CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The impact of the Celtic Tiger and Great Recession on drug consumption
Authors	Windle, James;Cambridge, Graham;Leonard, James;Lynch, Orla
Publication date	2022-12-29
Original Citation	Windle, J., Cambridge, G., Leonard, J. and Lynch, O. (2022) 'The impact of the Celtic Tiger and Great Recession on drug consumption', Drugs, Habits and Social Policy, 24(1), pp. 26-38. https://doi.org/10.1108/DHS-05-2022-0021
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.1108/DHS-05-2022-0021
Rights	© 2022, James Windle, Graham Cambridge, James Leonard and Orla Lynch. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at http:// creativecommons.org/licences/ by/4.0/legalcode - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-04 06:30:04
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/14187

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

The impact of the Celtic Tiger and Great Recession on drug consumption

James Windle, Graham Cambridge, James Leonard and Orla Lynch

Abstract

Purpose – *This paper aims to explore how the Celtic Tiger economic boom and Great Recession influenced drug and alcohol use in one Irish city.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 people, living in Cork City, who had previously used drugs and/or alcohol problematically. All participants had engaged with services for their problematic use and had at least one year of abstinence at time of interview.*

Findings – *Some participants reported that their drug and/or alcohol consumption increased during the economic boom; others, who were already in (self-defined) active addiction, reported how full employment lessened some of the harms of their problematic use. For others, problematic use struck once the economy entered a downturn and, heavy drink and drug use became a means of soothing the strains of economic recession.*

Originality/value – *The paper provides two key contributions. Methodologically, it demonstrates how large-scale national quantitative data can mask local idiosyncratic tendencies, suggesting the need for mixed-method approaches for understanding drug market trends. The paper also provides insights into the impact of global and local economic conditions on drug and alcohol consumption in Ireland.*

Keywords *Celtic Tiger, Alcohol, Drug consumption, Great Recession, Insider-researcher, Ireland, Addiction*

Paper type *Research paper*

James Windle is based at Department of Sociology and Criminology, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. Graham Cambridge is based at Churchfield Community Trust, Cork, Ireland. James Leonard is based at Niche Health Project Cork, Cork, Ireland. Orla Lynch is based at Department of Sociology and Criminology, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland.

Introduction

Windle (2018) has proposed that, in Ireland, drug consumption increased during the Celtic Tiger and declined during the Great Recession. The current paper critically explores this line of enquiry by drawing from two separate qualitative studies to assess how economic and social conditions influenced drug and alcohol consumption in economically deprived areas of Cork City (Ireland).

The first section of this paper provides context with a discussion on the Irish economy, followed by a review of the international and Irish literature on the impact of economic conditions on illicit drug consumption. The paper then reviews the findings from two qualitative studies which examined the lived experiences of people who had used drugs problematically during this period. It shows how already economically deprived areas suffered the impact of national and global economic shocks.

Economic boom and bust

Until the mid-1990s, Ireland was a poor country, relative to its European neighbours, with high levels of unemployment and economic disadvantage. It then experienced a prolonged period of economic growth. The so-called Celtic Tiger economic boom is broadly recognised as lasting from 1994 to 2008: Ireland experienced annual average growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) of 7%, one of the largest increases in the Organisation for

Received 20 May 2022
Revised 19 October 2022
16 November 2022
7 December 2022
Accepted 9 December 2022

The authors would like to thank the editors and reviewers for their thoughtful and constructive comments. *Funding*: The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). During this period, the number of people in employment increased from 1.2 million (1994) to 2.1 million (2007) (Callan *et al.*, 2013); this increase was dominated by employment in the services sector alongside significant increases in construction. There was also a large increase in individuals attending third-level education institutions (i.e. universities): in 1972 less than 30,000 individuals attended third-level institutions, in 2003 this figure was almost 130,000 (CSO, 2004). Ireland also experienced a cultural shift towards conspicuous consumption during this period and, while wages increased, so too did personal debt (Claudy *et al.*, 2017; Roche *et al.*, 2017).

While Ireland is often seen as one of the winners of the period of global economic growth that began in the 1990s, it was also one of the worst affected countries when the downturn came. The Celtic Tiger era abruptly ended when the global Great Recession hit Europe in late 2007/early 2008 (Molloy, 2013). While increased GDP officially signalled the end of recession in late 2009, unemployment and household income figures suggest that a severe economic slump lasted until 2012. Ireland officially re-entered recession in 2013 (Molloy, 2013). Ireland's national income had dropped by over 10% between 2008 and 2011 (Callan *et al.*, 2013) and, when unemployment increased from 4.6% (2006) to 15% (2012) (Kelly and McGuinness, 2015), Ireland went from having the second lowest to second highest rate of unemployment in Europe (White, 2010).

Austerity measures made a bad situation worse. Austerity involved "20.5 billion euros in expenditure cuts and €11.5bn in tax increases", including: reductions in public-sector jobs, pay and pensions; changes to the social welfare system; and a short-term reduction in the minimum wage (Roche *et al.*, 2017, p. 4; also Callan *et al.*, 2013). The recession hit the poorest the hardest and many families who were already struggling financially were disproportionately impacted by austerity (Callan *et al.*, 2013; Roche *et al.*, 2017). Cuts to public service resources further marginalised those in need (Roche *et al.*, 2017), including people with addiction and mental health issues (Pike and King, 2013).

Many families were left in significant negative equity, leading to debt, bankruptcy and high levels of homelessness. The recession had a disproportionate impact on the young and working class. Youth unemployment increased from 9.9% to 33% between 2006 and 2012 (Kelly and McGuinness, 2015). Wage cuts and taxation increases reduced equivalised disposable household income by 13% nationally but 20% for Ireland's poorest households (Callan *et al.*, 2013). The number of people in consistent poverty increased from 4.2% (2008) to 7.7% (2012) (Claudy *et al.*, 2017). Overall, Ireland entered recession with "one of the highest levels of income inequality" in the OECD, and this did not improve (Roche *et al.*, 2017, p. 16).

Drug consumption and recession

There is some consensus within the academic literature that recessions and economic downturns can increase drug use (see papers in Storti *et al.*, 2011) among segments of the population. For example, a Scottish study found general illicit drug use to be "moderately associated" with unemployment (Peck and Plant, 1986, p. 931) while studies in Australia (Chalmers and Ritter, 2011), the USA (Arkes, 2011) and UK (Mott, 1985) found cannabis use increases when unemployment rates rise or the economy weakens. The influence of macro-economic dynamics is not uniform, however, and local manifestation of the impact cannot be understood without detailed knowledge of local conditions. For example, the Australian study mentioned above found an increase in the frequency of use for those aged 25–34 but a reduction among older consumers (Chalmers and Ritter, 2011). Caulkins (2011, p. 374) has hypothesised that demand for drugs "responds slowly to exogenous shocks because it is dominated by dependent users whose behaviours are slow to change". That is, he argues, the number of people consuming drugs should increase during recession but this may not have a significant impact because heavy users often stabilize their

consumption and, as heavy users tend to account for a significant percentage of total spending on drugs, net consumption should stabilize.

In an effort to understand the complex dynamics at play, a number of studies have assessed how the Great Recession impacted national drug markets. Research in Greece noted a significant increase in problematic drug use, most notably among older people (Kondilis *et al.*, 2013). Two Spanish studies found that cannabis consumption increased amongst older unemployed men and women (Colell *et al.*, 2015), and an overall strong increase in cannabis and cocaine consumption (Bassols and Castelló, 2016). An Italian study found that heroin and cocaine consumption declined but cannabis and amphetamine consumption increased (Zuccato *et al.*, 2011).

To further complicate the situation there are differences in findings related to the national context in question. The Italian study mentioned above conflicts with the findings of several British (MacDonald and Marsh, 2002; Pearson, 1987) and Irish (O'Gorman, 1998; Punch, 2005) ethnographies which found that economic deprivation and social exclusion (as outcomes of recession) have inflated heroin consumption. The experience during the Great Recession offers a challenge to the well-established link between recession and heroin. In the UK, the number of recorded heroin consumers declined before and during the Great Recession, although, the number of consumers in the 35–64 age bracket increased (Wakeman, 2016). Irish research, by Carew and Comiskey (2018), has also identified an aging population entering treatment for opiate misuse. Furthermore, Smyth *et al.* (2000) reported a 330% increase in presentations for heroin addiction in Dublin between 1991 and 1996, suggesting that heroin consumption peaked as the country was recovering from recession.

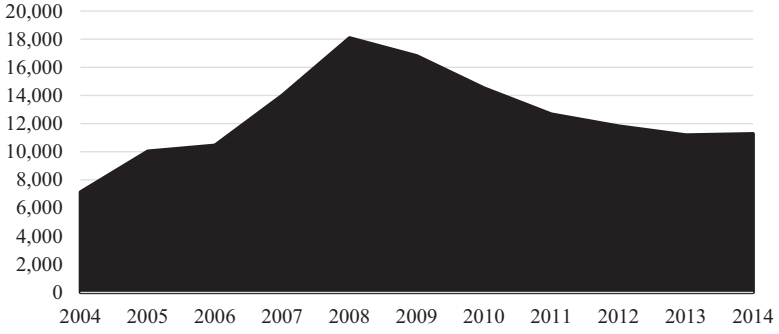
A number of interrelated situational and structural theories on why economic downturns can increase illicit drug consumption were proposed in a special edition of the *International Journal of Drug Policy* (Storti *et al.*, 2011). First, Arkes (2011) proposed that unemployed or partly-employed people have more free time to search for, and use, drugs. Second, Bretteville-Jensen (2011) proposed that reductions in legitimate employment opportunities can increase the number of dealers, which can increase competition at a time when risks are lowered by reduced police resources and, consequently, prices should fall as drug dealer's demand less remuneration. Third, a number of studies have suggested that drug use can represent an escape from, or medication for, the nihilism, hopelessness and depression of recession (Arkes, 2011; MacDonald and Marsh, 2002; Stevens, 2011). Finally, recession can heighten some risk factors associated with drug use, including, parental divorce, unemployment and disruption to education (Caulkins, 2011) all of which can make home life more chaotic and less inviting (Windle *et al.*, 2020).

In summary, there is some consensus amongst the academic literature that economic downturns and recession can increase the consumption of cheaper drugs, especially cannabis. The impact of recession on heavy drug use and of more expensive drugs is mixed. Different theories have been proposed to explain these variations, revolving around the influence of availability, price, boredom and the functional role of drugs in self-soothing.

Drug consumption and recession in Ireland

Windle (2018) analysed 10 years (2004–2014) of An Garda Síochána (Irish police force) controlled drug data, as a proxy for drug consumption and trade, to explore trends in Irish drug markets from the tail-end of the Celtic Tiger through the Great Recession. The review showed that recorded offences for the possession of drugs for personal use increased sharply during the Celtic Tiger era (2004–2008) (Figure 1). This observation was supported by drug prevalence data: last year cannabis use increased from 5.1% to 6.3% between 2002/03 and 2006/07, while cocaine use increased from 1.1% to 1.7% during the period (Ipsos, 2015). The number of individuals in treatment for cocaine also increased from

Figure 1 Number of recorded offences, possession for personal use (2004–2014)



Source: CSO (n.d.)

366 (2004) to 788 (2007) while the total number of individuals in treatment increased from 5,221 (2004) to 6,526 (2007) (Health Research Board, 2022) [1]. That drug consumption, especially of powder cocaine, increased during the economic boom is supported by findings from qualitative studies (Hourigan *et al.*, 2018; O'Gorman, 2014; van Hout, 2007, 2009b).

Previous research has attributed increased consumption during the Celtic Tiger to: young people possessing "greater levels of disposable income"; reduced "parental monitoring" due to high employment (van Hout, 2009a:3); changing attitudes towards drug use (van Hout, 2009b); increased demand for drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine amongst the middle classes (Hourigan *et al.*, 2018); and the development and expansion of the night-time economy (O'Gorman, 2014). Furthermore, during the boom, Ireland became more globally interconnected which likely reduced the price and increased the availability of drugs (O'Gorman, 2014; Windle, 2018).

At a more structural level, the night-time economy was developed during the boom years as a means of job creation in areas impacted by deindustrialisation and the loss of manufacturing jobs (Cambridge *et al.*, 2022; O'Brien *et al.*, 2014). As has been witnessed in the UK and elsewhere (Hobbs *et al.*, 2003; Stevens, 2011), hedonism was promoted during the boom years as a core economic activity: heavy drinking and drug taking became central to the consumer experience of the night-time economy. Indeed, cocaine use soared partly because it allowed people to consume greater quantities of alcohol (O'Gorman, 2014).

While drug consumption appears to have increased during the Celtic Tiger, Windle (2018) observed that recorded incidences of possession of drugs for personal use declined sharply between 2008 and 2014 (Figure 1), suggesting this as an indication that drug consumption declined. This observation was reported by other sources, including media accounts (Cusack, 2009; Lally, 2010, 2011) and a recent study which reported that "rates of drug poisoning deaths involving cocaine decreased" during the recession (Lynn *et al.*, 2021, p. 8).

Windle (2018) hypothesised that this national decline can be explained by Ireland's large-scale emigration, spurred by recession. The level of emigration increased from 36,000 (2006) to 89,000 (2013) and, young people were the most likely to suffer unemployment and thus emigrate (Kelly and McGuinness, 2015). Cahill (2014) estimates that 9% of the population aged 15 to 24 emigrated between 2007 and 2012, while Healy (2015) estimates that, at the peak of migration in 2012–13, between 10–15% of 15–24 year olds emigrated, as did "a significant number" of the 25–29 age group. The number of university graduates

employed overseas also doubled between 2008 and 2012 (Healy, 2015). In short, there were "fewer young people in the population" (Roche *et al.*, 2017, p. 15). This reduction in the youth population likely impacted net drug consumption as prevalence data shows that, between 2007 and 2015, last year cocaine use was 3.2% for 15–24 year olds against 0.8% for 35–44 year olds, while cannabis use was 16.2% (15–24) against 4.5% (35–44) (EMCDDA, 2019). As such, Windle (2018) hypothesises that emigration of young people contributed to the observed reduction in net consumption of drugs within Ireland during the Great Recession.

Method

While Windle's (2018) hypothesis has been partly supported by other observations (Cusack, 2009; Lally, 2010, 2011; Lynn *et al.*, 2021) the lack of specificity in Gardaí recorded drug offence data limits more sophisticated analyses and fails to differentiate between drugs used [2]. Furthermore, recorded crime data is simply an indication of the number of offences known to An Garda Síochána, and the offences the Gardaí choose to record, so may more accurately be framed as "records of decisions" rather than true reflection of possession (Bottomley and Pease, 1994, p. 169; Windle *et al.*, 2022), if such an outcome is even possible. In short, recorded drug offence data represents a useful (Rosenfeld and Decker, 1999) yet blunt indication of trends over time.

To explore some of these issues further, the paper draws on two separate qualitative studies conducted with participants in Cork City. Ethics permissions were granted from our universities Social Research Ethics Committee. Two of the authors conducted semi-structured interviews with people who had been addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. Both studies used similar methods. Full methodologies have been discussed elsewhere (Cambridge *et al.*, 2022; Leonard and Windle, 2020) but, in summary, both studies used mixed purposeful and snowballing sampling (Boeri and Lamonica, 2015). Recruitment was supported by an organisation based in Cork City that works with offenders pre- and post-release from prison. Posters advertising the research were initially displayed in the Centre, and snowballing was then employed to recruit further participants. Graham Cambridge also placed posters in other similar organisations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the participant's home or in public spaces, digitally recorded and transcribed; names and other identifying information were removed. The researchers past or present clients were excluded from participating.

Graham collected life history data to explore trajectories into and out of addiction. While participants were not specifically asked questions about economic fluctuations, these emerged naturally in interviews because they were important events in many participants' lives. James Leonard sought to understand how people who used drugs problematically viewed Irish drug policy; all participants were asked questions on the relationship between economic deprivation and drug use. The first study employed modified grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to analyse the life stories of 40 participants (Cambridge *et al.*, 2022). The second employed thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun, 2021) to identify relevant patterns from the eight interviews (Leonard and Windle, 2020). For the current paper, the transcribed interviews were analysed thematically with a narrower focus on how economic fluctuations impacted participants drug and/or alcohol consumption.

The two combined studies interviewed 48 individuals (n = 8 and n = 40). Participants were aged between 21 and 49 years old, all but one of the participants were male, all had been addicted (self-defined) to alcohol and/or drugs and had at least one year of abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol at the time of interview. All had been engaged with the criminal justice system as a result of drug use: most had received at least one conviction and many had served one or more custodial sentences. All had engaged at one point with outpatient addiction services and just over half had attended residential drug treatment centres. The

type of drug used varied: all begun using alcohol and/or cannabis, and many progressed to benzodiazepines and/or heroin.

Insider-research

Both Graham and James are insider-researchers (Cambridge *et al.*, 2022; Chavez, 2008; Lynch *et al.*, 2021) in that they worked with the population involved in the studies and grew up in the communities most impacted by problematic drug use and addiction. Bourgois (1995, p. 12) has argued that working-class drug users often distrust academics, so can be wary of revealing "intimate experiences of drug abuse". Insider-researchers can mitigate issues of trust and have less identity work to do in the process of data collection given that language use, local knowledge and relatability are shared and understood. That is, they can understand slang, jokes, "nonverbal gestures of embarrassment and discomfort" or unusual or potentially untrue responses (Chavez, 2008, p. 479).

James made relevant his personal experience of active addiction and time engaged with the criminal justice system, including several prison sentences. Since his release from prison he has worked in various roles supporting former prisoners, drug users and the homeless in Cork City (Leonard, 2021). Graham was employed in a probation funded initiative where he worked with people who were trying to desist, recover and reintegrate after serving time in prison. Both were well known to potential participants, partly because they were originally from and lived in some of the more economically deprived areas of the city. The biographies and cultural capital of both researchers were essential to the data collection process, both in terms of gaining access and developing the trust of participants but also in the production of meaningful and sensitive analysis of the lived experience of the individuals involved.

Findings

While Ireland appears to have witnessed a national, albeit temporary, reduction in overall drug consumption (Cusack, 2009; Lally, 2010, 2011; Windle, 2018), this national trend hides the idiosyncrasies regarding the type of drugs used and the local realities, particularly in economically deprived areas. While emigration *may* have contributed to reductions in *net* consumption, some lacked the resources or aspiration to emigrate. Emigration may have been particularly difficult for those in active addiction given the likely co-morbidities associated with addiction. Furthermore, marginalised and disadvantaged consumers can belong to local "moral economies" which provide economic and emotional support with a sense of belonging and identity (Wakeman, 2016). Access to such networks takes time to cultivate, so supports can be absent in foreign cities.

While Windle (2018) explored the national picture, this section compares this to a sample of people who had used drugs problematically, had engaged with the criminal justice system and, lived in areas of Cork City which suffer economic deprivation and social exclusion. These areas have high concentrations of low educational attainment and, high unemployment and lone parent ratios. The most extremely disadvantaged area, for example, has a male unemployment rate of 45.10% and just 4.35% of the population possess a third level education (Pobal, 2016).

Drug and alcohol use during the Celtic Tiger

The life history narratives collected during the interviews demonstrate how alcohol and drug use increased during the Celtic Tiger era, for personal, social and economic reasons. While some participants reported never having had a job, many found roles in unskilled labour (primarily in construction) during the economic boom. These roles paid well, but came with a heavy drinking culture which antagonised pre-existing propensities for problematic drug

use; for the participants in this study. For example, whilst a teenager, Mr Q begun working in construction, where he would drink with older men in a pub:

> All my friends were down the field drinking cans and here am I, in an early morning drinking with older men. I was the only fellow my age, there might have been 50 scaffolders worked for the company, they were all married men with children. It was just that era, the boom Celtic Tiger, everything was just drink (Mr Q).

Some participants reported earning high wages in construction during the Celtic Tiger. Heavy alcohol consumption was valued at the time throughout Ireland and some participants reported spending much of their wages on alcohol and/or drugs:

> I would have always had good money, which I would have blown, that was back in the boom, I was always broke from drink and smoking [cannabis], no matter how much I had I was always broke on the Sunday (Mr P).

This said, some participants, who were already in active addiction, reported how the full employment of the Celtic Tiger prevented them from engaging in acquisitive crime. For example, Mr N had expected to return to crime upon release from prison but quickly found a job which could fund his heavy drug consumption:

> I got out [of prison] in 2000, I got a job. I came out with the intentions of getting involved in crime that time, I did not, I was getting the bones of €1,600 a week, I [thought] fuck this, this is great (Mr N).

Jobs available to the individuals in this study, as manual labourers, were often short-lived, as many reported being dismissed for their problematic drug or alcohol use. The men described consistently arriving at work late or intoxicated, or failing to turn up at all when on a binge. During the economic boom they were, however, able to quickly find new work because jobs were plentiful.

Drug and alcohol use during the Great Recession

Most participants who secured work during the economic boom had been employed in the thriving construction industry. The industry contracted by over 60% during the Great Recession, with a loss of approximately 163,000 jobs (O'Connell, 2017). The option to move from one well-paying job to another disappeared. Consequently, Mr N described returning to acquisitive crime and was eventually imprisoned:

> Mr N: I was involved in crime again. 2008, 2009, 2010 I was locked up. Everything went balls up; the building trade was gone also.
>
> Interviewer: Did you go straight back to crime?
>
> Mr N: Yah, when you are used to the money, you could not do without it.

Despite the drinking and drug use, some participants reported enjoying being able to provide for their families during the economic boom:

> At the time I was bringing in €600 to a €1,000 a week, we thought it would never end, life was great. We had loads of money. Take the kids down every Saturday for tracksuit and runners, they always had the best bikes, they had everything they wanted, stuff I never had as a kid (Mr M).

Mr M started drinking heavily after losing his construction job during the recession. This put a significant strain on family relationships and he ended up leaving the family home. His drinking and drug use then progressed into active addiction:

> Well I lost the job in 2008, the building trade went sour. So as I was not working, I started drinking more, which was not good, we started arguing in front of the kids which was not good. I ended

> up walking out, I started to go downhill from then, 2009 and on, up to 2013 were the dark days in my life (Mr M).

Another participant observed a similar trend:

> Drug use around here became really bad around the end of the Celtic Tiger. The recession and heroin hit Cork around the same time. We didn't have any opportunities, the work was gone, for those of us who didn't have the money to emigrate, and all we had was heroin and tablets (Mr D).

Several participants reported progressing their alcohol and drug use to "cope" and "sooth the harsh realities of living on the margins" (Mr H), situations augmented by the stress and strain of recession; Ms H reflected that people "use drugs to cope with everyday life" in an "area where there's nothing around for them' and Mr C felt that drugs provided a means of "coping" with the "trauma" experienced by "a lot of people who come from poor or disadvantaged areas".

Mr F neatly drew together the impact of recession and joblessness, and the hopelessness many participants reported feeling:

> I think the bit of depression or anxiety that people feel who live in poverty, they might use drugs to help them [. . .] drug dealers are the doctors who medicate poor people who are struggling (Mr F).

Indeed, Claudy and colleagues (2017, pp. 130/132) found that "feelings of security and exuberance [during the Celtic Tiger] were replaced by anxiety and frustration", with many people showing symptoms of "depression, depressive thoughts, anxiety attacks, strains and breakdown of personal relationships, and excessive alcohol use". For some of our participants, drug and alcohol use represented an escape from, and medication for, these stresses and strains. This does not mean that all of those living in economically deprived areas used drink and drugs to cope with the pains of recession. Most people living in these areas learnt alternative coping skills, but the participants in both studies had all experienced early-childhood traumas which, together with structurally constraints, reduced their resilience to economic shocks (Cambridge *et al.*, 2022; Mulcahy, 2021; Seaman and Lynch, 2022; Windle *et al.*, 2020).

Some participants reported quite quickly progressing into active addiction, while others responded to the undulations of the national and global economy. For some, the full employment of the Celtic Tiger construction boom limited some of the harms of their addiction: they did not need to steal, the routine of work limited their consumption and, they had less time to search for and use drugs. For others, however, having money coupled with a heavy drinking workplace culture seemed to quicken their progression into addiction. For others still, addiction struck once the economy entered a downturn and, heavy drink and drug use became a means of soothing the felt hopelessness and strains of economic recession.

While the pathways to problematic drug use and addiction are equifinal (Cambridge *et al.*, 2022), all participants highlighted the influence of economic conditions. The societal inequality they experienced was amplified by economic shifts at a national and global level. The economic downturn did not create the problems outright: all participants reported having experienced multiple childhood traumas (Mulcahy, 2021), which they felt had influenced their own addiction (Cambridge *et al.*, 2022). Nonetheless, while many of those with the resources to emigrate for work did once work disappeared in Ireland (O'Connell, 2017), our participants did not have the resources to find work in another country nor the skills or mental resilience to cope with the stress and strain of recession [3].

Discussion

Previous qualitative and quantitative studies have indicated that illicit drug and alcohol consumption increased in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger. The current study provides some evidence to support these findings. Increased "social pressures" towards

"excessive spending" were reported during the Celtic Tiger (Claudy *et al.*, 2017, p. 136), including pressure to conspicuously consume alcohol and drugs (Hourigan *et al.*, 2018; O'Gorman, 2014; van Hout, 2007): a pressure facilitated by government support of the night-time economy (O'Brien *et al.*, 2014; Hobbs *et al.*, 2003). Indeed, several participants in the present study discussed how heavy drug and alcohol use was much valued during this period. That is, while the Celtic Tiger ensured a high level of employment for many, the promotion of heavy alcohol consumption as a core economic activity inflated alcohol and drug consumption. For some, however, steady work in construction limited some of the harms associated with their existing addiction.

Windle (2018) hypothesised that loss of income and jobs during the Great Recession caused a net reduction in drug consumption, partly because large numbers of young people emigrated. It is possible that many of those who emigrated may have consumed greater quantities of drugs during the recession but, as they were consuming in London and Sydney rather than Cork and Dublin, Ireland witnessed a national reduction [4].

The data presented in this paper suggests national reductions in drug use likely hid increased problematic use in some of Irelands economically deprived areas. Working-class men and young people were disproportionately impacted by joblessness during the Great Recession, and were also the least likely to emigrate, which was "concentrated among people with higher levels of education" (O'Connell, 2017, p. 15). As such, those unable to either emigrate or find work in Ireland were left to deal with the depression, strain and stress of recession. For some of those left behind, problematic drug use served a function to navigate these structural constraints: it allowed participants to "find purpose and company", a sense of identity, excitement and adventure, whilst dulling "the pains of existence and exclusion" (Stevens, 2011, p. 45) associated with economic recession.

Conclusion

This study aligns with previous research observations that drug and alcohol consumption increased during the Celtic Tiger economic boom. While previous national-level quantitative research has indicated a national decline during the Great Recession the qualitative data presented in this paper suggests an upsurge of problematic drug use for some of those who could not find employment or lacked the resources to emigrate during the recession.

The paper provides two key contributions to the literature. First, it demonstrates how large-scale national quantitative data can mask local trends. This is not to suggest that such data is not useful, but rather that mixed-method approaches can augment our analysis of drug market trends at the national and local level. Second, participants reported being impacted by economic fluctuations: some reported that their drug and/or alcohol consumption increased during the Celtic Tiger economic boom; others reported that full employment served to limit some of the harms of existing addiction, while some reported that the strains of recession contributed to their eventual drift into active addiction.

Limitations

Most of our participants underwent therapy during treatment for their addiction, so spent time reflecting on the factors which influenced their problematic alcohol and drug use. As such, the 48 participants may not be representative of all people who used drugs problematically in Cork City, let alone Ireland, during the period under review. Furthermore, that the two studies recruited people who lived in economically deprived areas of Cork City and had engaged with the criminal justice system, meant that wealthier people who had been addicted to drugs/alcohol may have been overlooked (Leonard and Windle, 2020). All but one of the participants were male, which limits insights into how economic fluctuations influenced female drug consumption (Seaman and Lynch, 2022).

Some researchers have argued that insider-researchers are "inherently biased, and too close to the culture to be curious enough to raise provocative questions" (Merriam *et al.*, 2001, p. 411). Supervision meetings were used to reflect upon biases and facilitate greater objectivity. Reflexive qualitative researchers are, however, increasingly identifying subjectivity and bias as "something valuable, rather than problematic". That "*all* knowledge" is "inescapably shaped by processes and practices of knowledge production, including the practices of the researcher" (Clarke and Braun, 2021, p. 12, italics added).

Notes

1. The total number of individuals in treatment continued to rise and peaked in 2010, after which a short decline was witnessed, before numbers began to rise again (Health Research Board, 2022).
2. While uncovering hidden drug use is challenging, such work has been undertaken in Ireland using capture–recapture methods. For example, Comiskey (2003) compared three different existing data sources of opiate use with a survey of school leavers. Such a method could be used to explore hidden drug use prevalence during these periods.
3. In 2016, Windle presented the findings of his study at a conference attended by practitioners. At the conference, members of the probation service argued that some consumers and dealers living in Dublin's inner city were unable to emigrate due to a lack of education, training and transferable skills.
4. The hypothesis upon which this study is founded – that there were national prevalence changes linked to emigration from Ireland during the Great Recession – needs testing at the national level. The hypothesis uses "an imperfect proxy for illicit drug market activity" as "a useful jumping-off point" (Windle, 2018, p. 560). The current study, as a local case, cannot explore national changes. As currently available alternative drug market indicators are unsuitable for charting changes caused by migration, one approach would be to survey the historical drug consumption patterns of Irish citizens, rather than Irish residents, and include both those who emigrated during the Great Recession and those who stayed behind.

References

Arkes, J. (2011), "Recessions and the participation of youth in the selling and use of illicit drugs", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 335-340.

Bassols, N.M. and Castelló, J.V. (2016), "Effects of the great recession on drug consumption in Spain", *Economics and Human Biology*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 103-116.

Boeri, M. and Lamonica, A.K. (2015), "Sampling designs and issues in qualitative criminology", in Copes, H. and Miller, J.M. (Eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Criminology*, Routledge, Abingdon, pp. 141-159.

Bottomley, K. and Pease, K. (1994), *Crime and Punishment: Interpreting the Data*, Open University Press, London.

Bourgois, P. (1995), *Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bretteville-Jensen, A.L. (2011), "Illegal drug use and the economic recession – what can we learn from the existing research?", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 353-359.

Cahill, A. (2014), "Almost 10% of Irish young people emigrated during recession", Irish Examiner, 29th March.

Callan, T., Nolan, B., Keane, C., Savage, M. and Walsh, J. (2013), "The great recession, austerity and inequality: evidence from Ireland", *Intereconomics*, Vol. 48 No. 6, pp. 335-338.

Cambridge, G., Lynch, O. and Windle, J. (2022), *The Desistance Journey: Into Recovery and out of Chaos*, Palgrave McMillan, London.

Carew, A.M. and Comiskey, C. (2018), "Rising incidence of ageing opioid users within the EU wide treatment demand indicator; the Irish opioid epidemic from 1996 to 2014", *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, Vol. 192 No. 2, pp. 329-337.

Caulkins, J.P. (2011), "The global recession's effect on drug demand – diluted by inertia", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 374-375.

Central Statistics Office (CSO) (n.d.), "Recorded crime offices by type of offence and year", available at: https://data.cso.ie/

Central Statistics Office (CSO) (2004), "Statistical year book", available at: www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/statisticalyearbook/2004/ireland&theeu.pdf

Chalmers, J. and Ritter, A. (2011), "The business cycle and drug use in Australia: evidence from repeated cross-sections of individual level data", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 341-352.

Charmaz, K. (2006), *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*, Sage, London.

Chavez, C. (2008), "Conceptualizing from the inside: advantages, complications, and demands on insider positionality", *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 474-494.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V. (2021), *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*, Sage, London.

Claudy, M.C., Keating, A. and Prothero, A. (2017), "Consumption", in Roche, W.K., O'Connell, P.J. and Prothero, A. (Eds), *Austerity and Recovery in Ireland: Europe's Poster Child and the Great Recession*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 107-124.

Colell, E., Sanchez-Niubo, A., Delclos, G.L., Benavides, F.G. and Domingo-Salvany, A. (2015), "Economic crisis and changes in drug use in the Spanish economically-active population", *Addiction*, Vol. 110 No. 7, pp. 1129-1137.

Comiskey, C.M. (2003), "Young people, drug use and early school leaving: estimating the prevalence, assessing the impact and assisting policy and planning", *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 159-168.

Cusack, J. (2009), "Downturn hits cocaine trade as price plummets", Irish Independent, 15th March.

European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) (2019), "Ireland county report", available at: www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/country-drug-reports/2019/ireland_en

Health Research Board (2022), "National drug treatment reporting system (NDTRS) data", available at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/tables/

Healy, T. (2015), "Emigration has taken its toll", available at: www.nerinstitute.net/blog/monday-blog-emigration-has-taken-its-toll

Hobbs, D., Hadfield, P., Lister, S. and Winlow, S. (2003), *Bouncers: Violence and Governance in the Night-Time Economy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hourigan, N., Morrison, J.F., Windle, J. and Silke, A. (2018), "Crime in Ireland North and South: feuding gangs and profiteering paramilitaries", *Trends in Organized Crime*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 126-146.

IPSOS (2015), "Prevalence of drug use and gambling in Ireland and drug use in Northern Ireland", available at: www.drugsandalcohol.ie/26364/1/Bulletin-1.pdf

Kelly, E. and McGuinness, S. (2015), "Impact of the great recession on unemployed and NEET individuals' labour market transitions in Ireland", *Economic Systems*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 59-71.

Kondilis, E., Giannakopoulos, S., Gavana, M., Ierodiakonou, I., Waitzkin, H. and Benos, A. (2013), "Economic crisis, restrictive policies, and the population's health and health care: the Greek case", *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 103 No. 6, pp. 973-979.

Lally, C. (2010), "Recession forces cocaine gangs to move into the booming illegal cigarette market", The Irish Times, 22nd Febuary.

Lally, C. (2011), "Illegal drug use in decline for first time in a decade", The Irish Times, 23rd November.

Leonard, J. (2021), "An autobiographical account of desistance and recovery", in Lynch, O., Windle, J. and Ahmed, Y. (Eds), *Giving Voice to Diversity in Criminological Research: Nothing about Us without Us*, Policy, Bristol, pp. 149-153.

Leonard, J. and Windle, J. (2020), "'I could have went down a different path': talking to people who used drugs problematically and service providers about Irish drug policy alternatives", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 84, p. 102891.

Lynch, O., Windle, J. and Ahmed, Y. (2021), *Giving Voice to Diversity in Criminological Research: "Nothing about Us without Us"*, Policy, Bristol.

Lynn, E., Cousins, G., Lyons, S. and Bennett, K.E. (2021), "Trends in drug poisoning deaths, by sex, in Ireland: a repeated cross-sectional study from 2004 to 2017", *BMJ Open*, Vol. 11 No. 9, p. e048000.

MacDonald, R. and Marsh, J. (2002), "Crossing the Rubicon: youth transitions, poverty, drugs and social exclusion", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 27-38.

Merriam, S.B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M.Y., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G. and Muhamad, M. (2001), "Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures", *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, Vol. 20 No. 5, pp. 405-416.

Molloy, T. (2013), "Recession over", Irish Independent, 19th October.

Mott, H.J. (1985), "Self-reported cannabis use in great Britain in 1981", *Addiction*, Vol. 80 No. 1, pp. 37-43.

Mulcahy, J. (2021), "Re-storying offending behaviour: a normal response to an overdose of trauma?", in Lynch, O., Windle, J. and Ahmed, Y. (Eds), *Giving Voice to Diversity in Criminological Research: "Nothing about Us without Us*", Policy, Bristol, pp. 89-111.

O'Connell, P.J. (2017), "Unemployment and the labour market", in Roche, W.K., O'Connell, P.J. and Prothero, A. (Eds), *Austerity and Recovery in Ireland: Europe's Poster Child and the Great Recession*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 232-252.

O'Gorman, A. (1998), "Illicit drug use in Ireland: an overview of the problem and policy responses", *Journal of Drug Issues*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 155-166.

O'Gorman, A. (2014), "Neighbourhood effects: the influence of time, space and structures on drug consumption trends and practices", in Potter, G.R., Wouters, M. and Fountain, J. (Eds), *Change and Continuity: Researching Evolving Drug Landscapes in Europe*, Pabsta, Lengerich, pp. 21-36.

O'Brien, J., Doyle, K. and Maguire, N. (2014), "Trends in public order offences", *Irish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 138-142.

Pearson, G. (1987), *The New Heroin Users*, Blackwell, London.

Peck, D.F. and Plant, M.A. (1986), "Unemployment and illegal drug use: concordant evidence from a prospective study and national trends", *BMJ*, Vol. 293 No. 6552, pp. 929-932.

Pike, B. and King, D. (2013), "Responding to addiction in a time of recession", *Drugnet Ireland*, Vol. 47, pp. 2-3.

Pobal (2016), "Deprivation maps", available at: https://maps.pobal.ie/WebApps/DeprivationIndices/index.html

Punch, M. (2005), "Problem drug use and the political economy of urban restructuring: heroin, class and governance in Dublin", *Antipode*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 754-774.

Roche, W.K., O'Connell, P.J. and Prothero, A. (2017), *Austerity and Recovery in Ireland: Europe's Poster Child and the Great Recession*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Rosenfeld, R. and Decker, S.H. (1999), "Are arrest statistics a valid measure of illicit drug use? The relationship between criminal justice and public health indicators of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana use", *Justice Quarterly*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 685-699.

Seaman, V. and Lynch, O. (2022), "Knifing off? The inadequacies of desistance frameworks for women in the criminal justice system in Ireland", in Grace, S., O'Neill, M., Walker, T., King, H., Baldwin, L., Jobe, A., Lynch, O., Measham, F., O'Brein, K. and Seaman, V. (Eds), *Criminal Women*, Policy, Bristol, pp. 37-63.

Smyth, B.P., O'Brien, M. and Barry, J. (2000), "Trends in treated opiate misuse in Dublin: the emergence of chasing the dragon", *Addiction*, Vol. 95 No. 8, pp. 1217-1223.

Stevens, A. (2011), *Drugs, Crime and Public Health: The Political Economy of Drug Policy*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Storti, C., De Grauwe, P. and Reuter, P. (2011), "Economic recession, drug use and public health", *International Journal of Drug Policy*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 321-325.

van Hout, M.C. (2007), "A community perspective of cocaine use in Ireland: a brief exploratory study", *Contemporary Drug Problems*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 103-110.

van Hout, M.C. (2009a), "An illustrative picture of Irish youth substance use", *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 6-7.

van Hout, M. (2009b), "Drug use among rural Irish adolescents-a brief exploratory study", *Drugs and Alcohol Today*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 20-25.

Wakeman, S. (2016), "The moral economy of heroin in 'austerity Britain'", *Critical Criminology*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 363-377.

White, T.J. (2010), "Celtic collapse, or Celtic correction?: Ireland's recession in historical perspective", *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 27-43.

Windle, J. (2018), "The impact of the great recession on the Irish drug market", *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, Vol. 18 No. 5, pp. 548-567.

Windle, J., Drew, S. and Leonard, J. (2020), "Why drug dealing and drug use will increase after covid-19", RTÉ Brainstorm, available at: www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2020/0901/1162507-drug-dealing-consumption-ireland-recession-coronavirus/

Windle, J., Lynch, O., Sweeney, K., O'Neill, M., Donson, F. and Cuffe, J. (2022), *Criminology, Crime and Justice in Ireland: An Introduction*, Routledge, Abingdon.

Zuccato, E., Castiglioni, S., Tettamanti, M., Olandese, R., Bagnati, R., Melis, M. and Fanelli, R. (2011), "Changes in illicit drug consumption patterns in 2009 detected by wastewater analysis", *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, Vol. 118 Nos 2/3, pp. 464-469.

About the authors

James Windle is Lecturer in Criminology at University College Cork. His recent books include *Suppressing Illicit Opium Production: Successful Intervention in Asia and the Middle East* (Bloomsbury, 2016), *The Desistance Journey: Into Recovery and Out of Chaos* (Palgrave, 2022), *Giving Voice to Diversity in Criminological Research* (Policy, 2021) and *Criminology, Crime and Justice in Ireland: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2022). James Windle is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: james.windle@ucc.ie

Graham Cambridge is a project worker at Churchfield Community Trust. He was previously a support worker at Cork Alliance Centre where he supported people to make a fresh start, both in terms of reducing offending, recovery support and increase participation in individual, family and community life. His first book is *The Desistance Journey: Into Recovery and Out of Chaos* (Palgrave).

James Leonard is a community worker at Niche Health Project, Cork. He was previously a team leader for Coolmine Drug and Alcohol Treatment Centre, a youth support worker for the Cork Education and Training Board, taught psychology in the Cork College of Commerce, and conducted training for recruit prison officers with the Irish Prison Service. He is co-host of The Two Norries Podcast.

Orla Lynch is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology, University College Cork, Ireland. Orla's current research focuses on victimisation, trauma and political violence in relation to the direct victims of violence, but also the broader psycho-social impact of victimisation and the perpetrator–victim complex. Her recent books include *Giving Voice to Diversity in Criminological Research* (Policy, 2021), *Reflections on Irish Criminology* (Palgrave, 2020), *Applying Psychology: The Case of Terrorism and Political Violence* (Blackwell, 2018), *The Desistance Journey: Into Recovery and Out of Chaos* (Palgrave, 2022) and *Criminology, Crime and Justice in Ireland: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2022).

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:
www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com