, which allowed them to sustain their heroin usage. Dealers, vendors, and police officials contributed to maintaining this subculture. Recommendations suggest that alternative interventions be properly implemented so that the subculture could be dismantled, and that heroin users receive treatment and be reintegrated into society. Furthermore, social workers need to assume more responsibility in preventing heroin usage in the Metro South and other areas.

Keywords: heroin use, drug subculture, qualitative, people of colour

UNISA university of south africa PRESS

Southern African Journal of Social Work and Social Development
https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/SWPR/index
Volume 33 | Number 2 | 2021 | #8127 | 18 pages

https://doi.org/10.25159/2708-9355/8127
ISSN 2708-9355 (Online)

Introduction

The World Drug Report (2020) recorded an increase in substance use across the globe during 2018. A total of 269 million users were identified, making up 5.3 per cent of the world's population. Dada et al. (2019) report on trends in treatment centres across South Africa. Their latest report raises concern about the increased use of illicit substances and promulgates that the most commonly reported primary substances abused in the Western Cape were methamphetamine, cannabis, alcohol and heroin (Dada et al. 2019). Heroin is by far the most complicated to treat given the highly addictive nature of the drug and the treatment facilities' inability to manage heroin addiction (Harker et al. 2020).

Research focusing on substance use among young people of colour at community level is minimal (Peltzer and Phaswana-Mafuya 2018; Wechsberg et al. 2008). This population generally lacks access to treatment services, resulting in their not being accurately represented in the reports by the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU). Notwithstanding the under-representation, Dada et al. (2019) report that 71 per cent of users entering treatment for various forms of drug use are from communities of people of colour.

Since the late 1960s, a drug subculture has been observed in the USA, particularly with regard to the use of psychedelic drugs (Elcock 2015). The subculture is generally recognised as a barrier to recovery as it enhances the popularity of the drugs by imparting a greater significance to behaviour (Golub, Johnson, and Dunlap 2005). It develops out of the complexities of the drug experience. Studies argue that these complexities include poverty, unemployment, polydrug use, physical and psychological comorbidities, younger age, and involvement in crime (Marel et al. 2013; Nolan, Socias, and Wood 2018), all of which influence the dynamics around supporting each other to maintain the habit. Hughes (2007) describes the drug subculture as "ways of being with and for others". In these subcultures, peers produce and reproduce conditions for continued use. Schroeder et al. (2001) assert that if users do not break ties with drug-using associates in these subcultures, intervention attempts are frequently compromised.

The aim of this study was thus to qualitatively explore and explain the existence of a heroin subculture among people of colour in a selected district in the Cape Metropole. The interaction in the subculture, in addition to the availability of psychoactive substances, perpetuates and maintains the addictive pattern of heroin abuse in this community. Given the paucity of literature in this area in the South African context, it is necessary to further explore these dynamics.

Literature Review

Whereas stimulants such as cocaine increase alertness and energy, heroin is an opioid that is consumed to alter mood, manage pain and create a sense of euphoria. This is the preferred drug in underprivileged communities where it is used to numb feelings of

despair. As a psychoactive substance, it is reported to be one of the most addictive and harmful drugs known to man (World Drug Report 2020).

Heroin use started to take off in South Africa in the early 2000s (Parry, Plüddemann, and Myers 2005; Plüddemann et al. 2008). Less stringent border controls following the change of government after 1994 contributed to this increase (Lund and Hewana, cited in Ellis 2012). Advancements in telecommunication systems, infrastructure and transport routes have led to an increase in trafficking of narcotic substances such as heroin into South Africa (Haysom 2019; Haysom, Gastrow, and Shaw 2018).

The world market for recreational heroin consists of few producing countries (Afghanistan being responsible for 70%), relatively few trafficking countries, and many consuming countries (Meylakhs 2017). During the past five years, the prevalence of heroin use has markedly increased across South Africa owing to the country's position on what is known as the Southern Route, one of three routes from Afghanistan (Haysom, Gastrow, and Shaw 2018).

Harker et al. (2020) report a statistically significant increase in the use of different classes of heroin (heroin, nyaope, codeine) in treatment centres throughout South Africa between 2012 and 2017. Using data collected by SACENDU, they report that an average of 18 per cent of admissions used heroin in some form during this period.

The extent of heroin use is misunderstood in South Africa because reported rates are obscured by the different names and drug combinations (for example, "nyaope", "whoonga", and "unga") in different regions (Haysom 2019). The problem is thus not getting the attention it requires. Areas in which it is most prevalent rarely get media coverage. SACENDU reports that the use of nyaope or whoonga (low-grade heroin and other ingredients smoked with dagga) poses a serious problem across all regions of South Africa (Dada et al. 2019). The fact that it can be produced cheaply makes it accessible to the most disadvantaged communities. Since it is highly addictive, users have to find ways to maintain their habit, thereby sustaining demand (Khine and Mokwena 2016).

Heroin has become a salient substance in many communities of people of colour across Cape Town in the Western Cape. The Wynberg Central Business District (CBD) in the Metro South of the Western Cape in particular has become a hub of heroin activity, perpetuated by ever-present heroin dealers and the perceived inability of officials to arrest these criminals despite working closely with the South African Police Service (SAPS). Mokwena and Fernandes (2014) cite tacit acceptance by law enforcement as a major contributing factor to the use of heroin in many South African communities.

Moreover, current literature (Dada et al. 2015; Haysom 2019; Haysom, Gastrow, and Shaw 2018; Parry, Plüddemann, and Myers 2005; Plüddemann et al. 2008; Wells et al. 2018) tends to overlook the social dynamics in communities that perpetuate the use of

opioid-based substances, particularly among communities of colour. This significant gap in research is what guides the rationale of this study, a situation wherein people of colour using heroin congregate in the CBD of Wynberg. The context reveals a peculiar and relatively unexplored set of circumstances, wherein heroin users from different backgrounds, ages and religions form part of a subculture which can be observed forming a bond and a kinship, and which extends beyond just their affinity for heroin use.

The study is located within the subcultural framework which was first applied to drug use by Howard Becker in the 1960s (Becker 1997). In these subcultures, problem behaviour is a means of conforming to the norms of the subculture. The framework is often applied by sociologists and criminologists to understand the behaviours of gangsters and drug users (Micinski 2014).

Drug subcultures are communities in which drug users acquire a sense of belonging. Numerous studies report that heroin use is not initiated alone, but that the drugs are introduced by someone, supplied by someone, and that the users are modelling their use on someone in their circle (Callahan 2018; Callahan and Jason 2017; Moshier et al. 2012). Heroin use can thus only take place in a community. Because of the illicit nature of the drug, the community members work together to conceal their practices. This strengthens the bonds in the community while negatively affecting their bonds with all those who disapprove of these practices.

Many studies on drug users focus on individual risk factors surrounding drug use and recovery with little consideration for contextual risk. Subculture theory considers macro-level matters such as economics, social inequality and cultural values. Recent studies (Best, Irving, and Albertson 2016) are shifting their focus to recognising the influence of the surrounding environment. Callahan and Jason (2017) argue that heroin use and recovery follow different patterns to other drugs. They demonstrate very specific patterns, routines and activities among heroin users that lend themselves to environmental influences. Callahan (2018) argues that a more macro-level way of theorising is required when studying heroin users. This framework is particularly useful in the South African context in which there are still such large economic disparities. In our context, trading of illicit drugs is often considered a necessary means of survival for those with limited access to education and employment.

Moshier et al. (2012) discusses the four elements of a drug subculture. Firstly, alienation from mainstream society. Because there is often a stigma attached to substance use, users become alienated in a variety of ways, including homelessness, unemployment, and the lack of access to healthcare. Users also develop strong ties with other users. Because drug use is a social activity, the users' social network becomes mainly other users. They support each other in the processes of locating, purchasing and consuming the drugs. Their drug networks thus become their social support networks. Dunlap (2017) agrees that users in a subculture become dependent on each other for social

contact and validation. Users share excitement about elicit activity as they consider the users' lifestyle more exciting than the clean lifestyle. They also share a sense of mastery derived from deviant behaviour such as locating, purchasing and using illicit substances.

Methodology

Research Approach and Design

Qualitative research was deemed suitable for this study as the stories of heroin users and key informants in the Metro South allowed for thick descriptions (Creswell 2014) which are commensurate with a qualitative approach. Therefore, quantitative research would not have been appropriate as surveys or other quantitative data collection tools would have been obsolete in that research setting (predominantly on the street). The study employed an explorative and descriptive design. It was exploratory as it was investigating a problem that had not been explored in the past. Furthermore, it was descriptive as it was describing the way in which the participants were interactively dealing with heroin use in the Metro South.

Population and Sample

The population in this study consisted of heroin users from the Metro South. Thomas (2017) argues that the population means the total number of all possible individuals relating to a particular topic which could be included in the study. Snowball sampling was used to find participants (Thomas 2017). This was the most appropriate sampling technique as heroin users were able to share about other potential participants for the study. Purposive sampling (Creswell 2014) was used for the key role players (vendors and the SAPS). They were interviewed to triangulate the data. A total of 15 participants (n = 15) were interviewed (6 male and 6 female heroin users and 3 key informants). Inclusion criteria for the heroin users were the following: (a) they had to be heroin users, (b) they had to be aged between 20 and 35, (c) they had to operate in the Wynberg area of Metro South, and (d) they had to be people of colour.

The key informants were chosen because of their day-to-day interaction with the heroin users in Wynberg in the Metro South. They were well suited to offer insight into the widespread availability of heroin, its distribution, and, most importantly, to provide insight into the dynamics of heroin use in the area. The SAPS office is situated close to Wynberg in the Metro South and it was therefore required of the local SAPS official as a key informant to explain the role of law enforcement in relation to the use of heroin and the estimated number of heroin users in the area. The local business owners have a strong presence in the Wynberg CBD, having been in business in the area for many years and interacting daily with service users, even forging relatively close relationships with the heroin users.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by the first author using a semi-structured interview guide. A semi-structured guide mostly uses predetermined and open-ended questions (Creswell 2014) and allows for in-depth probing and clarification. A pilot study was undertaken to test the trustworthiness of the questions. There were minimal changes made and this interview was included as part of the data collection. The questions ranged from asking about the participants' early experiences of drug usage, their reasons for coming to the Metro South, to their relationships with dealers, vendors, police officials and other heroin users. The interviews were audio-recorded (predominantly in the researcher's car as there were challenges in finding a venue suitable for the participants owing to their nervous disposition) and took between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and the findings were stored in a password-protected computer.

Data Analysis

Once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher read and reread the texts to identify codes. These codes were keywords or phrases that were repeated. Themes or categories emerged from this process. It is key in an interpretive approach that meanings were constructed by the participants (heroin users and key informants) as identified by Thomas (2017). Interesting neologisms unique to heroin users in the Metro South emerged from the data. Construct mapping was used to make the connections between ideas and themes. Valid quotations were identified to illustrate these themes. A critical analysis of these quotes followed and a literature control was implemented. There was a need to search for more relevant literature once the themes were established. Thereafter, theory was embedded into the discussion to enhance the analysis.

Trustworthiness

To check the accuracy of the findings and to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell 2014), the researchers followed several approaches. Themes were established from different sources to triangulate the data. Thick descriptions were obtained from the participants which added to the credibility of the study. Reflexivity was employed to prevent researcher bias. The first author who was responsible for the data collection reflected on his race, culture and history in relation to the participants. This heightened confirmability. Finally, a long time was spent in the field to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell 2014), which also enhanced credibility.

Ethics Considerations

Before beginning the study, ethics clearance was obtained from the Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape and the Ethics Committee of the Provincial Department of Social Development. The first author

is a trained professional in the field of social work and was guided by the ethical requirements of the South African Council for Social Service Professions (2018).

The participants were informed that the following ethics guidelines would be in operation: (a) they had to give their informed consent for the study, (b) confidentiality and anonymity would be ensured (pseudonyms were employed for all participants), and (c) participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the research at any time. Thomas (2017) highlights the importance of dealing with potential risks. These include (a) causing psychological or physical harm to the participants, (b) infringing the privacy of the participants, (c) breaking the law, and (d) harming the community in some way. The first author knew these risks and made sure that a social worker at the Department of Social Development was available to debrief any of the participants. None of the participants requested any debriefing.

Findings

Before embarking on the main themes of the results, a demographic profile of participants (Table 1) outlines who the participants are. There is also a background to the key informants (Table 2).

Table 1: Demographic profile

Name*	**Age**	**Gender**	**Area of origin**	**Manner of using**	**Proximity to Wynberg (km)**
Alecia	26	Female	Steenberg	Smoking	11
Jamie	31	Female	Grassy Park	Smoking	8
Raymond	33	Male	Mitchells Plain	Smoking	26
Rafiq	28	Male	Lotus River/ Ottery	Injecting	9
Ayesha	30	Female	Lavender Hill	Smoking	12
Gadija	25	Female	Steenberg	Smoking	11
Lucian	27	Male	Heathfield	Smoking	5
Ivor	35	Male	Ottery	Injecting	9
Marvin	30	Male	Grassy Park	Smoking	8
Kelly	27	Female	Plumstead	Smoking	3
Devin	26	Male	Lansdowne	Smoking	5
Tamzyn	25	Female	Plumstead	Smoking	3

*All participants were given pseudonyms.

Table 2: Key informants

Name*	Age	Area	Information
Sergeant Pieters	53	Montagu's Gift	Sergeant Pieters has been working for the SAPS for 21 years and was transferred to the Wynberg SAPS office 10 years ago. Sergeant Pieters understands the dynamics in the area well, and has agreed to participate in the research; other police officials seemed reluctant to do so.
Mrs Dollie	57	Parkwood	Mrs Dollie is single parent who owns and operates as a fruit vendor. Mrs Dollie has been working in the area for 15 years. Mrs Dollie has a reputation of being kind to the heroin users in the area.
Mr Cassiem	62	Wynberg	Mr Cassiem has been working in the Wynberg area for 20 years operating as a fruit vendor. He says he has observed and engaged with the heroin users of the area often.

*All participants were given pseudonyms.

Several themes and subthemes emerged from the original study, but for the purposes of this article, the focus is on four themes about the development of a heroin subculture in the Metro South. The participants revealed the way in which they became involved in the subculture in the Metro South in Cape Town, highlighting first the transition from their family of origin to the subculture. Some said they left their families of their own accord, while others were "thrown out" owing to their heroin use. As they became involved in the drug subculture, the participants described the way in which three groups – dealers, vendors, and the police – played an important role in sustaining their heroin addiction.

The Transition to the Heroin-Using Subculture

The participants indicated that they had been living on the streets of the Wynberg CBD in the Metro South for many years as part of the subculture while their affinity for heroin use progressed. Some participants left their family homes of their own accord, while others were forced to leave because, according to them, their family could no longer cope with the stressors and their heroin-induced behaviour patterns. The participants felt stigmatised as their association with heroin increased, to the extent where they felt completely ostracised from their family, as Ayesha explained:

> Ok like my mother said like that she don't want to have nothing to do with me. I'm putting them in the eyes [embarrassing them].

Furthermore, the participants pointed out the way in which family members seemed to lose faith in them and their ability to recover from the influence of the substance, which made them feel excluded from their family. There was even a belief among some participants that their parents had accepted the fact that they had chosen to adopt a life of vagrancy and had therefore given up on them. For example:

> I mean my mother knows that I am living here and they have accepted that, because they don't want me at home, they can't cope with me at home . . . Well, many of us I can say comes from decent homes, you must believe that there are children of bosses living in Wynberg like 'bergies' [vagrants]. (Ivor)

It emerged that the participants found a sense of comfort and belonging in the subculture, which they were unable to find in their family of origin. This represented a form of support and a sense of belonging in which they could identify with one another in the subculture (Moshier et al. 2012). Moreover, the subculture community offered a sense of protection and "togetherness" free from the stigma which was so often perpetuated by family members (Schroeder, Kelley, and Fals-Stewart 2006), as highlighted by the following participants:

> And I notice that in Wynberg you become part of a family, and you become part of Wynberg so it's like a big clique. I think there is support amongst each other whether you realise it or not. (Ayesha)

> Eventually you know or you realise that you need the people, and the closest people to you here is the other 'joonkies' [heroin users] and let me tell you, everyone knows everyone. That's how much time we either with or around each other. (Devin)

Blackman (2014) opines that in a subculture, people typically group together because of shared beliefs, values, and behaviour. However, the participants in this study argued that they shared an even greater emotional connection to the subculture community, which some articulated as being more profound than just support and care, even suggesting a form of kinship. Jamie and Ayesha said:

> Ja, it's like in a strange way it's like, for me personally it's kinda like, it's kinda like a love, a strange love, man, but you feel as if that void is getting filled. (Jamie)

> You will be surprised like we will always say like we like sisters and brothers you know. (Ayesha)

When unpacking the narratives of the participants, it appears that the subculture was formed as a result of family breakdown or rejection from their own community. In this study, more than half of the sample indicated that they had been stigmatised (due to their use of heroin), often by members of their own family, friends, and even the broader community. The subculture community in the Metro South, therefore, seemingly compensated by filling the emotional void left by the family of origin and provided, among other things, a sense of belonging (Sarah and Leonard 2018).

Heroin Drug Dealers as Part of the Subculture

The study found that most heroin users perceived themselves to have established a bond with heroin dealers. Some participants stated that they were close friends with the dealers. For example, Alicia said:

> But I get a lot [of heroin], because me and two of the dealers actually, we like friends. But me and my boyfriend are friends with two of the dealers; we are like close.

The idea of an emotional connection was further reinforced by the participants suggesting that the dealers understood them, showed concern, and helped them in times of need:

> . . . they give you unga [heroin] out of the blue. If they see you like arosto [withdrawing] or something then they give you free. So when you withdrawing, they give you. (Devin)

> They even give us free heroin on Sunday [laughs]. Yes, you get from your dealer, from the supplier. (Ivor)

Participants Mina and Devin even showed empathy towards the non-South African dealers (who were mainly from Tanzania) selling the substance. In addition, they spoke about preferring non-South African dealers to dealers from their own racial groups:

> I don't think we can blame them for you know, selling, they come here also with nothing and are just trying to make a living. (Mina)

> Like for example the coloured dealers, they, they mix it man they mix it too much. Ja, because the coloured dealers mix the unga with tik and with buttons and we don't look for that, because it's gonna make you turkey gou [quick]. Where I am looking for the purist I can get and that is the bongos [non-South African dealers] stuff because they don't step on it too much. (Devin)

Heroin use generally transcends race and ethnic boundaries; however, the distribution of heroin tends to have a symbiotic relationship with areas representing urban decline and dealers actively seek out areas of urban degeneration to engage in the unlawful distribution of drugs (Draus, Roddy, and Greenwald 2012). It is therefore not uncommon for those users in a subculture to have strong social connections with the dealers who have immersed themselves in the subculture and share a commonalty in that they are conveniently and structurally segregated from mainstream society (Draus, Roddy, and Greenwald 2012).

The participants expressed a strong sense of support and care from the heroin dealers, especially as it relates to providing heroin to aid with their physical withdrawal symptoms. Although some participants recognised the transactional nature of the relationship, predicated on the respective need to sell and buy heroin, many participants construed this relationship as caring. This co-dependence helps to keep the subculture

going, as the dealers are part of a larger syndicate which ensures the constant supply of heroin to the area (Blackman 2014).

Vendors Enabling the Subculture

As in the case of the dealers, the participants also indicated that the vendors understood them and refrained from judgement, which was unlike the treatment that they received from their families. Some participants argued that the vendors provided a kind of emotional support (similarly to the dealers), akin to that of a father or a mother, in offering feelings of parental acceptance. Rafiq and Raymond explained the way in which they were given food and employment and trusted to work as labourers at the vendors' establishments or taxis. For example:

> So when I work for him [vendor], he understand heroin and that, so he know that I have to smoke, but he try to like keep me busy for most of the day, man. So he [the vendor] employed me actually to help me. But there is one broker that I worked for and he didn't employ me just to employ me, man. He always tried to help me man, come off it [heroin]. (Rafiq)

> Um, basically I work at the stands[fruit sellers] packing the stands and packing it out, looking after it at night and because the guy that I help at the robot, he leaves basically his whole stand by me, the gazebos, irons too, everything. He leaves it here in my care so obviously I sleep here in this place and I use the stands stuff to make me a little place, to cover for the wind and the rain. And in the morning I pack it out before he gets here, help him pack the stand when he gets here and then he gives me something. **(**Raymond)

The vendors, unwittingly, appear to be supporting Rafiq and Raymond's drug use. By employing Rafiq, the vendor is trying to help him. However, it is not clear whether Rafiq is using the money for drugs or for food or shelter. Raymond is being cared for by the vendor who is giving him shelter. Unfortunately, this action is sustaining the subculture as Raymond is able to be close to the dealers. Best, Irving, and Albertson (2016) argue that the environment plays a major role in sustaining the subculture.

In this context, the vendors appeared to harbour feelings of responsibility as outlined by Mrs Dollie, reminiscent of the philosophy of ubuntu (Mamanzi 2020) present in many African cultures:

> I don't know, but we all are coloured people, and you can see here that it's mostly coloured people using this unga [heroin]. Now I can't speak for all the brokers [vendors] here, but we help them because we feel sorry for them. At least if they work with us, they are not out there stealing and getting into 'shit'. (Mrs Dollie)

In communities of colour, there appears to be a sense of belonging which could be said to be a subcultural phenomenon. This may have developed through the forced removals during the apartheid era. Moshier et al. (2012) suggests that drug use is a social activity in which networks are formed. They add that users support one another in every aspect

of getting the drugs. From the vendors' vantage point, employing heroin users may be viewed as a form of harm reduction. Experts in the field of substance abuse would, however, argue that providing jobs to those afflicted, with a clear understanding of what the funds would be used for, could be considered a form of enabling or co-dependency (Doweiko 2008, 291–292).

Police Sustaining the Subculture

The participants described the way in which they were often harassed and arrested by police officials, while police officials were cooperating with drug dealers in the area. This apparent collaboration with drug dealers is sustaining the subculture. For example:

> The police go there and they drink there and they don't care. Some of the police is on the payroll there, I have seen that with my own eyes. (Rafiq)

One of the key informants, Mr Cassiem, seemed to support this view by suggesting that the police officials are aware of the dealers, but are inclined to rather arrest heroin users as they seem easier targets. For example:

> Let me tell you about their involvement man, you can't tell me that they know nothing, we see them. Did you see the police station; you know how far it is from here. But the police do "fokkol" [nothing], sorry for my language, they only pick up the addicts, to now show the people in the area that they are doing something. (Mr Cassiem)

Without proper policing, the SAPS is allowing the subculture to grow and expand. Corruption is prevalent in the SAPS and it appears as if the close relationship between police officials and dealers in the Metro South is to the benefit of both parties. Watt et al. (2014) support this view. They argue that police officials are working in collusion with drug dealers which increases the ability of the subculture to function.

One of the key informants, a police official from the Wynberg police station (part of the Metro South), Sergeant Pieters, seemed to agree that heroin use was widespread in the area, but offered a mixed message about why the subculture is continuing. On the one hand, he said there are many dealers, while on the other hand, he was not prepared to blame the police. For example:

> Look I'm not going to say anything that is going to get me into trouble, but I know that there is a lot . . . daar is sommer 'n moerse klomp [there are many] unga [heroin] dealers in die Wynberg. The only thing is we arrest them if we catch them. Sometimes you know them but you can't find the stuff [heroin] on them. Sometimes they swallow the stuff [heroin] and a lot of them died because they do that 'shit' [take drugs]. But me as a policeman I try, I know that they say some of us is . . . hoe sê 'n mens skelem [how does one say it – corrupt]. But that I can't say for me. (Sergeant Pieters)

When asked what made it so difficult for police officials to arrest drug dealers, Sergeant Pieters spoke of fear on the part of the police for their own safety. This is a shocking

admission that police safety comes first rather than catching criminals and adds to the belief that the subculture will continue. He explained:

> Look, you are also a civil servant, social worker – so you understand that things are not always like the public wanna, you know, see things. Like a lot of the times you find cops that are sometimes scared for their own safety, because if you arrest someone and hassle the guys, your life is in danger. I'm just saying you know. Like the big guys. This is the reality. So, you think first about your own self and safety and your family. (Sergeant Pieters)

The killing of many top police officials, such as the recently slain Charl Kinnear in the Western Cape (Thamm 2020) who actively investigated high level crime, certainly lends credence to Sergeant Pieters' concerns about the safety of police officials, which are rarely dealt with. However, this lack of commitment on the part of the police validates the subculture in the Metro South.

Discussion

In the first theme, the transition from family to the heroin subculture reflects on the breakdown of the family on the Cape Flats. Many of these heroin users come from dysfunctional families where there is an absent father or a single mother who is looking after the children. Furthermore, poverty and unemployment are rife. The participants spoke about being abandoned by their families. In subculture theory, Moshier et al. (2012) state that drug users become alienated from society, including their families, and this leads to homelessness. Some of the heroin users came from wealthy families, which suggests that wealthier communities are also prone to substance abuse. This is probably owing to the availability of the drugs. Since the end of apartheid and the dawning of democracy, the South African borders have become porous and drug syndicates and cartels have grabbed the opportunity to target the urban centres. This has led to a proliferation of heroin in the Metro South.

Other themes highlighted that dealers, vendors and police officials have contributed to sustaining the drug subculture. They have also played a role in becoming an alternative to the families of heroin users. The dealers need the heroin users, so they encourage them to become friends or even lovers. The vendors appear to care for the heroin users and try to stop them or offer them piecework which unfortunately allows for the subculture to flourish. The SAPS turn a blind eye to the subculture and may be benefiting financially to ensure their inactivity. Corruption is prevalent in the Government of South Africa with numerous court cases emerging from the Zondo Commission enquiry. This is likely to have filtered down to organs of power. Even though the theory on subculture suggests that heroin users become dependent on each other for support (Dunlap 2017), it is clear that in the Metro South they are depending on other support systems which include the SAPS.

Subculture theory speaks to the macro perspective of society (Callahan 2018). There are clear links between subculture theory and the themes that are stated in this article. However, the theory also talks about "deviant behaviour" which is not aligned with restorative justice that is the pillar of the justice system in South Africa. The heroin users are coming from a society in which restorative justice does not always prevail because of apartheid. Many of the participants' circumstances are challenging in that their families were forcibly removed to the Cape Flats during the apartheid era. Subculture theory does consider aspects such as economics, social inequality and cultural values (Moshier et al. 2012), but the theory is vague on political aspects which are key to understanding the way in which heroin use operates in South Africa.

This study thus makes a unique contribution to the literature in that it uses macro-level theorising by means of subculture theory to understand the dynamics around heroin use in a disadvantaged South African community. This perspective redresses a gap in South African literature. In the South African context there is a need to focus on the role of broader macro influences such as its political history as discussed above in the development of a subculture among heroin users.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, the participants described heroin use as being part of their everyday lives in the Metro South, largely enabled by the subculture. They spoke of the way in which they transitioned from their broken family life to a nurturing and sustaining subculture that involved vendors, dealers, and the police. Future research should explore social work preventive programmes and intervention with families of origin so reintegration can occur. Research could also focus on the way in which drug syndicates are establishing themselves in the Western Cape and why heroin usage is predominantly affecting people of colour.

References

Becker, Howard, S. 1997. *Outsiders: Studies in Sociology of Deviance*. New York: Free Press.

Best, David, Jamie Irving, and Kathy Albertson. 2016. "Recovery and Desistance: What the Emerging Recovery Movement in the Alcohol and Drug Area can Learn from Models of Desistance from Offending." *Addiction Research and Theory* 25 (1): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2016.1185661.

Blackman, Shane. 2014. "Sub-Culture Theory: An Historical and Contemporary Assessment of the Concept for Understanding Deviance." *Deviant Behaviour* 35 (6): 496–512. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2013.859049.

Callahan, Sarah L. 2018. "Contextual Perspectives on Heroin Addiction and Recovery: Classic and Contemporary Theories." *International Archives of Public Health and Community Medicine* 2 (1). https://doi.org/10.23937/iaphcm-2017/1710009.

Callahan, Sarah, and A. Leonard Jason. 2017. “A Novel Approach to Understanding a Recovering Persons’ Relationship Dynamics: Injection Heroin Users.” *Journal of Addictive Behavior and Therapy* 1 (2): 9.

Creswell, John W. 2014. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 4th ed. California: Sage.

Dada, Siphokazi, N. Harker Burnhams, Jodilee Erasmus, W. Lucas Charles Parry, A. Bhana, Sandra Pretorius, and R. Weimann Helen Keen. 2019. “Monitoring Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drug Abuse Treatment Admissions in South Africa.” *South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use* 1–68.

Dada, Siphokazi, Nadine Harker Burnhams, M. C. van Hout, and Charles Parry. 2015. “Codeine Misuse and Dependence in South Africa – Learning from Substance Abuse Treatment Admissions.” *South African Medical Journal* 105 (9): 776–9. https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJnew.8172.

Doweiko, Harold E. 2008. *Concepts of Chemical Dependency*. 7th ed. Wadsworth.

Draus, Paul, Juliette Roddy, and Mark Greenwald. 2012. “Heroin Mismatch in the Motor City: Addiction, Segregation and the Geography of Opportunity.” *Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse* 11 (2): 149–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332640.2012.675246.

Dunlap, Eloise. 2017. “Black Females: Drug Subculture Inner City, and Black Family Life.” *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Dependence* 5 (1): 1–5. https://doi.org/10.4172/2329-6488.1000256.

Elcock, Chris. 2015. “High New York: The Birth of a Psychedelic Sub-Culture in the American City.” PhD thesis, University of Saskatchewan.

Ellis, George F. R. 2012. *Substance Use and Abuse in South Africa Insights from Brain* and *Behavioural Sciences*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Golub, Andrew, Bruce Johnson, and Eloise Dunlap. 2005. “Subcultural Evolution and Illicit Drug Use.” *Addiction Research and Theory* 13 (3): 217–29. https://doi.org/10.1080/16066350500053497.

Harker, Nadine, Warren Covele Lucas, Ria Laubscher, Siphokazi Dada, Bronwyn Myers, and Charles D. H. Parry. 2020. “Is South Africa being Spared the Global Opioid Crisis? A Review of Trends in Drug Treatment Demand for Heroin, Nyaope and Codeine-Related Medicines in South Africa (2012–2017).” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 83: 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102839.

Haysom, Simone. 2019. “Hiding in Plain Sight: Heroin’s Stealthy Takeover of South Africa.” *Enhancing Africa’s Responses to Transnational Organised Crime* 7.

Haysom, Simone, Peter Gastrow, and Mark Shaw. 2018. “The Heroin Coast: A Political Economy along East African Seaboard.” *Enhancing Africa’s responses to transnational organised crime* 4.

Hughes, Kahryn. 2007. “Migrating Identities: The Relational Constitution of Drug Use and Addiction.” *Sociology of Health and Illness* 29 (5): 673–691. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2007.01018.x.

Khine, Aye Aye, and Kedibone Elizabeth Mokwena. 2016. “Drug Interactions in the Constituents of Street Drug Mixture ‘Nyaope’ in South Africa: A Mini-Review.” *African Journal and Alcohol Studies* 15 (2): 91–101.

Mamanzi, Vuyisa. 2020. “Ubuntu and Solidarity in Times of Covid-19: Challenges and Contradictions as Communities Grapple with Ways of Being and Doing during a Pandemic.” *Centre for Sexualities Aids and Gender*.

Marel, Christina, Katherine L. Mills, Shane Drake, Joanne Ross, Tim Slade, Lucy Burns, and Maree Teesson. 2013. “Static and Dynamic Predictors of Criminal Involvement among People with Heroin Dependence: Findings from a 3-Year Longitudinal Study.” *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 133: 600–605. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2013.08.003.

Meylakhs, Pete. 2017. “The Current State of the World Heroin Markets.” In *Dual Markets*, edited by E. Savona, M. Kleiman, and F. Calderoni. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65361-7_2.

Micinski, Nathan J. 2014. “Simulated Sessions: Cannabis (Sub) Culture, the Subcultural Repository, and Networked Mediation.” PhD dissertation, Bowling Green State University.

Mokwena, Kebogile Elizabeth, and Lucy Fernandes. 2014. “Exploring the Role of External Locus of Control in the Use of Nyaope: A Qualitative Enquiry.” *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies* 28 (1): 41–50.

Moshier, Samantha J., R. Kathryn McHugh, Amanda W. Calkins, Bridget A. Hearon, Anthony J. Rosellini, Meara L. Weitzman, and Michael W. Otto. 2012. “The Role of Perceived Belongingness to a Drug Subculture among Opioid-Dependent Patients.” *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 26 (4): 812. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029107.

Nolan, Seonaide, Maria Eugenia Socias, and Evan Wood. 2018. “The Threat of an International Opioid Crisis.” *Current Addiction Reports* 5: 473–7. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429-018-0231-x.

Parry, Charles H. D., Andreas Plüddemann, and Bronwyn J. Myers. 2005. “Heroin Treatment Demand in South Africa: Trends from Two Large Metropolitan Sites (January 1997–December 2003).” *Drug and Alcohol Review* 24 (5): 419–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/09595230500290841.

Peltzer, Karl, and Nancy Phaswana-Mafuya. 2018. “Drug Use among Youth and Adults in a Population-Based Survey in South Africa.” *South African Journal of Psychiatry* 24 (40): 1–6. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajpsychiatry.v24i0.1139.

Plüddemann, Andreas, Charles D. H. Parry, Alan J. Flisher, and Esmé Jordaan. 2008. “Heroin Users in Cape Town, South Africa: Injecting Practices, HIV-Related Risk Behaviors, and other Health Consequences.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 40 (3): 273–9.

Sarah, L., and C. Leonard. 2018. “Relevant Perspectives on Heroin Addiction and Recovery: Classic and Contemporary.” *International Archives of Public Health and Community Medicine* 2 (1): 47–61. https://doi.org/10.23937/iaphcm-2017/1710009.

Schroeder, Jennifer, Carl Latkin, Donald Hoover, Aaron Curry, Amy Knowlton, and David Celentano. 2001. “Illicit Drug Use in One’s Social Network and in One’s Neighborhood Predicts Individual Heroin and Cocaine Use.” *Network, Neighbourhood and Drug Use* 11 (6): 389–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1047-2797(01)00225-3.

Schroeder, Valarie B. S., Michelle L. Kelley, and William Fals-Stewart. 2006. “Effects of Parental Substance Abuse on Youth in Their Homes.” *Prevention Researcher* 13 (4): 10–14. https://doi.org/10.1037/e568982006-003.

South African Council for Social Service Professions. 2018. *Policy Guidelines for Course of Conduct, Code of Ethics and the Rules for Social Workers*. Accessed 21 June 2021. https://socialdev.mandela.ac.za/socialdev/media/Store/documents/SACSSP-Code-of-Ethics.pdf.

Thamm, Marianne, “SAPS Policy is Clear: Murdered Anti-Gang Unit Commander Charl Kinnear more than Qualified for Police Protection.” *Daily Maverick*, 2 October 2020.

Thomas, Gary. 2017. *How to Do Your Research Project: A Guide for Students*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.

Watt, Melissa H., Christina S. Meade, Stephen Kimani, Jessica C. MacFarlane, Karmel W. Choi, Donald Skinner, Desiree Pieterse, Seth C. Kalichman, and Kathleen J. Sikkema. 2014. “The Impact of Methamphetamine (“Tik”) on a Peri-Urban Community in Cape Town, South Africa.” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 25 (2): 25–219. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2013.10.007.

Wechsberg, Wendy M., Winnie K. Luseno, Rhonda S. Karg, Siobhan Young, Nathaniel Rodman, Bronwyn Myers, and Charles D. H. Parry. 2008. “Alcohol, Cannabis, and Methamphetamine Use and other Risk Behaviours among Black and Coloured South African Women: A Small Randomized Trial in the Western Cape.” *International Journal of Drug Policy* 19 (2): 1309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2007.11.018.

Wells, John, Michael Bergin, Marie Claire van Hout, Pádraig McGuinness, Jaco De Pleissisc, Eileen Rich, Siphokazi Dada, Richard Wells, and Martina Gooney. 2018. “Purchasing Over the Counter (OTC) Medicinal Products Containing Codeine – Easy Access, Advertising, Misuse and Perceptions of Medicinal Risk.” *Journal of Pharmaceutical Science* 21: 286–95. https://doi.org/10.18433/jpps30049.

World Drug Report. 2020. “United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).” Accessed 21 June 2021. https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/index2020.html.