

PROCESS OF INTEGRATING ADOLESCENTS INTO DRUG DISTRIBUTION AND SALES NETWORKS. CASE STUDY IN ABIDJAN

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Abstract: The objective of the study is to analyse the causes of the integration of adolescents into various drug distribution and sales networks in the area of the city of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. Young people are looking for survival strategies from a young age, aiming at the same time to integrate socially and to be accepted by peer groups or mature people. The field research focused on a theoretical sample of 61 young people and questionnaires and interview guides were applied to them. From the field research we were able to ascertain the extent of criminal activities within the drug distribution networks. All these realities start from the economic and social difficulties these young people face, actually reaching social exclusion. For my part, social exclusion becomes a strong reason to trigger the revolt of these young people in a situation of social vulnerability.

Keywords: Integration, networks, drug distribution and sale, marginality, crime, social exclusion, dysfunctional family.

Résumé : L'objectif de l'étude est d'analyser les causes de l'intégration des adolescents dans les différents réseaux de distribution et de vente de médicaments dans la zone de la ville d'Abidjan en Côte d'Ivoire. Les jeunes recherchent des stratégies de survie dès leur plus jeune âge, visant à la fois à s'intégrer socialement et à se faire accepter par des groupes de pairs ou des personnes matures. La recherche de terrain a porté sur un échantillon théorique de 61 jeunes et des questionnaires et guides d'entretien leur ont été appliqués. À partir de la recherche sur le terrain, nous avons pu déterminer l'étendue des activités criminelles au sein des réseaux de distribution de drogue. Toutes ces réalités partent des difficultés économiques et sociales auxquelles ces jeunes sont confrontés, atteignant même l'exclusion sociale. Pour ma part, l'exclusion sociale devient un motif fort pour déclencher la révolte de ces jeunes en situation de vulnérabilité sociale.

Mots clés : Intégration, réseaux, distribution et vente de drogue, marginalité, criminalité, exclusion sociale, famille dysfonctionnelle.

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Rezumat: Obiectivul studiului este de a analiza cauzele integrării adolescenților în diverse rețele de distribuție și vânzare de droguri în zona orașului Abidjan din Coasta de Fildeș. Tinerii caută încă de la vârste mici strategii de supraviețuire urmărind în același timp să se integreze social și să fie acceptați de grupurile de egali sau de către persoanele mature. Cercetarea de teren s-a concentrat pe un eșantion teoretic de 61 de tineri iar acestora li s-au aplicat chestionare și ghiduri de interviu. Din cercetarea de teren am putut constata amploarea activităților delincvente din cadrul rețelelor de distribuție a drogurilor. Toate aceste realități pleacă de la dificultățile economice și sociale de care se lovesc acești tineri ajungându-se de fapt la excludere socială. La rândul ei excluderea socială devine un motiv puternic pentru a se declanșa revolta acestor tineri aflați în situație de vulnerabilitate socială.

Cuvinte cheie: Integrare, rețele, distribuție și vânzare de droguri, marginalitate, criminalitate, excluziune socială, familie disfuncțională.

1. Introduction

The issue of drug trafficking among adolescents is the subject of multidisciplinary research in the scientific world. Proof of this is the North American school that produces abundant literature on drug trafficking. For this school, the fragility of legal norms is put explains the trajectories of drug use and trafficking among adolescents (Cousineau et al., 2000; Bertrand et al, 2007). This weakness in legal standards is a factor in the integration and reinforcement of the trafficking of adolescents in drugs since family dissensions are triggers for drug use or trafficking. In addition, it is the family environment that plays an important role in the conduct of social deviance, Tremblay et al., (2007). Other factors such as family crises, disunions between parents, and siblings, death of parents, and blended and single-parent family environments lead to the adoption of problematic drug trafficking and use behaviours (Barnes, 1986; Schiray, 2001; Kroubo, 2013; Youf, 2012). Socio-environmental, economic, political and institutional factors are highlighted as triggers for drug use and trafficking among adolescents.

For example, Cusson (1998) notes that gang and drug addiction have a common causality. According to him, most habitual offenders take drugs and most of the addicts known to the specialized services have committed shoplifting, burglary, robbery and other assault. The author believes that both drug addicts and offenders come from disorganized families, both of whom have had to endure irresponsible parents, deviant peers, frequent school misses and poor academic performance. In addition to the literature on the explanatory factors of delinquency and drug addiction, other studies have focused specifically on the relationship that may exist between drug use and the development of delinquency. Matray (2013) credits the drug market with a prominent role in the evolution of gangs. According to him, gang dynamics have changed in response to their ambivalent relationship with drugs. Initially, drug users and gangs have moved from social institutions to primarily economic structures. Violence would then have become a transactional tool in the service of drug-related profit. This evolution of the place of drugs in gang activities is a factor explaining the rise in violence, not related to drug use but to the struggle for control of the trafficking market describes the involvement of

gang members in drug trafficking, noting the place of gang members (trafficking) in all gang activities. The author notes that involvement in the sale of narcotics is not a mandatory activity inherent in gang membership. However, she is present in the gang and represents an important source of income for those who take part. Moreover, for the author, the sale of drugs as a criminal activity of gangs is equally accompanied by drug use. Duprez & Kokoreff (2000) observed that the nature, degree and forms of the link between drugs and delinquency are strongly differentiated according to the products. While most small cannabis users are supposed to participate in resale activities, in addition to engaging in public disorder, heroin users, sometimes touts or dealers, more often sellers, are forced to finance their consumption to daily delinquency. It is in this context that Barre et al. (2001) analysed the differences between users (simple users, user-dealer, user-offender, user-dealer-offender) and offenders (seller, seller-delinquent, simple offender) to verify whether, on average, users have more implications, for delinquency than non-users, and on the other hand, what is the weight of the accusations concerning users in all the accused. The author observes that users-offenders represent 14% of the population and 28% of those involved. It concluded that offenders were low drug users and that drug-using offenders were more likely to be delinquent than non-users. In light of the analysis of police activity data, the author believes that the thesis that drug users are more often delinquents would be confirmed.

Cohen et al. (1999) seek to be more specific by surveying the relationship between delinquency and drug use, to examine the more direct effects of drug use in the vicinity of the time of the commission of the offence. The analyses covered arrests relating to offences against the person (murder, homicide, rape, aggravated and simple assault), acquisitive offences (robbery with violence and burglary), theft and property offences (vehicle theft, fraud, concealment), drug offences (possession, production, trafficking) and public order offences (prostitution, gambling, nuisance) as well as the results of heroin screening tests, cocaine and phencyclidine (PCP). The data estimate crimes committed at various times, including when people are under the influence and when they are sober. The main results show that heroin and cocaine have mainly inhibitory effects on delinquency. Cessation periods with withdrawal symptoms for users of cocaine and mainly in the form of crack cocaine have aggravating effects on acquisitive delinquency. PCP is the drug that has the greatest aggravating effects on delinquent behaviour, including violent offences. Prevalence studies suggest a link between substance use and violence, particularly among young people. Indeed, numerous studies conducted with a youth population known to have committed acts of violence have reported high rates of drug use among these young people. Conversely, studies of young consumers have also indicated that they are regularly involved in situations of violence.

Other studies focusing on specific subpopulations of youth have found that substance use and violent behaviour are frequently recorded in the same individuals (Cousineau et al., 2000). Continuing this logic, a study by Ellickson et

al. (1997) indicates that adolescents known to have committed violent acts were ten times more likely to be involved in drug trafficking than those who did not have a history of violence. For perpetrators, the greater and more repeated the violence, the greater the involvement in the sale of drugs. So there seems to be some link between these two activities. This link is even more pronounced in certain subgroups of individuals. The leaders of these illegal groups, wanting to maintain their reputation with their colleagues and their company in a defined territory, have every interest in surrounding themselves with strong people with fiery temperaments who do not hesitate to institute a regime of terror when it can serve the causes of the company (Brochu, 2006).

Conceptual models are likely to be used to explain the simultaneous presence of violence and drug use in several individuals. The most classic and developed is the tripartite model developed by Goldstein (1985). This model is based on the different aspects of the role of drugs in the criminal act: the psychopharmacological aspect or the role of intoxication, the economic-compulsive aspect or the role of dependence and the systemic aspect of the role of illicit drug distribution. Based, among other things, on the high prevalence rates of psychoactive substance use reported by individuals who committed violent acts in the hours preceding the assault, the psychopharmacological model postulates that there is a causal relationship between psychoactive substance use and violence. The nature of this relationship lies in the effect that the product consumed has on the individual. This effect is at the origin of the criminal act that would not have taken place otherwise.

As for the European School, the studies show that the weakening of social ties promotes social exclusion. Social disqualification and disaffiliation are thus considered by the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs to have a direct link with dissociability. In this perspective, drug trafficking and use are the expressions of survival of a (socio-economic) reality considered too difficult (Dubar, 2010).

In Côte d'Ivoire, some authors such as (Brou, 2005; article BBC, 2021) focus on the circulation of drugs, the disintegration of habitats, and family and institutional factors as a factor in drug use and trafficking. This juvenile drug trafficking highlights two dimensions of trafficking. The first dimension places the adolescent in the position of the object of trafficking. Here, the individual is the applicant, that is to say, a drug user. The second dimension presents the individual as the subject of trafficking. It is the individual who possesses, transports, distributes or sells the drug. It is two dimensions that highlight the circulation and marketing of drugs.

This phenomenon is a real endemic not only because of the quality of the population of individual users but especially because of seizures and the presence of smoking rooms in the majority of Abidjan municipalities and cities in the interior are of concern. According to the Interministerial Committee for the Fight against Drugs (CNAD 2011), 2891 individuals, including 1974 Ivorians, or 68.28% and 917 of other nationalities, or 31.72% were referred. Among them are 59% young people (15-35 years old with a predominance of young people aged between 15-18

years) at the national level. According to current statistical data from the Blue Cross (2012-2017), 80% of drug-dependent patients are between 10 and 17 years old. According to the Directorate of the Police of Narcotics and Drugs, in 2014, 1466 individual drug users including 440 young people or 30% of young people aged 20 and 15 years were arrested. With regard to the *Direction de la mutualité et des œuvres scolaires* (DMOS) (2016-2017), there is a presence of young traffickers and drug users in the majority of schools in Abidjan; San-pédro; Abengourou etc. The average age of the pupils concerned is 15 years, which is worrying for the future of these young people.

From the above, it should be noted that most young people who are involved in drug distribution and sales have themselves been victims of violence and social exclusion. Beyond this fact, cultural factors are evoked in the explanation of the emergence and expression of violence. These are the loss of identity or cultural alienation, the lack of respect and recognition of cultural specificity and especially religious ones, socio-economic inequalities. The appearance of the phenomenon is therefore linked to several causes, the first of which is the failure of the basic (family) framework. The family unit is the first circle within which the child's life unfolds. However, in the case of adolescents who join drug distribution and sales networks, it is clear that their homes of origin are unable to provide them with adequate supervision. Thus, socio-political conflicts with their perverse effects offer young people the opportunity to strengthen their capacity for harm and accentuate their immorality (Essis, 2007).

Several studies have been done on the link between drugs and crime. This previous work has led to a better understanding of the phenomenon and to establish a relationship between drug use and delinquency. However, these studies tell us less about the link between the integration process of adolescents and the difficulties encountered during their life trajectories. Indeed, even if these writings evoke the drug-crime relationship in a global context, it should be noted that the relationships maintained by adolescents integrating drug networks in an Ivorian context are not taken into account by previous work. The phenomenon of drug integration and distribution among adolescents is subject to a perfect organization that follows a path that begins with the drug and ends there. What is the relationship between the process of drug integration and distribution and the social context experienced?

2. Objective and hypothesis

The objective of this study is to understand the ends, and the means of marginal activities according to the social contexts experienced. To achieve this objective, the following hypothesis has been formulated: about their experiences, the integration or drug distribution behaviours adopted by adolescents in urban areas are variously the expression of intentions sought such as the search for means for survival, proof of the capacity for domination and acceptance by others as well as revenge.

3. Reference theory

We have favoured the theory of social exclusion (Merton, 1938). According to this theory, social exclusion is perceived as a profound mark of dysfunction in society, taking a multiplicity of forms and characterized by a temporal process. For example, early family breakdown and childhood abuse frequently lead to social exclusion. This is why it is better to talk and reflect on social exclusion in the plural.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Field of study, Survey population and survey sample

Our investigation was conducted in the REMAR (Rehabilitation of Marginals) centres in Abidjan. The choice of this centre is explained by its mission to provide psychosocial care through rehabilitation or rehabilitation and reorientation of individual drug addicts. At REMAR, some teenagers use drugs and supervisors, many of whom are former users. For us, former users and young users have frequented trafficking networks and drug use. With them, we believe we can obtain answers related to the process of integration of trafficking and consumption networks, especially through the triggers and motivations of adolescents. The study population was composed of adolescents aged between 10 and 21 years chosen using the reasoned choice sampling technique supplemented by the quota method. The adolescents selected for the study should all be volunteers, and therefore, give their consent to participate in the study. Thus, our sample consists of 61 teenagers.

4.2. Research Methods, Collection Techniques and Data Analysis Methods

The present research included two approaches: quantitative and qualitative (see Cresswell & Plano, 2011). To these we added the content analysis. Considering the novelty of the studied theme, we decided that the quantitative analysis should be primarily descriptive and that we use contingency tests where appropriate. If we refer to the qualitative part of the research, we extracted from the interviews a series of answers that we considered relevant and we also resorted to the analysis of some personal files (the purpose being to decipher the discourse structures which in many cases were difficult to decrypt). In all situations, the interviewed persons signed a protocol ensuring the confidentiality of their answers and no personal data, e-mail addresses, etc. were requested. Data processing was done with Microsoft Excel and SPSS (version 20).

5. Research results

The results of the field survey revolve around the description of the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks. And then the analysis of the causes of integration about the social conditions experienced.

5.1. Description of the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks

This description presents a similar socio-demographic profile that takes into account age, age of entry into violence, level of education, nature of entry into the drug distribution network, and adolescents' perception of the offending guardian within the drug distribution network.

Table 1. Distribution of adolescents surveyed by age group

Age categories	Frequency	Per cent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
[8-12 [years	1	1.6	1.7	1.7
[12-15 [years	12	19.7	20	21.7
[15-18 [years	38	62.3	63.3	85.0
[18-21 [years	9	14.8	15	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing system	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

Taking into account the methodological limitations related to the mode of choice of this sample of adolescents/young people integrating drug distribution networks, such a table suggests that individuals whose age varies between 12 and 18 years constitute 82% of adolescents involved in the distribution and sale of drugs. This means that beyond this age, we can wonder what becomes of them in society. Do they integrate into society professionally, or become chronic or even careerist offenders? Although the age group between 12 and 18 years of age constitute the modal class of adolescents involved in drug distribution networks, it becomes important to know the age of entry of adolescents into the world of violence visible in **Table 2**:

Table 2. Age of entry into the world of violence

Age categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
[5-12[years	2	3.3	3.3	3.3
[12-15[years	40	65.6	65.6	68.9
[15-18[years	19	31.1	31.1	100
Total	61	100	100	

The statistical distribution indicates that the adolescents from our sample - involved in drug distribution and sales networks - have experienced entrance in this violent environment in a great proportion between the ages of 12 and 15. This proportion represents 65.6% of the distribution. Based on the data contained in the statistical table, it can be assumed that 96.77% of adolescents have experienced a violent environment between the ages of 12 and 17. This reflects the early onset of

violence among adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks. What about their level of education? The results are in the next table:

Table 3. Distribution of adolescents by educational level

Level of education	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Illiterate	6	9.8	10	10
Primary School	30	49.2	50	60
Lower secondary school (Grades 7-9)	10	16.4	16.7	76.7
Upper secondary school (Grades 10-12)	3	4.9	5	81.7
Quranic school	11	18	18.3	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing system	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

Regarding their level of education, it should be noted that most young people reported not completing primary education (49.2%), while 21.3% said they had interrupted their education in the secondary cycle (4th and 3rd grades). 9.8% are illiterate and 18.0% have attended Quranic school. The analysis of Table 3 shows that the majority of adolescents who are members of drug distribution networks, 70.5% have received education during their life course, while only 27.8% have not received or have not been educated. Among this group of students, those enrolled in the first cycle of secondary education 16.4% are more involved than those in the second cycle of secondary education (4.9%). Our observations based on these results led us to investigate the nature of the entry of adolescents into drug distribution networks. This reality allows for the tracing of the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks.

Table 4. Nature of entry into the drug distribution network.

Who introduced you to the network?	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Myself	19	31,1	31,1	31,1
A friend	41	67,2	67,2	98,4
Brother	1	1,6	1,6	100,0
Total	61	100,0	100,0	

The process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks informs us about the nature of adolescents' entry into these networks. The distribution clearly shows that (41: 67.2%) of adolescents have joined drug distribution and sales networks through a „friend”. These adolescents represent more than half of the distribution. The analysis of this reality raises questions about the immediate environment of the adolescent that is dominated by marginal peers whom they present here as their friends. This leads us to question the living environment of adolescents involved in drug sales and distribution networks, as follows:

Table 5. Housing type of adolescents involved in drug sales and distribution networks.

Type of housing	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Shared courtyard	49	80.3	81.7	81.7
Villa	1	1.6	1.7	83.3
Block of flats/Terraced houses	10	16.4	16.7	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing System	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

Based on the distribution, it appears that over half of the adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks live in communal⁴ courtyards, with a score of (49: 80.3%). These are precisely the types of housing with the highest human concentration (6-9 people or more), in the smallest and most unsanitary spaces. Such precarious housing types with high human concentration tend to push the young people who live in them towards the streets. On the streets, exposed to various dangers and risks, they often have no choice for self-defence and survival other than resorting to violent behaviour. Regarding the neighbourhood of origin, the situation is presented in the next Table:

Table 6. Place of origin of adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks.

Neighbourhood of origin	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Residential neighbourhood	2	3.3	3.3	3.3
Low-income/popular neighbourhood	13	21.3	21.7	25
Spontaneous/precarious neighbourhood	44	72.1	73.3	98.3
Reception centre	1	1.6	1.7	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing system	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

The neighbourhoods of origin of these young people are as follows: spontaneous/precarious neighbourhood (44: 72.1%), popular-economic neighbourhood (13: 21.3%), residential neighbourhood (2: 3.3%), and reception centre (1: 1.6%). These figures show that the concentration of those involved in drug distribution and sales networks is in the most populated neighbourhoods. However, although it is noted that high-end residential areas are hardly represented, it is more the typology of housing that is the most operative factor for analysing the municipalities of Abidjan from this point of view. Thus, the hypothesis is put forward that the most rudimentary habitats were the neighbourhoods of origin of undereducated, idle, and marginalized youth.

⁴ The urban courtyard is often defined as a habitat that reproduces the organization of the village space: the buildings are organized around a central courtyard where most of the daily activities take place.

This reality deserves special attention because within these spontaneous/precarious neighbourhoods, social relations in the Bronx⁵, graffiti, tattoos, clothing styles, as well as the adoption of a language and gestures that are specific to them, constitute identity markers that allow adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks to distinguish themselves from other social groups. In a context of instability of values and a resurgence of individualism within society, it demonstrates that young people struggle to find a model that lives up to their expectations, especially youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, these young people always recognize themselves through the image of the „gangster hero” who has risen from poverty to become a feared and respected person. This model of action promotes violence, drugs, money, and crime as the ultimate means of emancipation for oppressed populations.

A more nuanced analysis is necessary regarding the residential neighbourhoods. Indeed, the variable of the commune of origin does not discriminate finely enough about the relationship of these children to the construction of their potential for violence. It is necessary to refer instead to the type of neighbourhood of origin within the commune, and then to the type of housing within that neighbourhood. The spontaneous and economically popular neighbourhoods are the ones that provide the battalion of young people involved in drug distribution and sales networks, representing 72.1% and 21.3% respectively. This relationship is strong with a coefficient of contingency = 0.60.

Why is this so? Our explanatory hypothesis appears to lie in the fact that these neighbourhoods are aggressively constructed with poor-quality buildings, making them unattractive and not valued by residents or any outside visitors. While it is true that not all adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks come from problematic neighbourhoods, the vast majority are associated with these neighbourhoods.

The delinquent activities are coordinated by some so-called tutors/old fathers. For us is important how were characterized thus 'tutors' by young people recruited into delinquent networks. The answer can be seen in the following table:

Table 7. Perception of Adolescents Regarding the Role of the Delinquency Tutor in Drug Distribution Networks

The character of the tutor	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Attentive	6	9.8	9.8	9.8
Affectionate	2	3.3	3.3	13.1
Protective	26	42.6	42.6	55.7
Our creditor (he lends us money).	27	44.3	44.3	100
Total	61	100	100	

According to **Table 7**, our survey participants justify their relationship with the delinquency tutor as being a creditor ('he lends us money') and this

⁵ An area, a neighborhood, a place that exhibits urban decay and where unemployment, insecurity, crime, delinquency, drugs, and other ills prevail.

represents (27: 44.3%) of the distribution. For them, ‘the old father’ lends them money to allow them to meet their existential needs. In addition, in this relationship, ‘the old father’ goes as far as protecting them against any unpleasant situations: 26 responses on this subject were reported during the survey and this represents (42.6%) of our distribution. The purpose of identification and belonging to the distribution network is not only to produce violence and the lure of profit. Integration into the group allows for its protection, but also the creation of social ties (solidarity, emotional and financial support). The group is a recreation of a familial order, with a „father” and „brothers”, elders, and role models.

5.2. Analysis of the causes of integration about the experienced social conditions

Another issue that followed in our research was the analysis of causes of social integrations in the specific delinquent networks. As the respective causes are very complex, we decided to refer briefly to two of them: the family of origin (and their socio-cultural environment), the social exclusion and the role of places dedicated to consumption (smoking dens).

5.2.1. Family environment and adolescent integration

Table 8. Marital status of adolescents involved in drug distribution networks.

The character of the tutor	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Close-knit families	12	19.7	19.7	19.7
Single-parent broken families	15	24.6	24.6	44.3
Blended broken families	20	32.8	32.8	77
Other (homeless)	14	23.0	23.0	100
Total	61	100,0	100	

Regarding the marital status of their parents, the survey reveals that 57.4% come from broken families, compared to 19.7% from intact families. However, 23.0% are without a family, meaning they are on the streets. This may lead us to say that contrary to what many authors, NGOs, and international institutions think and advocate for, family imbalances are not the primary factor explaining the marginalization of young people in urban environments.

The sociocultural and economic environment from which they originate is the first factor in structuring their paths towards integration into drug distribution and sales networks. Strong pressures are exerted on certain young people to engage in violence within the narrow family circle of the adolescent. These pressures are built around perceptions associated with children and youth in certain communities and are driven by the idea that the child is the primary „wealth” of their family. In fact, in pre-colonial village economies, the need for domestic labour to accompany parents in daily activities led some communities to value multi-nativity within couples and the contracting of polygamous unions within lineages. The change in the political economy of the family did not necessarily lead to the

abandonment of these perceptions associated with the child as a labour force capable of contributing to the subsistence of the family. For most of the surveyed children from the Abobo municipality, for example, the role of economic resource provider assigned to children remains prevalent. Mrs. H.F. a mother met at the COM during visits to detainees, expressed herself as follows:

„Women [...], our sisters there, exploit their children. They see the immediate benefit; the five or ten francs they earn is what they see [...]. There is no future, and this is also a cause. And then our fathers, who marry multiple women: polygamy. The man doesn't work, or he doesn't have a stable job, and he has four wives and each of these wives has at least five or six children. And each of these women, to take care of their children [...], often engage in small trade. How can these children not become [violent] because they want to be like children from good families” Moussa, encountered at the COM, said, „In any case, I did not join the rebellion because I liked it. No, it's because I was working for my parents. What I needed to give them, so they could meet their needs, I could not give.”

Thus, deprived populations construct their resilience based on survival strategies that place a significant emphasis on children and their potential for violence production. This setting clearly shows that families live in conditions of strong social despair, due to a lack of alternative economic opportunities in an informal sector that lacks diversity. A significant part of adults builds their subsistence strategies around contracting numerous marital unions, with women being called upon to seek resources through local trading activities to provide for the family. Due to the lack of assistance from men, who are heavily affected by unemployment, many women are thus abandoned and forced to assume alone the educational and food-related responsibilities for their children. Furthermore, as the bulk of formal economic activity requires relocation from the place of residence, children often find themselves without parental supervision and thus resort to forming their groups in the street.

Some parents rely on their children to bring back „on their means” enough to satisfy the needs of their younger siblings, and children are urgently invited to „ fend for themselves” to help the family, as in the case of K. Yaya:

„Parents relying on their children to bring back, 'by their means,' what is needed to satisfy the needs of their younger siblings, children are urgently invited to 'figure it out' to help the family. Like the case of K. Yaya: 'It's me who hustles so that my mom can eat a little, she is disabled so she cannot move, my dad too [silence] he passed away, so now I can't look for anything, my uncles also don't care, so being a minor at the COM where I am now is a waste of time. I want to leave to take care of my mom, that's it.'”

This resourcefulness is even socially valued and contrasted with the perceived lack of initiative and inability to become self-sufficient under parental guardianship attributed to young people. As a result, some girls are often forced

into prostitution or risky street trading at a very young age, while a significant number of boys join violent gangs. The latter are regularly mobilized as violent combatants in brutal battles between transport unions or as „small-time thugs” selling drugs for smokehouse owners who are one of their privileged customer bases.

„When the head of the household is unable to provide for his children's daily bread, the children are called upon to fend for themselves. Some become hustlers, some load cars, some join unions... Each one fights to find their daily bread. For these children who have no education, no guidance... Whatever they can get their hands on, they will take it: whether it's drug dealers, alcohol vendors... But we are all guilty at this level.” These are the words of Mr Séka, a resident of Akéikoi in Abobo.

An important characteristic of the family of origin of these young people is the reason for which the family was deprived/broken. Some causes are in the next table:

Table 9. The origin of familial dissociation*.

The situation in the family	Frequency
Separation of parents	28
Death of one parent	15
Lack of knowledge of the existence of parents (mother/father)	1
Total	44

*only the valid answers

Regarding this statistical distribution, it should be noted that the family environment of these adolescents who are involved in drug distribution and sales networks is marked by the separation of parents with a score of 28 from 44 cases. However, there is also the death of a parent (mother/father) which contributes to a non-negligible proportion of adolescent integration into the drug distribution and sales process (15 cases).

The analysis of these results shows that the integration of adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks is part of a struggle against family poverty. Indeed, after the 2011 political-military crisis, Côte d'Ivoire is in a shining economic situation, with a growth rate of 8%, but not all social categories seem to be receiving the dividends. As demonstrated by a survey on household income in Côte d'Ivoire (INS-ENV, 2015), poverty has increased with the post-electoral crisis of 2010-2011. The poverty rate is estimated at 46%. The field survey shows that in neighbourhoods of the Abidjan agglomeration, where families are plagued by poverty and unemployment, there is deficient supervision of children. These children, generally left to their own devices, will in most cases join the drug distribution and sales networks in the neighbourhood that can enable them to meet the needs of money and food that parents cannot offer them.

Investigations show that the integration of adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks is essentially to cope with family poverty. They

join these networks and the income from the marginal activities they carry out, therefore, benefits the whole family, including food, healthcare, and children's education, as evidenced by the statements of the adolescents interviewed at REMAR -Y. S. (16 years old):

„Before, it was difficult to have enough to eat at home, but today the work I do allows me to give money to the family to buy food” (K.B, 15 years old) „We are forced to sell drugs to 'earn for ourselves' [to have enough to survive]. We know ourselves that it's not good, but in 'this country' it's every man for himself” (Y.S, 16 years old).

„When I sell drugs, I send the money home without saying where I got it from, but I know that everyone knows 'what it's about' [they have an idea of the source]. But they 'don't ask, so they don't get involved' [they don't dare ask so they don't feel like accomplices], because the work we do is not too good” (Z.T., 17 years old).

In light of the above, we can say that families experiencing economic and social difficulties are an important risk factor associated with adolescent involvement in drug networks. It is in these families that gangs recruit most of their members. The survey also reveals that many adolescents consider the marginal activities they engage in as their work and therefore legitimate, as illustrated by the statements of the interviewees above.

5.2.2. A social exclusion that leads to the integration of adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks.

The survey results indicate that most adolescents come from a difficult childhood. They have not experienced childhood, and as a result, have not received love, family protection, or learned how to live harmoniously. Typically, these children come from poor families, have limited access to education, and have had to drop out of school early due to their parent's lack of financial means. They are therefore largely unschooled and spend much of their time in drug trafficking networks within the neighbourhoods where they live. Here, they often receive a criminal education. These children survive hunger, thirst, dangerous work, and police harassment thanks to their cognitive skills. These young people do not experience a real childhood or family and consider themselves excluded from society. In this regard, we have gathered the following testimonies:

„We were not born 'drug addicts', we became so because we did not have the chance to go far in school and to be well-educated like other children. No one wants us anymore, so we do with our lives as we please.” (S.P, 18 years old)

„We saw our friends with nice mobile phones, beautiful clothes, but we couldn't have them too, so we decided to look for money to pay for ourselves, that's why we sell drugs in smoking rooms” (K.T, 16 years old).

These statements reflect the vulnerability of these children, who are desperate in life and develop anti-values. We are witnessing a radical and justified use of the integration of adolescents into drug distribution networks. As evidenced by the statements of these smoking den leaders

„The police try to kill us without understanding us, while it is because we have nothing to live well that we become drug dealers. And besides, we are not afraid of dying [getting caught], because we have nothing to lose, and since we know that we can be killed at any time, we also maintain our involvement in drug distribution to the fullest. When we get caught, we pay our ransom to be free, or the babatché pays for us and sets us free.” (H.M, 17 years old)

„We didn't go to school. Since we were young, we've been in poverty, and people do nothing for us [without the state coming to our aid]. 'Since we started selling drugs, everyone is interested in us, we've become stars (laughs)'” (F.S., 18 years old).

The statements of these young people reflect a strong sense of exclusion from the so-called 'normal' society. The distribution and integration of adolescents into violent groups then appear as a social revolt, a response to the suffering they experience and a characteristic of poor integration.

This perception of injustice, indifference, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion explains the integration of adolescents into drug distribution networks. They accuse the social system of not giving all children an equal chance to succeed. The drug trafficking networks in which they become involved are nothing but an expression of discontent, frustration, and even a rejection of the pro-social values they no longer believe in.

5.2.3. Role of smoking dens in the process of integration and distribution of drugs among adolescents.

Young people have a clear representation of places of consumption (dense smoking) as shown in the following graph:

The data from **Figure 1** informs us about the role that smoking rooms could play in the development of gang phenomena (construction of criminal careers) among adolescents. It is observed that 15% of gang members perceive the smoking room as a place for gathering and planning attack strategies. The smoking room serves as a refuge for 35% of these adolescents, and for 50% of those surveyed, it is a place for drug consumption.

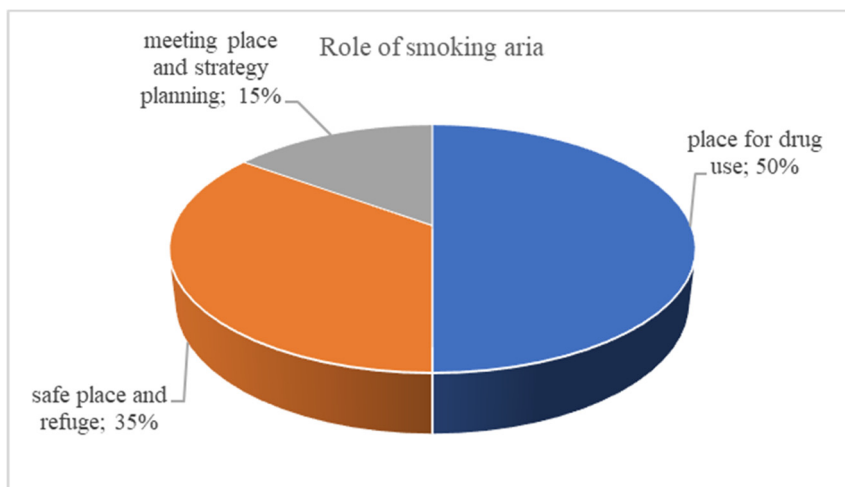


Figure 1. Perception of the smoking area by the young people

Thus, it can be deduced from the observation of this graph that smoking rooms contribute to exacerbating the phenomenon of youth involvement in gangs. As a place designed for drug sales and consumption, the smoking room is used for other purposes by young people. In addition to providing the necessary dose of drugs for them to hit the streets, the smoking room also serves as a laboratory for them. This is the perfect place where adolescents meet before any attack. It is in the smoking rooms where all the strategies and target areas for attacks are planned. The smoking room offers them a sense of security, allowing young people to discuss freely about their intended targets and potential victims. They take stock of past actions and inventory the weapons they have at their disposal. They are well organized. Some are tasked with posing as beggars to distract the intended victim, while others are specifically responsible for attacking with weapons. Generally, the leader of the group always carries a firearm. The supply of weapons is obtained from the smoking room. This is because enough weapons, especially small calibre firearms and bladed weapons, circulate in these places.

In this context, K.B., an influential member of the young „microbes” of Abobo, states:

„In the smokehouse, we meet to plan our attacks. Roles are assigned and everyone knows their role. There, we are taught solidarity within the group. We do not act randomly. We respect the instructions of the leader. The motto is 'One for all and all for one'. If you act randomly and when there is a 'remba' (a turning point), you manage alone. The smokehouse is our HQ, the rear base.”

In addition to its role as a gathering and planning spot for attacks, the smoking room also serves as a refuge for adolescent gang members. As the smoking room is considered an outlaw place and offers a sense of security, these young

people will take refuge there after committing various offences. They even go as far as sleeping there, waiting for a period of calm before resurfacing.

The statements of Commissioner K. Y., Director General of the National Police, shed light on this issue:

„The microbes who are active in Abobo are mostly minors aged 10 and above. They are usually armed with bladed weapons and find refuge in the smoking rooms created during the post-election crisis... But, what is important to note is that as soon as they take their dose in the smoking rooms, they have machetes, axes that they use to attack.”

In summary, it should be noted that the role played by the fumoir for young people is not negligible. The fumoir serves as a place for planning, refuge, and drug consumption. As such, it plays an active role in the delinquent activities of gangs.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The exploratory study shows that the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks is a prevalent reality of criminal activity in Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire. It is the result of vulnerable individuals whose age ranges from approximately 10 to 20 years old, although it is not uncommon for both younger and older individuals to participate in the actions of these criminal networks. These adolescents, victims of delicate family conditions, precariousness, illiteracy, and dropping out of school, integrate into drug trafficking networks, spontaneously and in impressive numbers frequenting the smoking dens and often, under the influence of these drugs, violently attack passers-by whom they dispossess of their belongings.

The exploratory survey results show that the integration of adolescents into drug networks is linked to the economic destitution of families, which leads children to engage in trafficking to meet their basic needs. This antisocial behaviour is also the result of young people who denounce through their reprehensible actions an exclusion from society at large. Drug distribution is thus also an expression of the dissatisfaction of child soldiers used during the post-electoral crisis and reintegrated into civilian life without being properly re-socialized.

The study also shows that the fumoirs serve as spaces where adolescents can replenish their drug supplies for distribution. This location is the origin of the ultra-violent behaviour of the youth by exacerbating their psychopathological and social problems. Thus, criminal networks thrive thanks to a network of receivers who enable the rapid and discreet distribution of the product with impunity.

Furthermore, the results of this study show that it is mainly economic and social difficulties that lead to the exclusion of many young people, which explains their integration into drug distribution and sales networks in Abidjan. These findings are consistent with theories of exclusion, particularly Robert Merton's theory of social inequality as the source of exclusion developed in 1938, which suggests that social inequalities hinder individuals' aspirations for social success.

This form of social injustice helps us understand the emergence of rebellion against society, as seen in the children involved in drug networks whose actions are directed against society.

The results of our empirical research are similar to those of Mucchielli (2004), whose work shows that it is economic and social processes that create exclusion and contempt, which are the logical springs of violence among young people in France. It is also recognized by these authors (Jankowski, 2003; Brochu et Parent, 2005; Jones et al., 2004) that adolescents in drug networks come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Drug dealing can then be seen as the ultimate solution for economic enrichment in the eyes of young people living in precarious conditions (Hamel et al., 1998; Perrault et Bibeau, 2003; Chatterjee, 2006). Furthermore, for these authors (Perrault, 2005; Chatterjee, 2006), the pursuit of mercantile interests leads adolescents to adopt a particular mindset and code of conduct.

Studies have revealed the role of conformist peer groups and adult educators in the entrenchment of delinquent behaviour in terms of „phagocytosis” and institutional rejection (Koudou O., 1994, 1996, 1997), as well as the role of school in the emergence of delinquency in terms of differential schooling and school exclusions (Koudou O., 1993). Thus, while the family environment is key to understanding adolescent delinquent behaviour, other agents of socialization or resocialization, such as peers, school, and interactions in observation or rehabilitation institutions, should also be taken into account as close criminogenic factors, but intervening at different stages of delinquency development. De Latour (2001) examines the ghettos of the Ivory Coast and identifies the reasons why young people join gangs. She conducts her study in slums and high-risk neighbourhoods to better understand the phenomenon and observes that young people „*refuse the relay of socialization through work or schooling that require money and demand time (...); they prefer risk and the immediacy of gain over effort*” (De Latour, 2005, p. 151). Thus, they create a space called the „ghetto” where they can take refuge and express their singularity. The notions that emerge from the concept of the ghetto are creation, autonomy, independence, solidarity, keeping one's word, forgiveness, blood ties, friendship, and success, which are achieved through the excesses of hierarchies, affective places, and rules.”

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