

## 9. Drug use and early job insecurity

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the association between drug use, early job insecurity and periods of high youth unemployment using quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative analysis shows how young people's behaviour and attitudes towards drugs have changed as youth unemployment rates have increased over the past decade. The qualitative analysis, drawing on data referring to a lengthier period, explores how drug use and early job insecurity have affected young people's life courses and labour market transitions. Our contribution provides insights that can inform policy towards young people at risk of social exclusion as a result of their involvement with drugs. Conceptually, we focus on the significance of critical moments understood at both the societal and individual levels, looking at how the environment and the role of 'significant others' in the lives of these vulnerable young people affect their trajectories in positive and negative ways.

The 2008 international economic crisis hit young people particularly hard (Bell and Blanchflower, 2011; O'Reilly et al., 2017). In general, unemployment and increased job insecurity disproportionately affected youth (McQuaid, 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2018). However, the impact of the economic crisis varied greatly across Europe in terms of young people's probability of making a successful transition from school to employment (Karamessini et al., 2016).

The transition to adulthood is difficult for many young people. Moreover, the nature of this transition has changed profoundly. Changing demands for skills and the growth of precarious and flexible forms of employment have contributed to making transitions to adulthood more complex and individualized (Blossfeld et al., 2006). Shildrick and MacDonald (2007) argue that to understand how these transitions from school to work have become increasingly uncertain and unstructured requires a broader and

longer view of young people's experiences that captures the complexity and societal context of individual biographies.

Societal norms, institutions and the economic environment all shape a range of transitions for different groups of young people in different ways (Bøhler et al., Chapter 3 this volume). Societal norms establish expectations and practices as to how individuals should structure their lives, for instance via implicit norms about the ideal timing of important life events. Even though the acceptance of traditional societal norms has changed considerably in recent decades and the stigma attached to those who do not follow established conventions has diminished in certain areas, there are still societally approved times as to when young people are expected to begin working, start a family and get married (O'Reilly et al., 2014). Many of these important transitions follow a life script of events that are supposed to happen in young adulthood (Habermas, 2007), and many are connected to being able to support oneself financially.

Key events in this life script become increasingly more difficult to attain in an inhospitable socioeconomic and labour market context. Job insecurity has a range of repercussions for young people's lives that go beyond the lack of a stable source of income at a level that can sustain a young person. The difficulties facing young people affect several important choices linked to education and training (Ayllón and Nollenberger, 2016), career paths, family formation (Ayllón, 2017; Schneider, 2015; Sobotka et al., 2011) and living arrangements (Becker et al., 2010; Matsudaira, 2016). These difficulties may also affect health, subjective well-being (Buttler et al., 2016) and (anti-)social behaviour related, for example, to the use of drugs or excessive alcohol consumption (Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista, 2018; Claussen, 1999; Vijayasiri et al., 2012).

Following Shildrick and MacDonald (2007), who call for a broad and holistic approach to understanding youth transitions, we examine the effects of unconventional youth transitions. In this context, 'unconventional' means deviating from what cultural norms and institutional frameworks expect of young people in their transitions from youth to adulthood. Unconventional transitions pertain to many different aspects of life, including early parenthood, poor health or abusive upbringings associated with the 'Messy Life' narratives discussed by Bøhler et al. (Chapter 3 this volume). Here we focus on the link between drug use, unemployment and early job insecurity to identify how young people have coped with unstable personal situations and what role drugs played in these transitions.

The first part of this chapter presents findings from an original quantitative analysis carried out by Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018). The quantitative analysis provides an aggregate picture of young people's

substance-use behaviour and attitudes towards drug use across Europe during the recent crisis. Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) find that the increase in joblessness amongst youth is associated with an increase in the use of cannabis and ‘new substances’ such as powders, tablets/pills or herbs imitating the effect of illicit drugs. In several countries they are sold legally and are often known as ‘legal highs’ (Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista, 2018).

To complement this quantitative analysis, we draw on qualitative interviews conducted in seven European countries as part of the NEGOTIATE project (for details of the qualitative data collection, see Hvinden et al., Chapter 1 this volume). We have selected five cameos from Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom to illustrate how the use of drugs may affect young people’s labour market transitions and shape experiences of early job insecurity. These interviews reveal the impact of significant and critical moments that included both individual and societal experiences, such as major recessions or political transformations. In these interviews we probe the reactions of the interviewees to these disruptive periods, seeking to elicit how the role of significant others and welfare support affected their trajectories in positive and negative ways.

The contribution of this chapter is twofold. First, it presents a quantitative analysis describing young people’s drug behaviour and attitudes towards drug use during the Great Recession. Second, it provides original, qualitative life-course data on the negotiation of strategies in situations of precarious employment from a young person’s perspective. This chapter opens new research avenues on the relationship between normative trajectories and lived experiences in times of employment uncertainty for young people. Summarizing the findings of this analysis, we indicate how it might inform policy.

## 2 CONVENTIONAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL PATHWAYS OF YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Long-term changes in society mean that young people nowadays face stronger expectations than previously about being each responsible for constructing their own trajectories (Woodman, 2009). It is commonly assumed that contemporary youth trajectories are less likely to follow the biographies of the ‘baby boomer’ generation, with a linear transition from school to work and family formation. However, as some of the interviews with older cohorts from our qualitative study reveal, this assumed societal norm was not ubiquitous, even for the baby boomer generation.

Bottrell (2007) argues that the education system tends to conceal existing social differences by attributing individual success or failure

to individual deficiencies. When the system identifies these deficiencies within a defined social group, it labels these young people as being 'at risk'. This label can carry with it strong normative assumptions about the unsuitability of behaviours and the need to correct and prevent unwanted trajectories, for example school dropouts. Policies to reduce the numbers of early school-leavers have had some success in bringing young people back onto standardized and recognized pathways (Ross and Leathwood, 2013; Tomaszewska-Pękała et al., 2017). Nevertheless, some young people's trajectories are still more fragile, as we explore here.

When confronted with welfare institutions providing activating measures, young people are expected not only to respond to an exogenous economic need, but also to develop an idea of an 'entrepreneurial self' where they are the 'masters' of their own life and work trajectories (Périlleux, 2005). Programmes helping the unemployed integrate into the labour market are intended to foster both an active attitude towards job search and a focus on their saleable qualities on the labour market (Bussi, 2016). Serrano Pascual (2004) argues that activation policies build upon three main ideas: (1) young people lack technical skills that are needed in the labour market; (2) young people lack competencies and attitudinal competences for developing a sense of independence and for setting personal targets; and (3) young people lack motivation and work ethic, which hampers their inclusion in the labour market. These assumptions serve as the basis for some of the recent reforms to welfare benefits for young people.

Although institutions try to modify individual behaviours in order to favour upward and linear trajectories, some young people do not respond positively to these injunctions. Their resistance to imposed pathways is often seen as them challenging social, cultural and economic norms (Bottrell, 2007). Based on qualitative longitudinal studies of 'hard-to-reach' young people in Teesside in the United Kingdom, Shildrick and MacDonald (2007) examined youth transitions that went against the assumed societal norms. They argue that one cannot understand young people's experience of education, training and employment in isolation, looking only at the individual; we also need to pay attention to the broader socioeconomic environment in which these transitions are embedded. The socioeconomic context can shape the 'critical moments' affecting young people's transitions and their ability to respond to different levels of adversity (MacDonald and Marsh, 2002). Some of these unconventional transitions relate to what Shildrick and MacDonald (2007) call '*independent careers*', including leisure, drug use and criminal acts that combine to create mechanisms of exclusion.

In this contribution we focus on the relationship between drug use and critical moments of the life course, such as becoming unemployed

(MacDonald and Marsh, 2002). We investigate the experiences of young people's involvement with drug use and their trajectories between unemployment and precarious and more stable forms of employment. We examine how they 'fell out' of the system or 'reconnected' with it, and what strategies they adopted in these periods of adversity and adjustment.

In their economic literature review, Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) identify three mechanisms that come into play in relation to changes in unemployment rates and drug consumption: an 'income effect', an 'opportunity cost' (also called a 'substitution effect') and an 'economic stress' effect. The 'income effect' assumes that drugs are normal goods – i.e., a good whose consumption follows budget constraints – so that consumers faced with limited economic resources will reduce their consumption because of cost considerations. In contrast, in similar circumstances the inability to progress in the labour market might reduce the 'opportunity cost' of drug consumption, resulting in increased consumption. The 'economic stress' mechanism is based on the assumption that the consumption of substances is caused by psychological strain: reduced certainty about future outcomes, increased probability of being unemployed or a lack of labour market opportunities might push young people to find relief by increasing their use of substances or by engaging in drug dealing to earn money.

More than 30 years ago, Peck and Plant (1986) found – after controlling for social class background and educational qualifications – that there was still a significant association between unemployment and the use of illicit drugs in the United Kingdom. More recently, in a sample of French young people, Redonnet et al. (2012) tested the role of pre-existing familial and individual characteristics that can increase the risk of addiction. They found that young people with a low socioeconomic position, including those who were unemployed, had higher rates of substance use. Hyggen (2012) also found that the use of illicit substances is associated with a reduction in work commitment amongst young adults.

However, some young people do not have a problem using recreational drugs and still continuing with their education and/or employment; some choose this pathway as an alternative way of living. For others, by contrast, participating in a drug culture results in a failure to meet societal norms around expected stable youth trajectories, where reliance on drugs becomes a way of coping in 'a cruel world'. Here our focus is on cases where the use of drugs results in unconventional pathways that reinforce exclusionary transitions.

Relying only on quantitative data can overlook the agency and 'bounded agency' that young people exert in their lives. The bounded agency of young people depends on their experiences, while the institutional and

social landscape they find themselves in at a particular historical moment shapes their perception of future possibilities. Our aim here is to contribute to this literature by carrying out an original quantitative analysis of the relationship between drug use and unemployment during the recent economic context shaped by the Great Recession and then illustrating this evidence with qualitative insights from a selected body of life-course interviews conducted in different European countries.

We are interested in answering the following question: Do young people change their behaviour and attitudes towards drug use in times of economic crisis and, if so, how? How do young people using drugs manage to (re)connect with mainstream pathways when they are experiencing unstable work trajectories and/or are living in unstable family relationships and deprived neighbourhoods?

### 3 A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, DRUG USE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Early job insecurity and labour market exclusion might have a range of consequences that go beyond limited personal income. Such experiences may also affect attitudes and actual behaviour related to drugs. Knowledge about the relationship between the business cycle and drug use is important because excessive drug consumption is likely to make a bad situation even worse. Especially in the case of young people, the use of drugs can have highly negative individual consequences if the consumption progressively turns into an addiction. To gain further knowledge about the impact of soaring European youth unemployment rates on drugs consumption, Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) used data from four Eurobarometer surveys on the topic of 'Young people and drugs'. Conducted before, during and after the Great Recession, these surveys were aimed at studying patterns of drugs consumption and potential changes in attitudes towards drugs amongst young people in Europe (Open Data, 2018). The sample includes 28 countries and is representative of the population between 15 and 24 years of age.

Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista's (2018) results are derived from logit regressions with fixed effects by country (or region) and year, where the main explanatory variable is the overall unemployment rate, or the youth unemployment rate obtained from Eurostat. Thus, they exploit the variability of unemployment rates over time resulting from the different impact of the crisis in the countries and regions of Europe on the outcomes of interest in their study. While it is true that the use of the unemployment rate, especially the youth unemployment rate, could introduce a certain

degree of endogeneity if drugs consumption affects the supply of labour, the effect should be small in the sample analysed.

First, the authors show that, in 2011, 24 per cent of young Europeans admitted having tried cannabis at some point in their lives, whereas only 5 per cent had done so in the past 30 days. In 2014 these figures increased to 28.5 per cent and 5.7 per cent, respectively. The Eurobarometer data that Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) analyse also include information on the use of 'new substances', which refers to powders, pills and herbs of the kind that imitate the effects of illicit drugs. Such substances are often known as 'legal highs', and while their level of consumption of such substances is lower than that of cannabis, the survey results suggest a worrying trend represented by a sharp increase in young people's consumption of new substances between 2011 and 2014. More specifically, the share of persons aged 15–24 who had ever tried such substances amounted to 4.7 per cent in 2011, whereas the proportion had increased to 7.2 per cent only three years later.

Importantly, the authors confirm a positive relationship between increases in the unemployment rate and increases in the consumption of cannabis and 'new substances'. Thus, an increase of 1 per cent in the unemployment rate at the regional level can be associated with an increase of 0.7 percentage points in the probability that young people will say they have used cannabis. The corresponding figure for 'new substances' is 0.5 percentage points. The marginal effects are smaller when one uses the youth unemployment rate instead of the unemployment rate relative to the population as a whole. However, these are not insignificant changes if one thinks, for example, of the increase in unemployment rates during the crisis in countries such as Greece or Spain. These results serve as further confirmation that, for young people, the negative consequences of the turbulent economic environment experienced since the onset of the Great Recession go far beyond the difficult labour market situation. As similarly noted by other authors in the literature, Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) argue that behind their findings there is likely an 'economic stress' mechanism: some young people resort to self-medication through increased substance use to deal with uncertainty about the future, discouragement brought about by the recession and the lack of opportunities in the labour market, precariousness and tough working conditions (Arkes, 2011, 2012; Bradford and Lastrapes, 2014; Currie and Tekin, 2015; Dee, 2001).

Second, Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) examined whether changes in the possibility of finding a job were related to changes in the perceptions of young people regarding the health risks associated with drug use. In this case, the authors found no relationship between the business cycle and a change in the opinion that drugs consumption is risky health behaviour. The only exception the authors found was for ecstasy, for which increases

in the unemployment rate are associated with a greater number of young people who believe that consuming this drug is not harmful for their health. These findings fit with the results presented in the recent European Drug Report (EMCDDA, 2016), according to which ecstasy is gaining ground amongst users. As explained in the report, ‘. . . amongst the countries that have produced new surveys since 2013, results point to an overall increase in Europe, with nine countries reporting higher estimates and three reporting lower estimates than in the previous comparable survey’ (EMCDDA, 2016: 42–3).

Third, Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) analysed whether changes in macroeconomic conditions are related to changes in the perception that young people have of the difficulty (or ease) of access to certain substances. (Here, the authors used the standard procedure to measure respondents’ *perceived* availability and not *actual* availability.) As indicated by Bachman et al. (1990), explanations of drug use need to account for drug-specific factors such as perceived availability or perceived risk because these factors help to understand the different patterns of trends. A certain degree of availability (as well as a certain degree of proneness to use) is necessary for actual consumption to happen (Smart, 1980). Nonetheless, according to the *availability-proneness theory*, if ease of access is high, the level of proneness required for consumption to take place can be lower than if availability is low.

In this case, the authors found that increases in the unemployment rate are related to a greater number of young people agreeing that obtaining substances became more difficult during the period, and particularly so for ecstasy, cocaine and heroin. However, when they focused the analysis on young people who admitted consuming, the results changed: the higher the unemployment rate, the easier young users perceived access to be. Unfortunately, the lack of data did not allow the authors to go further and study the consequences of the recent economic crisis for the informal economy or for the sale of drugs on the Dark Web (see Bhaskar et al., 2017).

To complement this analysis, we use qualitative interviews to explore the consequences of drug use for those people who experienced significant levels of early job insecurity when they were young, drawing on a sample of interviewees over a longer time period than the recent decade of recession.

#### 4 A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF EARLY JOB INSECURITY AND DRUG USE

When analysing the qualitative data available from the NEGOTIATE project, it was immediately obvious that causal relationships are very hard

to establish on a micro level. Many of the NEGOTIATE interviewees mentioned drugs and drug use as part of their stories of transitioning from education to work, but very few made a straightforward connection between the two, neither in terms of blaming drug use on unemployment or vice versa. What these life-course interviews gave us is a unique window into the multiple and complex individual coping strategies of young people living with marginal, insecure or precarious relationships to the labour market.

We examined five cameos of unemployed young people who used drugs at some point in time and here we discuss what (un)successful steps they took to overcome their difficulties. The examples come from different cohorts and countries. We are aware that the socioeconomic contexts are different. However, it is striking to see that these individuals all shared important features in their stories: the relevance of critical moments in life, living in hostile neighbourhoods and the role played by supportive and unsupportive families or ‘significant others’.

#### **4.1 Growing Up and Out of a Delinquent Neighbourhood**

Born in the 1970s, Markus grew up in the 1980s in a socially deprived urban neighbourhood. He never had a permanent job and experienced several periods of unemployment. He was active in a delinquent neighbourhood gang from an early age. By the time he was 16, due to repeated offences, the court and youth welfare office placed him in an institution for young people with behavioural problems in another town. Here he entered vocational training to qualify as a painter. However, he had problems settling into the institution and frequently got into fights with his housemates. He also suffered from bullying and discrimination from his work colleagues in the firm where he was completing his training. As a result, he dropped out of his vocational training, left the town he had been placed in, and went to live with his sister. For a while he took part in training measures that he accessed with the help of the youth welfare office. One day he decided he had had enough of the welfare services:

I live far better from the drug business than if I apply for social assistance. So then at some point I thought, why should I take social assistance and give up my flat when I earn ten times as much each month [dealing drugs]? My cousin said, if you had been clever with the money and did as I did, you would have been able to afford a house by now.

One day, high on LSD, Markus got in a fight at a techno party and almost beat a person to death. Although he was convicted for attempted manslaughter, the judge sent him to a small residence for offenders with

difficult backgrounds rather than sending him to prison. While living in the residence, and encouraged by his caseworker, Markus qualified as a carpenter. He also entered a relationship that led to the birth of his daughter when he was in his mid-20s.

Engaging in vocational training brought some stability to Markus's life, but when he moved he saw that the regional qualification he had obtained was not recognized, which meant he was unable to take jobs officially as a carpenter. For a while, he worked on one-year contracts with a transport company. The company wanted to offer him a permanent contract but was unable to do so because Markus lacked the formal qualifications:

I was forced to continue with temporary employment. . . While I was temporarily employed, I always went to the unemployment agency and told them to give me a chance. But they always said 'no, you are a drug addict, and if you start vocational training now you will fail at it'.

The failure to get a permanent contract was a great disappointment, followed by years of great instability characterized by short-term jobs and periods of unemployment. Markus kept using and dealing drugs:

On the one hand, I thought I would manage it somehow with an occupation. And, on the other hand, I thought I would carry on with criminal stuff and try to be successful with a drug business.

However, there were signs during the interview that Markus had by now reached a turning point. Over the past ten years or so, he had undergone several rounds of psychotherapy. He had gradually withdrawn from criminal activities and tried to make a permanent move away from the drug scene. A combination of factors had contributed to these positive developments. First, his daughter motivated him to change his lifestyle:

With my daughter, she is 16, she also says 'So dad, if you keep going like this, nothing good will come of you.' And when my daughter says this to me, then it touches me the most. . . she has really concrete ideas. If my daughter can pull it off at 16, why can't I do it at almost 40?

Second, Markus had made contact again with old friends, who for years had kept their distance and considered him bad company; now they saw he was making an effort to change his life. Markus was motivated by these contacts and by seeing how his friends lived:

I look at my friends, they have obtained a vocational qualification, they can support their families, one has a son, one has a daughter. . . then I say to myself, why can't I do that too?

Third, after passing a psychometric test at the job centre, he finally managed to obtain permission to apply for another vocational training programme:

I had insisted for years, but the employment office had always said no, you should rather take part in another scheme where you will also have access to therapists, where you will be able to deal with your private situation.

In sum, Markus's experience reflected a Messy Life narrative of intermittent employment, inability to obtain recognized qualifications and drug dealing (Böhler et al., Chapter 3 this volume). The importance of 'significant others' had helped pull him back on a number of occasions: his mother, who had provided him with financial support and regular telephone contact, then his sister, and more recently his daughter and his friends. Support from social institutions only really kicked in once he had been through the criminal justice system repeatedly, and with his caseworker supporting his education. He attributed his situation to his own culpability and growing up in a neighbourhood where he could earn a lot of money selling drugs as an alternative to employment or drawing welfare benefits:

I had chances, as I said the doors were all open. But I messed it up because of the drugs and criminality.

#### **4.2 Working Illegally for an Alternative Lifestyle under Communism**

We found a similar opportunistic approach to the benefits of illegal work and drug dealing in the story of Czesław, who was born in a small town in Poland during the 1960s. Despite growing up under communism, where he received formal vocational training as a tinsmith roofer and was obliged to work, his dalliance with the informal economy, drug dealing and prison left him homeless, disabled and in poverty today:

I could have had a better life, but I wasted it. I could have developed in one profession – today I would be a champion and make money!

He recounted a Messy Life, but this was the one he chose:

The idea was to earn money and then go have fun without a care!

Working in the informal economy during communism was more lucrative than having a legal job. It was a way of escaping relative poverty and conformity to communism. When he was young, being without formal work

in Poland was punishable by fines, but Czesław had no problem paying those fines with the high income he earned from his illegal work in construction or unloading coal or cement from the railways. He could afford a motorcycle, a car and go on holidays – luxuries that were unimaginable for those on a normal salary.

However, an accident he caused while working on an illegal building site resulted in him going to prison. This was a critical moment in his life. Later he had many periods of unemployment, alcoholism and drug addiction. In contrast to many other interviewees, Czesław explicitly connected his addiction problems to working in the informal economy. His ability to survive adversity he attributed to his own personality:

Throughout all my life, I've had a very strong psyche. It's hard to break me.

Like Markus from Germany, Czesław accepted his responsibility for his current situation, but he also stressed that the systemic transformation in Poland, through the privatization of large state-owned enterprises, left limited opportunities for people like him to gain employment.

Asked what could have helped him, Czesław stressed the need for guidance in youth. At the time, all he thought about was earning money for the lifestyle he wanted – he did not consider, for instance, how hard it would be to be without health insurance later in life:

If someone had come to me and guided me, I could have acted differently in those days.

Although Czesław himself emphasized that it would have been hard to mentor him at that time in his life when he did not care much about his future, this is probably what he needed – a 'significant other'.

In sum, for Czesław, taking and dealing in drugs was part of his choice to work in the illegal economy to achieve a better-quality lifestyle and more wealth. A series of critical moments at a personal level – his accident, ending up in prison, his addiction and disability – had culminated in his current situation in a hostel for the homeless. He seemed to be very much alone without any significant other in his life. He never wanted to contact his family for help because of his 'honour and ambition', despite them being economically comfortable. Alongside the wider political transformation marking the end of the communist system, Czesław's illegal activities made it harder to find stability and connections: 'If you have money, you have friends'; at the time he was interviewed he had neither.

### 4.3 'Overwhelmed by Responsibility, I Just Got a Bit Lost'

Born in the late 1960s, Brian from the United Kingdom had left home to live with friends at the age of 14. He was cleaning cars and '*doing a lot of drugs and stuff*', which also involved dealing. He left school at 16 with one O-level in Art. He felt overwhelmed by the number of decisions he had to make:

Unlike school where you're in a routine all the time, you then come out into the real world. You've got to get your own money and grow up a little bit. . . I just wanted an easy life when I left school.

He felt that he had been too young at 16 to have aspirations or to know what he wanted to do. 'Just bumming around', earning money in the informal economy and 'doing dodgy deals was just the in thing to do. Everyone was on the dole back then in the 1980s'. Dealing drugs became an easy way to earn money, but it got him into trouble and made relations with his parents difficult.

His father intervened and employed him in his garage business, where Brian said that he struggled to take orders and adapt to the discipline of working time. He learnt car valeting, which enabled him to take various jobs and to set up his own business for five years. His father helped him with the accounting, but the business required long hours of work, worry and struggle, so he returned to work for his father.

He then spent four years caring full time for his grandfather, who had dementia, with his family paying him £300 a week. This was a new responsibility, which he said meant that he had to 'step up to the mark'. After his grandfather's death, he was unemployed for a year – 'I couldn't find any work at all, it was a real struggle.' He did some van driving and then found a new car-valeting job, which he held for two years. He did not receive any concrete support from mentors or career advisers, but he recognized that his family '*have always been there for me*'.

Brian claimed to have been without aspirations, although he said he also had wanted to go to Australia, but this was unrealistic as he had no qualifications. He still felt limited, saying 'I'm useless' and that the only thing he could imagine looking forward to was 'getting married, maybe'. Like Markus and Czesław, Brian blamed himself for his situation: 'I was just lazy, if I'm honest. I'm a bit dyslexic, so that as well'. Hyggen (2012) has shown that smoking cannabis might have a serious long-term effect on work commitment, and Brian's story would appear to illustrate this: he said that he was 'drained' and 'didn't have any confidence at all. . . I just got a bit lost, that's all'.

#### 4.4 Turning Points and Stumbling

To shed light on how some young people involved in drugs managed to turn their lives around, we examined the two cases of Jesse and Nina from the United Kingdom. These cases showed how significant critical moments and significant others could mitigate the effects of leading Messy Lives associated with drug use for young people overcoming early job insecurity.

Born in the late 1980s, Jesse left school at the age of 16. He went to a further education college to study for a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) to become a chef. After achieving NVQ Level 1 in seven months, he left to work in a tile shop warehouse to earn some money. After ten months, he returned to college to study for an NVQ Level 1 in motor mechanics. His college education was marked by indecision and difficulty finding a stable path towards employment.

Jesse described how he entered a downward spiral at age 19, when he lost a motor mechanic job after two months. He developed a marijuana drug habit that, after four years, drove his parents to exclude him from the family home. He was depressed, with mood swings and fatigue, and was diagnosed and medicated for a chemical imbalance. This evolved into a four-year period when he was on and off medication and was registered as unemployed intermittently, claiming Jobseekers' Allowance three or four times during this period. Jesse explained that he came off his prescribed medication and was 'self-medicating' by smoking marijuana heavily. He was in and out of about ten casual jobs to pay for his habit during this time:

I was essentially working to pay for a habit, so I was getting into a job and then, say, taking on full-time work, but going in three days a week, earning a bit of money and then not going in the other two days of the week because I wanted to smoke. It was not a good life. [None of Jesse's jobs lasted for more than three months.] Sometimes I was asked to leave. . . but I would say most of the time it was me leaving.

After leaving home and working for a van company for nearly a year, Jesse decided he wanted to turn his life around. He found a scheme online that supported young people in voluntary work overseas, provided he fundraised £800. It captured his attention. He baked and sold cakes at a primary school, held a car-boot sale and received donations from the van company he worked for and from friends to the tune of £1,500. Jesse said that the two and half months he spent working at a HIV clinic abroad changed him completely:

I decided I needed to show people that I'd changed. That is what everybody will tell you that mostly changed me, really, really changed me. Big time. It was a

proper shock to the system – I can't remember a day out there that I didn't start crying at some point. It was really quite shocking.

I was working in a testing clinic for mainly women that had been raped, mostly by their own family, and contracted HIV/AIDS. It wasn't nice. There was a woman there that was actually 45 that contracted it when she was 12 and she'd lived her whole life. She wasn't skinny or anything, she was – she didn't say suffering – she said she likes to say, 'I live positively with it'. Because she has, she's made a real life out of it. But listening to her story, I could have listened to her talk for hours. It was really emotional.

You would live in a host family house, so I was living with a Muslim family which, you know, going out there at 24 years old and you're kind of growing up on all the terrorist stuff – I wasn't being racist, I was trying to keep an open mind. But they completely changed my perspective. Probably the nicest family I've ever met, and it just does go to show there's Muslims and extremists, they are completely different people. Which is why I don't like people when they take the piss essentially out of Muslims, because they're not all like that.

This 'critical moment' turned his life around: 'I only ever really cared about myself, if that made sense. But going there, I actually really don't care about myself anymore at all and I actually care far too much about other people.' Jesse said that there had never really been anything he wanted to do, except driving. Now, he wanted 'to do something that would make my parents proud'. He took a positive attitude from his experience, saying:

...now I look back and it's made me more of a stronger person, because I know that if I could change, most people could.

Jesse wants to have a family like his brother and sister and thinks about running a pub or having his own business. He wants his own home and a career:

I need to have a career to actually make it look to other people that I've actually done something with my life.

The second key point to come out of this case was the role of significant others. Jesse's main support was:

...always my parents, always they have stood by me, that's why I'm really quite thankful for them. I was not a very nice person, but they've seen that I've changed. They finally even said it last year, they said they can finally let me back in. They kind of shut me out for a while, which was hard.

He felt that a support network had been lacking and that

...it would have helped a lot more if I had had decent friends, not people that were taking drugs all the time.

In retrospect, Jesse realized that ‘I always felt bad, because everybody around me was doing so well’. His mental health issues and drug use impeded his search for steady employment, and he said that, ‘*doing what I was doing isn’t really a normal life*’. A combination of his environment with access to drugs and his own poor psychological health reinforced a precarious employment trajectory. It was the critical moment of volunteering and deciding to change his life, reinforced by his family support, that enabled him to turn his life around.

He recently started working in a pub. The manager suggested he become a licensee so that he can eventually run his own pub, which at the time he was interviewed he found very motivating. Although things were improving for him, recent news from local contacts in the area where he interviewed him suggested that he is still struggling with his addiction. Jesse clearly illustrates the importance of ‘significant others’ and critical moments; however, his trajectory also shows how easy it is to stumble despite the desire to change.

#### 4.5 Disruptive Families and Inspirational Others

The last case we examined was that of Nina, who was born in the early 1970s. She was 15 when her parents divorced, leaving her feeling unsettled with changing schools and truanting. She left school at 16 with no qualifications. During the 1980s she worked in different factory and shop jobs that she enjoyed. However, when she was 19 her mother died, and she struggled with this grief for a long time. She lived in different places, sometimes with friends, sometimes in squats. She went through with an unplanned pregnancy when she was 22, but it left her feeling very lonely and isolated, even though she had many friends. To compensate for being severely depressed, she started drinking and partying heavily:

It was just party after party, club after club, doing other things I shouldn’t have been doing – that kind of thing – because I felt I’d missed out because my friends were living a certain lifestyle and I kind of couldn’t obtain that. So I decided if I can’t do it, I’m going to do it anyway. And to be fair, I didn’t really put my son’s needs first really, looking back. I know that. And it’s just everybody around me at that age was able to do the things they wanted to do, it seemed. But I was. . . I felt really isolated, really alone. Very troubled, because of my mum’s death, I lost my faith, everything. My family were just sort of, ‘Well, have a drink and you’ll be all right, you’ll be all right. Have a drink.’ Which was exactly what I shouldn’t have been doing and that’s what the problem was. And every time I sort of said, ‘I think I’m drinking too much,’ or whatever, ‘Oh, you’re all right, you just need to cut down, that’s all. You’re all right, we all get pissed.’ And so this came from all my family and it was the

norm. And I knew deep down within my heart this is not something that was right. I felt it.

Nina relied on welfare benefits to survive and supplemented her income with some illegal cash-in-hand jobs. She lived in a council block where the lifts did not work, and people were using drugs in the stairwells. This environment made her want to change the way she was living:

I just wanted – you know, wanted a life for my son. I wanted, you know, to live comfortably, not have to scrimp and scrape, being on the dole. Wanted a career, just wanted to, you know – I was living in council flats, high-rise, didn't want to live in a place where people urinate in the lift all the time and take drugs everywhere and get off their heads. I just wanted to come home and experience what it's like to walk home and feel peace, a place of comfort and peace, serenity.

She wanted to work because she wanted to have a normal life; however, she found it too difficult to change:

A lot of young people at that time in the eighties were coming from up north, there was a lot from Liverpool, Scotland, Ireland, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, there were loads of us all hanging out. And the common theme there seemed to be there's no work. There's no work. There's no work. There's no work. And so this seemed to be where people get housing and the bedsits and the dole and, you know, UB40. ['UB40' referred to the official unemployment benefit form number 40; the band UB40 were all unemployed when they started out, hence their name.]

When her son started getting into trouble at school, she was assigned a social worker to help her out with after-school clubs and play centres and this marked the beginning of a change for Nina. In addition, a turning point at the age of 27 was when she met a new boyfriend; he inspired her to do more:

He was in a really good job, was very stable, who was basically, you know, a bit of a driving force for me, looking back. Basically, an angel in disguise. And basically just came into my life and kind of pushed me in the right direction, I guess. And it took a lot for him to do that, because I was pushing against it. Because, you know, I guess the, you know, the anger I had within myself. And eventually he just asked me, you know, 'What do you really want to do? Because you need to sort yourself out.' And I had no idea. And I looked back at what I thought I was good at and that took several years of being with him. And I got to 30 and that's when I made a change.

He helped her with her drinking and smoking and encouraged her to go to back to college. She obtained some beauty course qualifications on a

government-funded course while retaining her benefits. She went on to get a job in a health club for about a year until she had to leave because of problems with her back. She then got job as a beautician that lasted four years. She took more courses to learn massage with some inspirational teachers and later moved out of the big city. Reflecting on these experiences, Nina summed up as follows:

It was horrendous being in a council flat, mother dying so young, family, you know, on the booze all the time, smoking stuff and having a young child. That is not the ideal. But, however, if you can pull out of that, you can pull out of anything. I think it gave me strength. You know, strength from within that I didn't know I had. If you have negative thoughts or self-doubt, that's what you're going to see in your reality. And if you don't have those or you can find a way to overcome that, then I think that's the first step.

Nina's story shows how an initial and prolonged period of adversity in her youth made it difficult for her to find a stable path. Her environment did not help, as others who were reliant on drinking, smoking and partying heavily surrounded her. Her new partner, and some inspirational teachers, exemplified the importance of a significant other. They enabled her to move out of the messy life she had been leading and to gain a more secure foothold that helped her improve her own mental well-being. Nina is now self-employed and has her own business. She is also starting to do voluntary work with young people: 'I feel like I've got something from it all and I'm hoping that I can hopefully give some of that back.'

## 5 DISCUSSION

Drawing on two different sources of data to inform our understanding of the role of drug use in youth trajectories characterized by troubled work transitions provides important and diverse perspectives mapping both trends and individual experiences of how young people negotiate their trajectories in challenging situations. The quantitative analysis provided us with a picture of how recent higher drug use is associated with higher rates of unemployment and how this has increased in recent years. The qualitative interviews drew on the experience of a wider age group who had been involved in drugs when they were young and how this had contributed to their difficult and messy lives as they progressed to later adulthood and parenting. Many factors mediate the relationship between unemployment and drug use. The quantitative analysis captures how this has changed over the past decade of the Great Recession; the qualitative data provide a longer-term approach to show how early involvement with drugs affected

lives over a lengthier period. These cases illustrate how a combination of critical moments and environments in the lives of vulnerable young people can act as triggers into a downward spiral of negative trajectories.

We have identified critical moments at the individual level, for example in the divorce of Nina's parents and the death of her mother. The social context of a family of heavy drinkers, not able to help her emotionally, marked her own transition into early motherhood.

Critical moments might be diverse in nature. In our cameos they related to family breakdowns or unsuccessful work transitions that put a strain on young people's capacity to find their own way. However, as the quantitative analysis indicates, critical moments such as the Great Recession also play a role on a larger scale.

In some cases 'significant others' played a fundamental part in helping lift young people out of these trajectories. For Markus it was his daughter; for Nina it was her new partner and inspirational teachers; for Brian it was his father; for Jesse it was a combination of positive critical moments in volunteering abroad and the people he met there along with the desire to prove himself to his family. Czesław seemed the most isolated, and Brian remained drained and lacking in self-esteem and motivation.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Economic recessions lead to unstable labour markets, especially for young people whose rates of unemployment are more sensitive to the business cycle. As a response, most of the policy attention tends to be directed towards strengthened linkages between labour market and education or expanding active labour market policies to enhance or restore linear youth transitions. However, we need a broader perspective on transitions to understand the wide range of challenges young people face when they are unemployed in hard times.

One of the most interesting questions examined by Ayllón and Ferreira-Batista (2018) asked young people what they saw as the most effective ways to combat the problems associated with drugs. There was widespread support for 'more severe measures against traffickers', 'information campaigns' or 'treatment and rehabilitation'.

Their micro-econometric analysis revealed that changes in macroeconomic conditions affected attitudes: there was more support for reducing drug use through policies to 'reduce poverty and unemployment' in regions with increased rates of unemployment. There was also a less punitive attitude towards drug users in areas where it was harder to find work.

In terms of policy implications, it emerged that drug use was not so

much about criminalizing or blaming young people for their behaviour but about offering them more opportunities and support. The qualitative interviews showed that drug users often blamed themselves for the difficulties they faced or had faced. Thus, strengthening societal expectations and putting further pressures on people using drugs would probably enhance their sense of guilt. Such strict expectations might also aggravate existing psychological strains linked to following an unconventional trajectory. In the opinion of the young Europeans interviewed in the Eurobarometer surveys, when the economy weakens, the authorities should put the emphasis on reducing the demand for drugs by providing sufficient alternatives to joblessness and precariousness.

In this perspective, policies that strengthen the position of young people in the labour market would have benefits in multiple domains, including in terms of health. Moreover, it is apparent that it is in those countries where youth unemployment increased the most that the need for investing in anti-drugs policies is greatest. Unfortunately, policymakers in many countries still need to acknowledge fully the consequences of the austerity measures they have imposed, including the cuts in budgets for drug-related policies (Costa Storti et al., 2011).

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