

turning knowledge into practice

Brokered Illegal Drug Sales as a Measure of Local Demand

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“Illicit drug market is not an economic system with a social component, but rather a social system with an economic component”

Lee Hoffer. Junkie business

What is Brokering?

- Brokering (a.k.a. “copping drugs for others”) is mediated exchange. Neither the buyer nor the broker considers the act dealing.
- Instead of transacting directly with a seller or dealer, the buyer gives their money to a peer (i.e., a broker) to make a **purchase for them**
- Brokering is understudied and often misunderstood

Heroin Market Transactions (Conventional Understanding vs. Reality)



- In reality, only accounts for about 1/3 of all sales
 - Dealers desire to remain hidden
- Why users **rarely** connect to the heroin market in these spaces?

Because they don't have to.

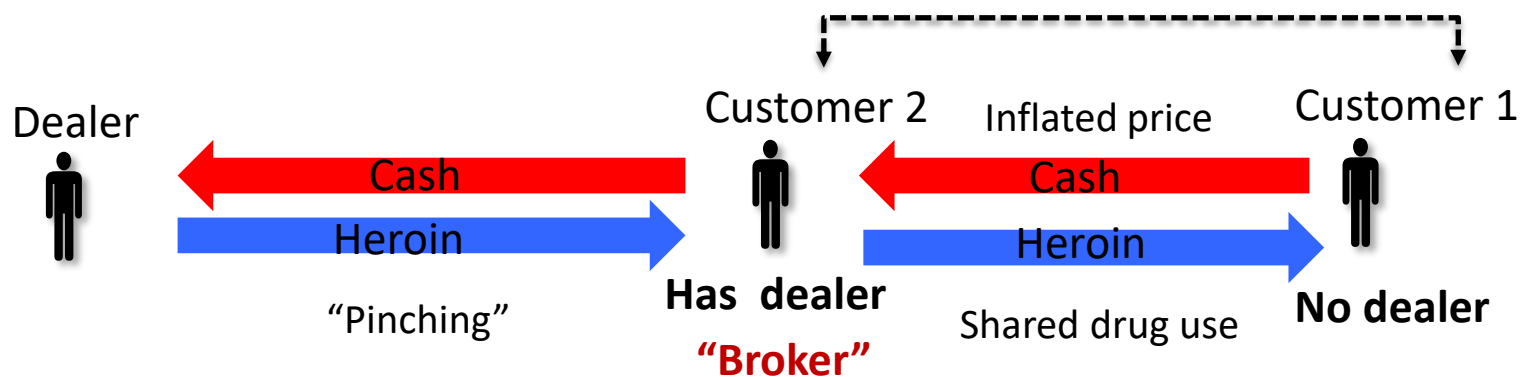


Questions about Market Functioning



- How does **a neophyte** heroin user buy the drug?
- How do they...
 - Identify a heroin seller and communicate interest?
 - Avoid arrest?
 - Avoid being ripped-off? What's the true market price?
- Why it is so easy for the **experienced** users to buy heroin?
 - How do experienced users find new dealers?

Most Common Transactions



- Users (initially) acquire heroin through fellow users & not dealers
- Incentive for brokers: **Free Heroin**
- Brokering involves shared drug use – prosocial behavior
- Brokered transactions are common (a.k.a. “copping drugs for others”)

Brokering Study

Urban and rural locations, OH 2019-2021

- **Two samples from Syringe Exchange Programs 241 subject**
 - **The interview took between 30-45 minutes to complete, and participants received \$20 reimbursement. No PII.**
 - **Instruments: Brokering Behavior Survey (BBS)**
 - **Brokering**
 - **Demographics**
 - **Drug use history (including poly-drug use and drug use combinations). Past 30 days, past year, lifetime**
 - **Places where people used drugs and people with whom used**
 - **Drug overdose history**
 - **Engagement with health and drug treatment services**

Subjects

(Not many differences between the urban and rural samples)

Characteristic	Overall, N = 241	Individual Sites		p-value
		Rural Site, N = 120 ¹	Urban Site, N = 121 ¹	
Age	37 (32, 46)	38 (31, 45)	37 (32, 46)	0.7
Unknown	1	1	0	
Gender				0.9 [†]
Female	107 (44%)	54 (45%)	53 (44%)	
Male	134 (56%)	66 (55%)	68 (56%)	
Race/Ethnicity				0.003 ^{†**}
African American	26 (11%)	6 (5.0%)	20 (17%)	
Asian (or Pacific Islander)	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)	
Hispanic	9 (3.7%)	2 (1.7%)	7 (5.8%)	
Mixed (more than one of the above)	6 (2.5%)	2 (1.7%)	4 (3.3%)	
Native American (American Indian)	4 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	
Other	2 (0.8%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.7%)	
White	192 (80%)	108 (90%)	84 (69%)	

Subjects

(Not many differences between the urban and rural samples)

Characteristic	Overall, N = 241	Individual Sites		p-value
		Rural Site, N = 120	Urban Site, N = 121	
Completed Education				0.012 ^{†*}
A GED (high school equivalency)	42 (17%)	20 (17%)	22 (18%)	
College graduate	17 (7.1%)	7 (5.8%)	10 (8.3%)	
Eighth grade or less	4 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	2 (1.7%)	
Graduate degree	1 (0.4%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.8%)	
High school graduation	56 (23%)	31 (26%)	25 (21%)	
Less than high school graduation	60 (25%)	40 (33%)	20 (17%)	
Some college	54 (22%)	17 (14%)	37 (31%)	
Trade or technical training	6 (2.5%)	3 (2.5%)	3 (2.5%)	
Full or Part Time Employment in Last 30 Days	57 (24%)	21 (18%)	36 (30%)	0.025*
Ever Copped for Someone Else	216 (90%)	105 (88%)	111 (92%)	0.3
Ever Had Someone Cop for You	184 (76%)	96 (80%)	88 (73%)	0.2
Years Since First Used Heroin	10 (6, 17)	8 (5, 13)	13 (8, 20)	<0.001***

Results

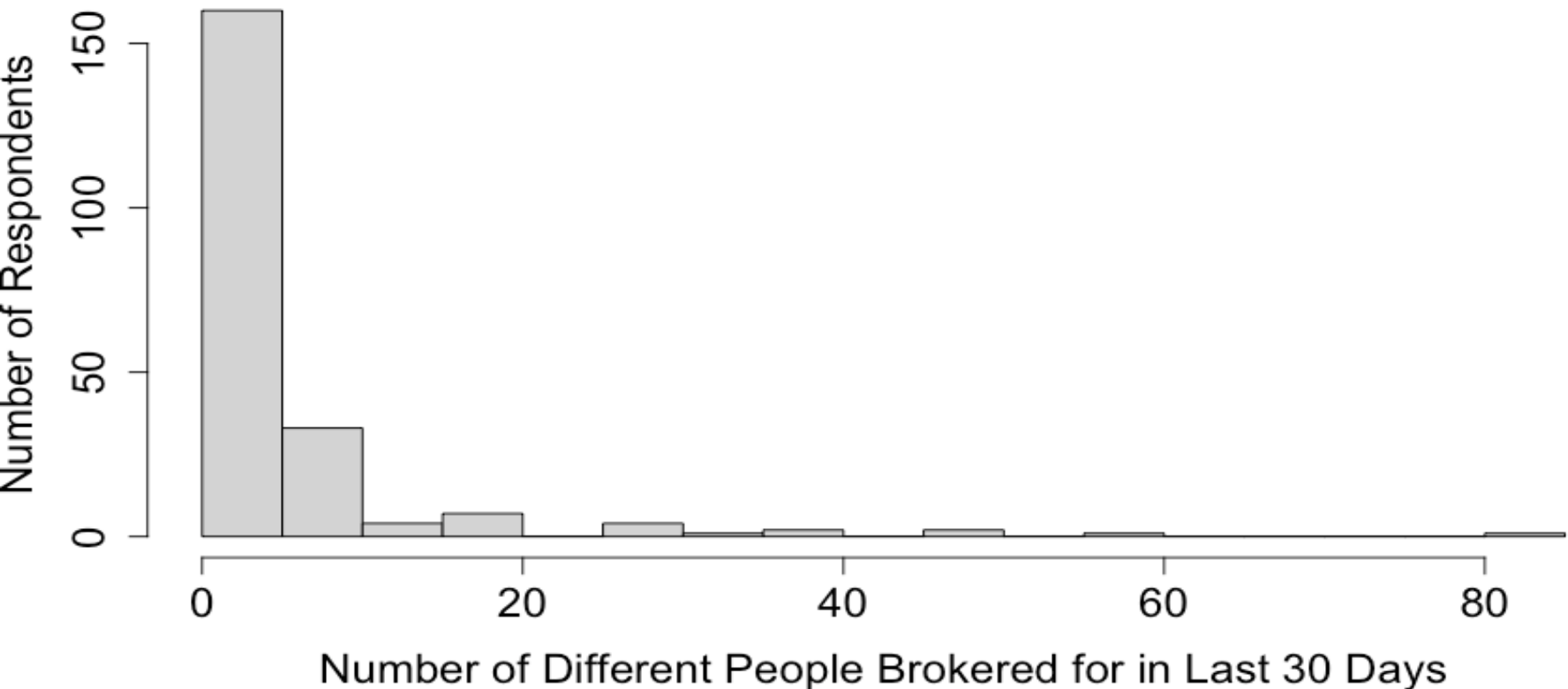
- **48% reported never buying drugs from a dealer “working on the street”**
- **52% reported almost always buying from a dealer in working in a “private location.”**

Results (Continued)

- **Brokered for someone lifetime: 216 (90%)**
- **Brokered for someone past 30 days: 181 (75%)**
- **Used a broker lifetime: 184 (76 %)**
- **Used a broker past 30 days: 92 (38.2%)**
- **Among those who had brokered, used drugs with the people they purchased drugs for: 84%**

Results (Continued)

- Mean number of different people brokered for is 5.9 (SD 10.5). Long tail, 31% reported brokering for 6+ people



Results (Continued)

Using and Brokering

		Drugs Used in Last 30 Days					
		Value Row % Column %	No Drugs Used	Opioids only	Stimulants & Opioids	Other drugs combined with stimulants and opioids	Total
Drugs Copped in Last 30 Days	No Drugs Copped	3 R: 5% C: 75%	16 R: 27% C: 40%	5 R: 8% C: 11%	36 R: 60% C: 23%	60 C: 25%	
	Opioids only	0	16 R: 23% C: 40%	15 R: 22% C: 34%	38 R: 55% C: 25%	69 C: 29%	
	Stimulants & Opioids	1 R: 2% C: 25%	3 R: 6% C: 8%	16 R: 33% C: 36%	28 R: 58% C: 18%	48 C: 20%	
	Other drugs only or in combination with stimulants and opioids	0	4 R: 6% C: 10%	8 R: 13% C: 18%	52 R: 81% C: 34%	64 C: 27%	
	Total	4 R: 2%	40 R: 17%	44 R: 18%	154 R: 64%	241	

Conclusions

- **Brokering is ubiquitous. About 75% of users captured in the SER sample brokered in the past month**
- **Brokering reflects demand (“pull”) for drugs as opposed to supply “push” the drugs from a dealer to a user**
- **SER provides a way to access market demand by asking about brokering**

Thank you!

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