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Amsterdam Coffeeshops, Victimization, and Police Mobilization

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Abstract

Police mobilization is a first step in the judicial process and an important source of information on offending. Whether victims mobilize police is affected by their assessment of its utility. Victims who are criminals, such as drug dealers, are known to face a different cost-benefit scenario than law-abiding persons. Dutch 'coffeeshops' are a unique type of dealer. They operate in a grey area, allowed by the government to sell a prohibited drug, cannabis, so long as they comply with a set of regulations. Little is known about their mobilization of police in response to victimization, including how it is affected by the rules governing their business. We explore this issue with qualitative data collected from personnel of 50 coffeeshops in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. We analyze how they think about the potential benefits and costs of asking the police for help post victimization. In many ways, their thought process is similar to that of most any victim, but they also consider the potential negative ramifications of inviting police to their door. We conclude by discussing the implications for future research, regulation and drug control broadly, and coffeeshops specifically.

Keywords:

Police mobilization, victimization, regulation policy, cannabis

A first link in the judicial chain is victim's mobilization of police. For government authorities, not to mention researchers, unreported victimization is a knowledge problem (Biderman and Reiss 1967; Coleman and Moynihan 1996; Gill 2002). When people withhold such information, the actual extent of offending is masked (i.e., the dark figure of crime increases), which impedes optimal allocation of police resources. Most research on mobilization is quantitative and focuses on victims' characteristics, their relationship to offenders, or differences across countries (Avakame *et al.* 1999; Baumer 2002; Felson *et al.* 1999, 2002; Goudriaan *et al.* 2004). Research less often looks at rationality through a qualitative lens. Perhaps the richest body of such work is that on victimized drug dealers.

In this article, we explore the rationality of police mobilization by a particular sort of drug dealer: personnel of cannabis-selling coffeeshops. This is a unique group with which to examine the substantive issues, owing to their business being semi-illegal and highly regulated. Our goal is to shed light on how personnel think about mobilizing law, in terms of benefits and costs, with an eye to how this is shaped by Dutch coffeeshop policy. We do so by analyzing qualitative data from interviews with personnel (owners and employees) of 50 coffeeshops located in and around the Red Light District of Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Our findings demonstrate the unintended consequences of place-based regulatory policies, informing the worldwide shift from cannabis prohibition to decriminalization and legalization.

Mobilization of Police by Victimized Drug Dealers

Mobilization is 'the process by which a legal system acquires its cases' (Black and Mileski 1973, p. 6; Black 1980). Much has been learned about it by focusing on victimized drug dealers.¹ This is because, on the one hand, dealers should be afforded protection under the law, but, on the other hand, the illegality of their business puts them in a precarious position to request legal assistance (Jacques and Allen 2015; Jacques and Wright 2013). Indeed, that position makes them an attractive target to would-be robbers, defrauders, burglars, and other predators (Jacobs 1999, 2000; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997).

The rationality perspective provides one way to analyze and understand dealers' responses to victimization. The theory is that actors weigh the potential benefits and costs of various lines of action, and choose whichever has the greatest payoff or, at least, the lowest loss (Bentham 1970). By extension, people's responses to victimization should be affected by

¹ As used herein, the term 'drug dealer' – or 'dealer' for short – refers to someone who sells psychoactive substances used for recreation (see Zimring and Hawkins 1992). Like many roles, that of the dealer is filled by many types of people and found across many times and places (Coomber 2006).

their assessment of how the possibilities compare in utility (i.e., benefits minus costs). Thus, a victim should be more likely to mobilize when it is perceived to have greater benefit or less cost, but, if deemed to have less utility than informal alternatives, should not occur. Informal routes are retaliation, negotiation, avoidance, gossip, and toleration (among dealers, see, Dickinson 2015; Jacques and Wright 2011, 2015; Jacques *et al.* 2016; Jacobs and Wright 2006; more generally, see, e.g., Anderson 1999; Black 1998; Cooney 2009).

Many of the factors that weigh on victimized dealers' decisions (not) to mobilize police are also considered by law-abiding victims. Both types of victims consider how much time, effort, and other resources may be incurred to mobilize police. These costs stem from contacting police, waiting for them to investigate, providing information, perhaps going to the police station, and filling out forms. If police arrest and charge a suspect, the victim may then be compelled to attend court to provide testimony (Tarling and Morris 2010).

Whether those costs are 'worth it' depends on the potential concrete benefits, such as recovering lost property, and abstract rewards, like pleasure in justice (Tarling and Morris 2010). Tied to that, most anyone will consider whether the police are unwilling or unable to pursue the matter and accordingly adjust the utility of involving them. Relevant evaluations in that regard are the crime's seriousness and a victim's self-blaming (Baumer 2002; Gottfredson and Hindelang 1979; Goudriaan *et al.* 2004).

There are unique factors that enter victimized dealers' cost/benefit assessment of police mobilization. Unlike law-abiding persons, dealers may consider whether the police know them to be criminals and, therefore, undeserving of help (Jacques and Wright 2013; from the perspective of police, see, e.g., Klinger 1997; Moskos 2008). Furthermore, dealers may worry that requesting police assistance will bring (further) attention to their own crimes, leading to unwanted surveillance, investigation, and punishment. Whether contraband is involved has an effect, too (Copes *et al.* 2011; Jacques and Wright 2013; Mohamed and Fritsvold 2010; Jacobs 2000). For example, a dealer who is robbed of €1,000 in cash may have a plausible way to involve the police and recover the money, but that is not true if the stolen item is a fully prohibited drug, such as cocaine or heroin.

Dutch Coffeeshop Policy

In the 1970s, the Netherlands introduced a regulatory regime for narcotic drugs that distinguishes less harmful, or 'soft', drugs from unacceptably harmful, or 'hard', drugs (Spapen *et al.* 2015). Cannabis was categorized as a soft drug. To prevent cannabis users from gaining connections to hard drug dealers, the Dutch government allows so-called

‘coffeeshops’ to sell cannabis. This type of retail business is formally illegal but allowed, so long as purveyors adhere to a set of conditions stipulated in the revised Opium Act of 1976 and since expanded; they are outlined below (MacCoun 2011; Monshouwer *et al.* 2011). In this sense, coffeeshops occupy a ‘grey area’: The law is not black and white with respect to their activities. All the more so because though coffeeshops are allowed to make cannabis sales, it is *de jure* and *de facto* illegal for them to purchase stock for trade.

In exchange for formal permission to break the law on cannabis distribution, the government requires coffeeshops to follow a set of strictly enforced rules, or regulations. At any given establishment, the Dutch policy prohibits the presence of hard drugs, persons under 18 years of age, or more than 500 grams of cannabis. Nor may a coffeeshop sell more than 5 grams to an individual in a day, advertise, or be a source of nuisance. Failure to comply with the rules can result in short-term, long-term, or permanent closure, as well as criminal prosecution if warranted (Spapen *et al.* 2015).

The Dutch policy takes a proactive approach to seeking out rule violations at coffeeshops. As one worker explained: ‘You [have to] agree to let the police in the door whenever they come. ... We have far more checks on our business than any other sort of business in the country. We have police checking for all sort of stipulations they can shut us down for’ (Jacques 2019, p. 2). Annually at each coffeeshop, police are required to conduct at least two unannounced visits to check for compliance. The number of site-visits can be more, as to do otherwise would allow personnel to relax control. Across the 50 coffeeshops examined in this article (described in ‘The Present Study’ section), there were about 2.5 surprise checks at each, on average. For some coffeeshops, this in-establishment surveillance is a monthly occurrence (for details, see Jacques 2019).

The Dutch coffeeshop policy is an example of a place-based enforced, self-regulation policy (Graham and Homel 2008). Regulation, in this context, is defined as ‘allowing the controlled supply of the product or service by licensed operators’ (Spapen *et al.* 2015). The aim of regulating retail cannabis sales is to prevent the negative externalities of crime and disorder by motivating coffeeshop personnel to internalize the costs of those problems (see Eck and Eck 2012). In other words, the government indirectly controls behavior at coffeeshops by motivating personnel to exercise informal control. Police take on a ‘quasi-enforcement and managerial role’ (Buerger and Mazerolle 1998, p. 302), with personnel forced into playing the role of police officer.

That indirect control is achieved by threatening coffeeshops with punishment for violations, and increasing the certainty of detection through surprise police checks. The goal

is partly deterrence: scare personnel *out of* acting in prohibited ways, such as advertising, selling more than 5 grams to a person in a day, or having more than 500 grams on the premise. Also, the goal is what Jacques (2019) terms proterrence: scare personnel *into* stopping non-personnel from committing prohibited acts. This effect is created by holding coffeeshops responsible for violations by other persons, like bringing hard drugs onto the premises, entering the establishment underage, or starting a fight – a type of nuisance.

Dutch coffeeshop policy has been largely successful at achieving its goals. It separates the markets for hard and soft drugs, without increasing the latter's consumption, with a greater net benefit – financially, morally, and with respect to public health – than prohibition (MacCoun 2011; Monshouwer *et al.* 2011; Reinerman 2009; Wouters and Korf 2009; Wouters *et al.* 2012). Yet the policy is not without problems, some better known than others (see Jacques 2019). Perhaps the best example is that Dutch coffeeshops attract international drug trafficking. Especially in the past, but surely still today, people living in neighboring countries will go the Netherlands, buy cannabis, and illegally bring it home (Advisory Committee on Drugs Policy 2009). Other problems are less established.

Mobilization of Police by Victimized Coffeeshops

Potentially, the rules governing coffeeshops may negatively affect personnel's mobilization of police in response to victimization. Scholars have recognized that enforced self-regulation policies may have unintended negative consequences, including on victims' mobilization of police (Gill 2002; Eck 2010, 2017; Freilich and Newman 2018). As reviewed above, coffeeshop personnel have a vested interest in, one, abiding by the rules and, two not increasing police officers' opportunity to detect violations. Otherwise, they risk short-term or permanent closure and, in the extreme, criminal prosecution. Therefore, and like dealers of fully prohibited substances, victimized coffeeshops may see it as a risk to mobilize police.

The literature is largely quiet on that possibility and, more broadly, how personnel decide to mobilize police. The most pertinent study is that of Jacques and colleagues (2016). They found that in response to victimization, coffeeshops' rate of police mobilization was greater than that of street dealers, but equal to that of bars/cafés/pubs. Thus, they found mixed support for the theory that when victimized, dealers' mobilization of police varies inversely with the illegality of the drug sold (Goldstein 1985). That article left much unexamined and unexplained – voids we fill herein. Its limitations include no qualitative analysis bearing on why personnel responded as they did to victimization.

The Present Study

In this study, we analyze personnel's explanations of why they chose (not) to mobilize police when victimized. We focus on victimizations in the *de jure* illegal but *de facto* legal part of coffeeshop business; that is, the retail sale of cannabis to customers on the premises. As with dealers of fully prohibited drugs, coffeeshop personnel have the right to formal protection and justice. Yet, the policy that governs their business may lead them to think it is better not to mobilize police when victimized. At the same time, other considerations may take equal or more precedence: The time, effort, and other resources required to seek formal justice; the potential to obtain concrete and abstract benefits; the crime's seriousness; and, victim culpability.

Data and Methods

The second-author, henceforth 'the fieldworker,' collected qualitative data by interviewing personnel (i.e., owners and employees) of 50 coffeeshops. The coffeeshops were in and around Amsterdam's Red Light District, an area about one square mile in size. It is a tourism spot because of its history, architecture, and, not least, deviant attractions; coffeeshops are one.² In fall 2008, the fieldworker made a population list of the area's coffeeshops. He did so by recording their names and addresses while walking every street. To ensure the list's accuracy and completeness, he compared it to results on Google Maps and the Amsterdam Coffee Shop Directory (coffeeshop.freeuk.com/Map.html). That process led to a population list of 84 coffeeshops.

Interviews and observations were conducted in Amsterdam from September 2008 to May 2010, with follow-up visits in the summers of 2011 and 2016. Before recruiting an establishment's personnel to give an interview, he mailed them a letter describing the study and requesting participation; one side was written in English, the other in Dutch. Next, he visited each business to request involvement in the study. The aim was to interview the highest-ranking representative possible. To serve as a participant, a person must have owned or worked at the establishment for at least 6 months. Upon meeting a potential participant, the fieldworker introduced himself, provided his business card, and briefly outlined the study's purpose and methods, including that respondents would be remunerated with €50.

Among personnel who agreed to participate, 64% are male; 34 is the average age; 10% were married; 26% graduated from secondary school; 70% identified as White, 6% as Black,

² For further details on the study, see Jacques 2019; Jacques *et al.* 2016. The study was approved by the fieldworker's Institutional Review Board.

and 24% other; 40% immigrated to the Netherlands; 56% and 30% reported daily use of cannabis and alcohol, respectively. Participants provided information on traits of all personnel of their coffeeshop, as well. On average, 67% are male; 15% married; 81% White; and, 47% immigrants. On average at coffeeshops, there is one owner; one manager; five dealers who focus on selling cannabis but may also serve drink and food; two servers who only serve the latter; a runner who brings the cannabis stock; and, sometimes another dedicated employee, such as a cleaner or a doorman.

During each interview, the goal was to obtain data about the coffeeshop's prevention of victimization, experiences with it, and responses. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol that promoted consistency in what was discussed across participants, while allowing unplanned follow-up questions to elicit further details. Of course, some participants may have lied or otherwise said something not reflecting the 'truth' (cf. Presser and Sandberg 2015; Bernasco 2010). The fieldworker countered this problem by asking clarification questions, promising confidentiality, and informing participants of their rights as a research subject. Interviews took place in English because the fieldworker is only fluent in it. This language barrier did not preclude any personnel from participating, as all exhibited fluency in English.

Interviews lasted between one and two hours, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Of the 50 interviewees, seven declined to be recorded and one conversation was conducted in a place too loud to be recorded; instead, the fieldworker took detailed notes. Using NVivo 10, a qualitative, software package, files were coded with identification tags corresponding to relevant research issues. Initial tags were generally broad. One of these was information related to police mobilization. The first and second authors sifted through the data to create narrower distinctions. Emergent categories were personnel's perceptions of the potential benefits and costs of mobilizing police when victimized. The final coding step involved detailed analysis of variance across cases, the results are presented, below.

Coffeeshop Personnel's Rational Reasons for (Not) Mobilizing Police

Potential Benefits

When victimized, coffeeshop personnel implicitly or explicitly considered the utility – benefits minus costs – of mobilizing police. We begin our analysis with the potential benefits. Like most any victim, personnel weighed whether the police would be willing and able to pursue justice. For example, when Hassan was asked if he called the police after €400 was stolen out of the register, he answered: ‘No, I didn’t because he [the thief] was gone. If you call them they are going to see the camera and that’s it. They are not going to do shit, believe me. It’s going to get reported, that’s the only thing [that will result]. It’s only giving me extra work, extra headache for nothing.’

Hanna described a less serious crime, handled the same way for the same reason. A thief posed as a customer, but ran off with the marijuana when it came into his grasp. In response, Hanna merely made an accounting note of the loss: ‘[I] put it on a list: minus 1 [gram, worth about €10]’ (on accounting in coffeeshops, see Jacques 2019). She did mobilize police ‘because there wouldn’t be anything that they could do.’ The fieldworker followed-up with the question, ‘And that’s all it comes down to, so if they could do something about it would you?’ Her answer was, ‘Yeah, of course’.

In addition to whether police *could* do anything, personnel assessed whether they *would* do anything. Negative assessments often pertained to the crime low seriousness. Maud had trouble getting a rule-breaker to leave, making the person a trespasser. Asked about requesting help from the police, she stated: ‘I would not call the police because I would not want to make a big issue just about someone who does not want to go outside. It’s a small problem. If it is a bigger problem then yes, I will call the police.’

Victims’ culpability also shaped their perception of what the police would do if called on. This effect was discussed with Jack, for instance. He detailed an incident in which his careless surveillance allowed a ‘German bastard’ to leave without paying for €100 of marijuana. Posed the question about mobilizing police, he said: ‘For the police to even bother investigating it would be a miracle. They would be like, “Ah, you are a muppet!” That is what they would say to me, effectively. “That’s your fault for being stupid!” So it didn’t even cross my mind to report it to the police.’

Personnel did not always deem the benefits of police mobilization as too low to warrant it. This came up was with respect to tax write-offs and insurance claims. This rationale was made possible by the Dutch coffeeshop policy’s treatment of coffeeshops as above-ground, instead of underground, businesses. Coffeeshops pay income and corporate

taxes, though not VAT, to Dutch authorities, resulting in significant revenue for the government (MacCoun 2011).

A common refrain among personnel was about taxes. Not so much about being owed, but how it was enforced. Finn said of the tax-collector, ‘They are never satisfied. They want to know every gram that is being bought, every gram that is being sold by name, by whatever.’ Irman described what this looks like: ‘The tax people, they check the cash machine; how much you sold for that day; what average to make the plan for the week, for the month or the year; see how much tax you are paying.’ As with any legal business (or any criminal, for that matter), not paying one’s taxes is a risk. So coffeeshops take steps to make sure they do. ‘Everything [pertinent to accounting] is automated, recorded, and audited. I think he [the owner] has had tax problems, before but not now’, James explained.

Paying taxes has its advantages, though. When victimized, coffeeshops could turn this obligation into a benefit. Victor, for instance, was asked whether personnel at his coffeeshop were willing to report victimizations to the police; he responded: ‘Shops pay taxes like everybody else. They pay tax on what they sell. Coffeeshops pay taxes, so they are going to report it, hell yeah.’

In addition to tax write-offs were insurance claims. Coffeeshops acquire insurance and pay the premiums as a hedge on risk. To file a claim, it is often necessary to make a formal report, which insurance companies require to cut-down on false payouts. So, after a burglary at Maikel’s coffeeshop, in which about €700 worth of marijuana was stolen, he made a police report because ‘I am insured, the shop is insured.’ Mike detailed the logic of involving the police after his coffeeshop was robbed of more than €1,000 in cash and about 430 grams of cannabis: ‘You have to do it. It is basically for insurance. I know for sure they [the owners] have insurance for robbery: Like you get robbed for something, and they [the insurer] give you the money back.’

Potential Costs

Coffeeshops’ tax obligations posed a risk to mobilizing police, as well, which brings us our analysis to the potential costs of mobilizing police. Tips are a cultural phenomenon; in some places they are expected (as at restaurants in the United States), in others unexpected. They were the latter in Dutch coffeeshops, but, largely thanks to American visitors and small change, were occasionally received. To collect this incentive, coffeeshops would put ‘tip jars’ on the counter, in full reach of any customer – and equally accessible to thieves. This is poor

crime prevention, no doubt, but it was done to avoid problems with the tax authorities; as Lizzie explained:

I cannot put it [tips] in the register because if the tax people come, I have €10 extra in the register, then they think I might do something on the side or something [such as selling my own cannabis³]. Everyone always thinks first that you do criminal things. When the police come to check the tax people also come and ask you everything, they will do your administration and then the money has to be correct.

Because tips went largely unreported on personnel's income tax filings, they feared the ramifications of involving police when stolen. In Dean's words: 'Yes, they [people] steal the tip jar. Yeah, this happened one time.' Asked if it was reported to police, he answered, 'They [personnel working at the time] have to be secretive. Otherwise, we get in trouble with the tax office.' The fieldworker followed up with, 'What would cause problems with the taxes – the tip jar?' He responded, 'Well, the really legal way if you make a little bit more money [is] you have to declare it. No one does, but in every business, like the casino they have to do it also. That's why it is a little bit awkward to talk about it.'

To here, the discussion on the potential benefits and costs is applicable to victims everywhere, criminal and law-abiding. Coffeeshop personnel do, however, have unique considerations. Their assessment to mobilize police was shaped by how it could interact with the rules governing coffeeshops. The effect could be direct or indirect.

Potentially, a direct cost of calling the police when victimized is that on arrival, they discover, record, and sanction a violation. Linda, in response to being asked if the police provide the same protection to coffeeshops and bars, answered, 'I do know they [coffeeshops] are less keen on reporting to them.' Probed for a reason, she alluded to the risk that police detect a rule violation while investigating the victimization: 'If they come in and they find hard drugs [then we are in trouble]. I think they [police] watch you more as in a Big Brother thing [which is why coffeeshops are less apt to mobilize them].' She added, 'Speaking for the company I work for, we just try to do everything according to the rules.'

When coffeeshop personnel did mobilize police, police seemed less quick to help them than bars. Talking about whether the police do a good job, Jens stated: 'Usually, but it depends. They respond quickly to bars; coffeeshops, they are usually a little bit lax [about

³ See, for example, Jacques 2019.

providing swift assistance]. Sometimes it can be real shit for me when I am working, and so sometimes you really do have to be dependent on the police and, yeah, they do seem to respond quicker to bars than to coffeeshops – that’s a fact.’

A potential indirect cost of mobilizing police, when victimized, is putting the coffeeshop in hot water by tarnishing its reputation for rule compliance. Jack worried that reporting victimization would jeopardize the coffeeshop’s standing with police. The same concern also motivated him not to aggressively handle the incident, as even self-defense could be interpreted as violating the ban on nuisance:

The less you have the police over for an incident like that [the better]. It is kind of a bad mark on the coffeeshop, even though it is not our fault. If I had started a fight there [or something to handle the offender,] it would go on our records that there has been an incident in the coffeeshop; violence had occurred and if I had thrown the first punch. That would stand on their records, so we have to be very wary of all that.

Jack and his coffeeshop also serve as a good example of within-coffeeshop variation in mobilizing police. Above, he presents reasons not to involve police, whereas, below, he implies how rule compliance provides a safety net for their involvement. To contextualize that observation, it is important to realize that coffeeshops vary in respectability. As with individual offenders, individual coffeeshops vary in respectability. It is higher, by definition, at a coffeeshop that takes more steps to prevent violations; has fewer of them, of a less serious nature; and, been punished less often and less severely.

Getting back to Jack, he alludes to how the coffeeshop’s respectability mitigated the risk of mobilizing police, making its potential benefit outweigh the potential cost:

If I needed to call the police, I would call them. If we need to ask advice, we will ask them. As much as the authorities do consider us criminal enterprises, the police do their best to work with us. As long as we can stay in line with them [with respect to the coffeeshop rules], we can count on them not treating us like gangsters. [For example,] when I have a problem like 15 nutters about to start a riot in my coffeeshop, I can call on them [police] for help and they will come running. They will come and help us. They don’t mess around. If we ask for their help they come quick.

Coffeeshops with more respectability have more access to law, at least in theory (Black, 1976). Ergo, they should be more likely to mobilize police and receive better service. To the extent that the average coffeeshop is higher in respectability, the average utility of mobilizing police should increase. Because Dutch coffeeshop policy weeds out bad coffeeshops by closing persistent and serious violators, it is logical that, as time goes on, the average coffeeshop becomes more respectable. Gijs reflected on this possibility:

I have a feeling that it is getting better, like over the last thirty years since I have been dealing. Yeah, I have seen robberies, I have seen things like that happening. So I think with the coffeeshop, in the old days it was more like, “Ok, we have a space, we have a bar, we have hash so let’s sell.” The book keeping was not always totally right, tax paying. But nowadays everything gets [properly] arranged [nowadays]. I mean it’s a totally legitimate business. Because of all these rules, and maybe the contact with the police, crimes [by coffeeshops] have become a little bit less. I do have a feeling that it has changed for the good.

Discussion

Coffeeshops are a peculiar kind of drug dealer. Their retail sales are *de jure* prohibited by *de jure* legal, contingent on compliance with a set of government rules. Before summarizing how that uniqueness affects their mobilization of police in response to victimization, we reiterate how coffeeshop personnel are like many other victims: First, they considered the potential benefits of the formal path. Its prospect was partly contingent on perceptions of officers’ willingness and ability to seek justice. That assessment reflects the crime’s characteristics and circumstances, such as its seriousness, the likelihood of apprehending the offender, and the victim’s culpability. If justice was unlikely to be done, it was a waste of personnel’s resources (e.g., time and effort) to mobilize police. An exception was found with personnel who involved the police simply to get an official report. Though formal justice may fall short, the report enabled coffeeshops to write-off the loss on their taxes or to file an insurance claim (outside coffeeshops, see Goudriaan *et al.* 2004). Yet taxes became a liability when tips were stolen, the worry being that a police report could inadvertently lead to trouble with the tax authorities.

Other considerations of personnel were unique to working in a coffeeshop. They expressed being ‘less keen’ to involve the police than are neighboring bar personnel (but see

Jacques *et al.* 2016), and, when police assistance was requested, as receiving less good service. The latter perception may lead to the former, but, more so, personnel discussed the potential cost of inviting police to their door. The risk stemmed from the possibility that on arrival, the police would discover a rule violation, which, in turn, would lead to negative consequences for the victim. The consequence could be a damaged reputation or, more concretely, short- to term-closure or even criminal prosecution.

Potentially, that sequence of events – from victim to complainant to offender – could be tied to any of the rules. Recall that on the premise, there cannot be hard drugs, persons under 18 years of age, or more 500 grams of cannabis; and, a coffeeshop cannot sell more than 5 grams to an individual in a day, advertise, or be a source of nuisance. So, for example, when called to the scene of a victimization, police could walk into a coffeeshop and observe a violation in plain sight, such as hard drugs that had been dropped on the floor (see, e.g., Linda’s quote). Or, police could blame the victim for the offense, take issue with the self-defense (e.g., Jack’s quote), or construe the crime as nuisance – a rather vague concept in the Dutch coffeeshop policy (Jacques 2019; Ooyen-Houben and Kleemans 2015).

In a word, the rules governing coffeeshops seem to deter personnel from reporting victimization to police. This deterrence is not absolute, but rather restrictive. ‘Absolute deterrence’ refers to cases in which fear stops an actor from ever committing an act. With ‘restrictive deterrence’, the non-commission is partial (Gibbs 1975; Jacobs 1993, 1996; Jacques and Allen 2014; Moeller, Copes and Hochstetler 2016). In the criminological literature, deterrence and those subtypes are used to explain crime. Yet it makes equal sense to use them with respect to victims’ mobilization of police, so long as their fear is the causal mechanism. Sometimes, personnel fear that mobilizing police will cause trouble for the coffeeshop, so they forgo that path.

We do not want to overstate the uniqueness of coffeeshops, in the above analysis. It is true that sellers of legal drugs are often regulated and, in theory, they may fear that involving the police will result in a violation being detected by them.⁴ Bars in the study area, for instance, were prohibited from, and punishable for, being a source of nuisance, having hard drugs on the premise, or selling to underage persons.⁵ However, those establishments are subject to fewer rules than coffeeshops; not subject to mandatory police checks; and, closure

⁴ Also, dealers of fully prohibited drugs refrain from mobilizing police to prevent apprehension and punishment, though are known to involve police if the cost-benefit balance is right (Jacques and Wright 2013; among criminals generally, see Rosenfeld *et al.* 2003; Topalli 2005).

⁵ Specifically, bars could not sell alcoholic beverages to persons 16 of age or younger, or drinks over 15% alcohol to person under 18 years of age.

for violations is rare (Jacques *et al.* 2016). Our conjecture, based on the fieldworker's experience, is that bar personnel have very little to fear and, therefore, that factor is unlikely to deter them from mobilizing police. Thus, while prior research shows that victimized bars and coffeeshops have similar rates of police mobilization, our findings suggest that they likely have some different motivations.

That assertion requires validation in future research, such as by analyzing bar personnel's explanations of why they did (not) mobilize police. It would also be useful to know if they share the assessment, voiced by coffeeshop personnel, that bars are more apt to involve police and receive better service from them. On top of that, the perspective of police officers would be very useful, too (see, e.g., Spicer 2019). Those possibilities speak to a limitation of this article: Its focus on a particular type of dealer, operating in a distinct locale, in a particular time period: coffeeshops, in and around Amsterdam's Red Light District, circa 2010. To be clear, those businesses are not only internationally unique, but also domestically owing to their location. Plus, the Dutch drug landscape is constantly evolving, with much changing in the country and study area post data-collection (Bieleman *et al.* 2015; Marie and Zölitz 2017). Unknown is the extent to which our findings generalize to other dealers. That problem applies not only to Dutch coffeeshops across time and place, but also to other kinds of semi-illegal dealers (e.g., dispensaries in US states); sellers of previously outlawed but now legal drugs (e.g., as with cannabis in Canada); and, those of drugs that have long been legal (e.g., alcohol in Europe).

Another limitation is the sole theoretical focus on cost-benefit assessment. Certainly, there are other influences on how coffeeshop personnel, and victims generally, decide (not) to mobilize police. For example, we left unexamined how victims' perceptions of police's legitimacy – a function of their perceived performance and fairness – affects the willingness to mobilize them (see Tyler 2003). Other variables likely to bound rationality are socio-cultural, informational, and emotional and emotional (Cornish and Clarke 1986; Kahneman and Tversky 1972; Moeller 2018). These factors are ripe for inquiry in future studies.

Implications

The article's findings and limitations lead to interesting questions about its implications for drug control, and control more broadly. Let us begin with the latter. Our study contributes to the knowledge of 'regulating crime' (Braithwaite 2000; Clarke 2018; Freilich and Newman 2018), especially at micro-places (Eck and Eck 2012). The rationale for the place-based regulation is to shift responsibility from government authorities onto others.

Governing at a distance is a growing issue of importance for criminology (Braithwaite 2000). Dutch coffeeshop policy is effective at reducing various harms, including those attributable to interpersonal crimes, yet that effect will appear bigger than it is if personnel are choosing not to involve police when victimization, due to fear of the consequences. In Gill's (2002) terminology, this is a knowledge problem for regulators. But personnel have a knowledge problem, too. They worry but cannot confirm that, one, police keep special tabs on perceived trouble-spots and, two, reporting victimization to police risks being identified as such a spot. This is an example of regulation's ambiguity in enforcement. Regulators seek compliance, but the process behind that is opaque, perhaps intentionally (Gill 2002; Hawkins 1998). Certainty is a double-edge sword, as it can deter actions, but it also provides information useful to evading detection. Uncertainty, then, is a friend and foe of control. Maximally effective regulatory enforcement should not be fully transparent or mysterious, but somewhere in between so as to keep regulated parties on their toes and in compliance.

With respect to drug control, more specifically, our findings shed new light on the debate about what is the optimal form and amount (for other recent insights, see Coomber *et al.* 2019; Spicer 2019). It is difficult to argue against harm reduction (Bacon 2016), first formulated by Bentham (1970) and now a staple of worldwide calls to promote happiness and minimize pain. Based on our findings, it could be interpreted that the rules governing coffeeshops have the unintended, negative consequence of harming criminal justice by deterring personnel from mobilizing police. Tying back to the article's opening, this effect has knock-on harms, such as contributing to the dark figure of crime and suboptimal allocation of resources. Furthermore, the non-reporting of victimization may skew interpretations of Dutch coffeeshop policy's effectiveness, making it more difficult to compare to the alternatives (see MacCoun and Reuter 2001).

An alternative interpretation, also evident in the data, is that part of why coffeeshops obey the rules is to keep the door open to mobilizing police as needed. To break the rules would make coffeeshops entirely on their own when victimized, unable to use anything but informal means to seek justice. Personnel may realize that, one day, they may have no better option than to involve police. Plausibly, then, coffeeshops' compliance with the rules is partly motivated by its payoff in access to law. Dutch policy allows coffeeshops to sell cannabis in order to reduce the harms of hard drugs, and it may also be that coffeeshops follow the rules to reduce the harms that would result from 'virtual anarchy' (Cooney 1998). This is an example of adversaries becoming allies. In criminology, perhaps the best known example is

that of criminals-turned-informants in exchange for leniency or immunity from police and prosecutors, with some even being rewarded financially (Natapoff 2011).

Dutch policy could take that a step further by making a new rule: When a victimization occurs at a coffeeshop, its personnel must mobilize police. For practical reasons, it would likely be wise to restrict the rule to certain types of offenses, such as violence or theft and destruction exceeding a certain monetary amount. Noncompliance, as with the other results, could result in punishment. This rule would further stretch police resources and may be perceived as illegitimate, among other potential costs. Likely benefits are reducing the dark figure of crime and related harms. The police would gain a better sense of which coffeeshops are the biggest problem, and so be better positioned to take appropriate action. That could further motivate coffeeshop personnel to prevent problems, out of fear that mobilizing police is a knock against their respectability and so a risk to their licensure. This would be a new source of proterrence, further scaring personnel into stopping non-personnel from committing prohibited acts.

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