

# NEW DISORDER

The riots in London and other UK cities over a week in August stunned the country. Amid the talk of feral youths and a nation in moral decline, drug issues have been cited to become a key factor in the cause of the chaos. Below, **Camila Batmanghelidjh**, director of Kids Company, and author **Gavin Knight** give their unique insights into the links between the drug trade and the rioting that shook Britain.



## Camila Batmanghelidjh

The sight of youths smashing shop fronts horrified the nation; sending opinion-formers spinning. Sadly little of the discourse touched the truth. Consoling itself, Britain identified some 30,000 rioters as suffering from a 'moral decline'. Exhibits of greed were gleefully presented; from the millionaire's daughter, the teacher to the bandana-clad boys.

For many of the children and young people in the riots, the doors of social care had slammed shut. Britain has a toxic challenge: 1.5 million children a year are maltreated in the UK, with an annual cost to the economy of £77.7 billion. Currently there are just under one million children not in education, employment or training. Out of the 21 wealthiest countries, we score bottom for children's well-being, and we disguise the fact that we have some 1.1 million children suffering from significant emotional and mental health difficulties.

The figures of children living with substance abusing parents are difficult to capture officially, however, it is estimated that a further 1.1 million children are enduring the chaos of parental addiction. Add to these vulnerabilities to the corrosive impact of poverty and you have a catastrophe shadowing 'civil' society.

Children cannot be held responsible for the distribution of wealth and political decisions: so one wonders, whose moral corruption we should be looking at? In dominating the public narrative, the articulate residents of reasonable Britain might miss out on the unreasonable strategies required for survival on the streets. Children who endure chronic victimisation either break down into self-harm – turning their rage onto themselves – or they use it to fuel a solution.

Amongst the rioters were children who were sent out by drug dealers and their parents. Much was made of trainers and plasma TVs being stolen, but large volumes of food and nappies disappeared. Were children given opportunity to describe the riots a more searing truth would emerge.

At street-level, currently eight and nine year olds are being pulled into the drug trade by adults who run the drug economy much like a business. Children participate in a perverse

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apprenticeship, learning violence to control drug transactions. It is, unfortunately, an organised system with 'shooters' who sell the goods, 'shooters' who hurt and kill people for not honouring debt, 'informers' who ride on their bikes checking out territories and 'couriers' who deliver.

Vulnerable children turn to local drug dealers because they deliver more fiscally sound solutions than the social care agencies who are too under-resourced to intervene meaningfully. Some young people seek the gang actively, hoping that through criminal activities they can generate resources to meet their family's needs. Other young people become reluctantly attached because their connection to the gang ensures their safety. Ultimately the criminal gangs have more power over vulnerable children, because paradoxically they are better able to protect them than the police. The potency of the police is paralysed as witnesses are intimidated into not giving evidence.

The media ridicules the children's drive to acquire 'respect', but in a dog-eat-dog world, top dog is less attacked. To be the top of a pathetic food chain the young person has to have a high credit rating. He or she has to be seen as violent and rich because the subtext is that the young people's criminal backing must be substantial to have facilitated it. It functions as a warning: should someone be thinking of doing harm they must expect the revenge to be powerful.

Ask yourself what kind of a society have we created that children have come to believe that criminality and violence is the available law and order through which solutions to social care issues can be found.



### Gavin Knight

The economics are in the drug trade's favour in these deprived inner city areas. A source in the gang community in London told me that teenage gang members quickly realise the amount of money they can make dealing crack cocaine and heroin. The amounts cannot compare with the low-wage jobs on offer to them working in supermarkets or doing manual labour work like plastering.

One 21 year old girl told me she dealt drugs to show she was equal to the boys, so she could dress nicely and go to auditions. Another girl stole a stash off dealers to pay for her mother's medication. It sucks in the brightest and the best of a lost generation. Often the drug dealers are the most dynamic, most entrepreneurial people in these estates. Sometimes they even extend help to the community – an alarming development that sees the UK drifting towards the Brazilian gang model.

One of the key trends that emerged was that younger and younger kids are becoming involved in the drugs trade. The pattern that emerged in my research was that a young child may first encounter addiction in the home, with his parents. These toddlers grew up opening the door to strangers who were coming in to inject, deal and other activities. Often they witnessed domestic violence in the home and, as adults, they repeated this cycle.

In Glasgow some cocaine dealers would hook-in teenagers by advancing them large quantities of coke on credit. Then they would turn on them, demanding that the debt was repaid. In one case, a 19 year old found himself in £4,000 worth of debt and held up a security guard to repay the dealer. Another tactic was to force the debtor to take part in a criminal act. I heard of one case where a young man, in this dire situation, was forced to be the look-out on a murder. He was the only suspect who was identified and faced a lengthy sentence in prison.

Another key pattern that emerged in my research was the influence of the 'Olders' on young kids. The Olders, senior gang members, usually 19 or older, with multiple convictions recruited young kids by offering them cash, new trainers and other incentives to become low-level street dealers, or 'shotters'. They could earn £50 a day. One boy in London was forced to deal in the stairwell of a tower block around the clock. The length of the shift was so long that he had no time for any other activity. The Olders will then arrange for the drug earnings or stash of the shotter to be stolen, and then force them to repay the debt by continuing to deal.

Those kids who try to break out from this intimidation face violence. I heard numerous stories of being bricked, shanked (stabbed) for not dealing. An enterprising armed robber told me that shooting was drudge work and if you were smart you'd rob the dealer at the end of the day. In Manchester I heard many stories of dealers being tortured by medieval means to ward them off another gang's turf.

To these kids, and the world they grow up in, a bit of stealing, violence and police baiting isn't anything out of the ordinary.



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# inside



### Book now to avoid disappointment: DrugScope conference 2011

Rising to the challenge, our conference on Wednesday 2 November, is almost fully booked. Baroness Browning, Minister for Crime Prevention at the Home Office, is the keynote speaker. Other speakers include Tim Hollis (ACPO), Joy Barlow (STRADA), John Ashton (Cumbria Public Health), Jeremy Swain (Thamesreach) and Paul Hayes (NTA), and five leading figures working on the recovery agenda, Stephen Bamber, Mark Gilman, Anne-Marie Ward, Alistair Sinclair and Richard Phillips, will participate in a panel discussion. To download a booking form, please visit our homepage at [www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk).

### The Recovery Partnership: August 2011 update

In May 2011, the Substance Misuse Skills Consortium, the Recovery Group UK and DrugScope formed the Recovery Partnership to provide a new collective voice for the drug sector to Ministers and Government. The Partnership published a 'Statement of Intent' (revised in July) which sets out its aim and purpose and has been undertaking work in a number of key policy areas since its inception, including the preparation of a paper on Housing and Recovery at the request of the Inter-Ministerial Group on Drugs (see pull out in this edition of *Druglink* for a briefing based on this paper). You can read about the activities of the Partnership in their August update, which is accessible at <http://tiny.cc/Rec-Par-Update-August>

### Debate on drug deaths

Mike Weatherley, Conservative MP for Hove and Portslade, has responded to concerns at high rates of drug-related deaths in his constituency and neighbouring Brighton by organising a public event entitled *Are Drug-Related Deaths Avoidable?*. Speakers include DrugScope's Martin Barnes, Amanda Feilding of The Beckley Foundation, Niamh Eastwood of Release, John Corkery of the National Programme on Substance Abuse Deaths, Nicola Singleton of UKDPC and Danny Kushlick of Transform. This free, public event is taking place at Hove Town Hall, 9.30am – 5.30pm on 30 September. More information can be found online here: <http://tiny.cc/DrugDeathsDebate>

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