Urban crack users in The Netherlands: Prevalence, characteristics, criminality and potential for new treatments

Oteo Pérez, A.

Citation for published version (APA):
Acknowledgements
The elaboration of this thesis has been a challenging and laborious process but it has also been one of the most enriching and personally rewarding experiences I have ever had. I can only associate this accomplishment with all of the incredible people that have shared hours, months or years by my side, and I regret not being able to name all of them in a few pages, but they contributed to it through professional, personal, intellectual or simply human attentions.

Firstly I would like to thank my thesis director Dirk Korf for trusting a Spaniard who had just arrived in the Netherlands and who could then barely speak Dutch. For some reason, you thought that I was the right person to carry out this research. You gave me the opportunity to investigate and learn more from this topic that I am passionate about and to learn from you. I am very thankful for you making the time in your busy agenda for our long discussions and for always making me see that things were doable when I was seeing obstacles.

I also want to thank my thesis co-director Vincent Hendriks for tutoring my project and contributing with his knowledge in the area of drugs research. Discussing the project with you has always been a pleasant experience that kept me being curious to learn more.

Furthermore, to Peter Blanken from Parnassia, Wim van den Brink from AMC, and Annemieke Benschop from the Bonger Institute, who have been part of this project since its creation, thank you for all your helpful advice and input on the research and related publications. I have learned a lot from you and I’m very proud to have worked with such outstanding researchers in the field of drug use.

A special thank you goes to my fieldwork partner Petra Houwing. The unstoppable and fierce woman I could always count on to go out in the street and identify, approach and talk to crack users. At any time of the day, no matter how much ice was on the streets, or how rainy or cold it was, we would hop on our "vouwfietsen" and go to any corner of the city for an interview. There were also sunny days, and we would have our catch-up meetings while walking (or even cycling) through a park or over a “broodje tempeh”. You really have a gift for dealing with people in need, but also for managing aggressiveness and bad manners without losing your cool. I think it comes from your huge generosity and caring for the people you work with and I have learned a lot of this from you.

To my colleagues at the Bonger Institute, thank you so much for having been a source of support and inspiration to me. Marije, Ton, Danielle, Jennifer, and the talented stagiers, you have been of great help by providing feedback on my work, exchanging insights at the seminars, and by sharing with me your experiences and the evolution of your excellent work. I have enjoyed so much the walks outside for lunch around the Waalen with the team, our routine that led us to learn about each other and to always have a laugh.

A special mention goes to my “office roommates” Nienke and Rafaela. We have spent so many hours together, sharing our worries and joys inside and outside of our projects that you understand better than anyone what the elaboration of this thesis has been for me. We have shared tough phases such as overcoming the rejection of a paper, passing deadlines and difficulties in our personal lives but also many great moments like completing field data collection, publishing our first papers, your thesis defence and now mine...even Nienke’s first baby! It has been a real pleasure to mature and share with you all these years.
From all of the many people that have collaborated with this project and to whom I feel a great gratitude, I would like to particularly thank Marcel Buster from GG&GD, Filip Smit from the Trimbos Institute, and Maarten Cruyff and Peter van der Heijden from the University of Utrecht, for their advice on the methodology of prevalence estimates and for always being available to answer my questions. I would also like to thank Lisa Johnston and Jean Paul Grund for their valuable lessons on respondent-driven sampling as well as Jane Mounteney from the EMCDDA for her critical review of the introduction and conclusions of this thesis.

Moreover, I would like to express my great appreciation for everybody at GG&GD, Jellinek, Bouman GGZ, Brijder/Parnassia, de Regenboog Groep, HVO-Querido, CVD, MDHG and at all other institutions working with drug users and homeless people that generously allowed us to conduct our research in their premises, lending us rooms for our interviews and granting us access to their clients. I especially want to thank the staff of Blaka Watra from the Regenboog Groep, where I spent many days observing the behaviours of drug users. On top of allowing me to see the good work that is being done in the center, you allowed me to get in touch with the world of crack users.

I also want to thank all of the people who have participated as respondents in my research. It has been over one thousand personal stories that we have looked into and each one has made an impression on me. Spending time in the streets, care facilities and the homes of drug users has provided me with a knowledge that no paper or statistic can ever provide. For this I thank those who trusted me to have a privileged insight of their lives and the multifaceted reality of drug use.

To Felipe Medrano, a talented artist whose work I admire, I always wanted to have one of your pieces, so what better way than you having done the art work for the cover of this thesis.

To my friends in Amsterdam, you have been like a family for me and you were my rock in the good and the bad moments. You made Amsterdam my home and gave me a reason to go forward. To Eloy, Guiomar, Victor 1, 2 and 3, Rupin, Shravan, Arthur, Mariska, and all of my other friends, thank you.

I would like to thank my family. To my mother, Lola, you have supported me unconditionally in every decision, no matter how random or risky it could seem at first. Even though it was hard to live at a distance for a long period, you backed my decision to move to the Netherlands and pursue this adventure. I also want to thank my brother Alfonso and my sister Ana, who also have always been there for me when I needed them.

Last but not least, my sweet Olga, I want to thank you for staying by my side and being my source of motivation. You make me believe in myself and become a better me. You help me to stay focused and to take smarter decisions. You have helped me to get organised, take responsibility and meet my deadlines so I could finish this thesis. I am so lucky to have you in my life and I can’t wait to close this cycle so I can spend more time with you.