Oxi has been identified by outreach workers in locations as diverse as the nearby city of Manaus, capital city of the state of Amazonas; Brazilia, Brazil’s capital, at the geographic centre of the country; and more recently in Santos, the main Brazilian harbour, located in the south-eastern coast.

Oxi, a short form for ‘oxidation’, is made of leftovers of cocaine paste, cooked with variable amounts of gasoline or kerosene and ‘raw’ (‘virgem’) lime (CaO). The proportion of such addictives seems to determine whether oxi stones will be coloured purple (roughly similar proportions of gasoline/kerosene and lime), whitish (when lime is the main contaminant) or yellow (where gasoline/kerosene is the predominant contaminant).

Oxi is a home-made substance, to a large extent independent of mainstream trafficking activities. Field-workers have reported that the drug became popular in Acre state as an alternative substance that could be prepared in domestic kitchens, sold at a very low price, even compared to the low prices of coca paste and crack stones in such impoverished region. The latter are produced in illegal ‘factories’ and smuggled by dealers instead of the informal network of ‘retailers’ currently involved in the informal oxi scene.

To the best of our knowledge, there is only one scientific paper on its pharmacology [2], but in this paper, published in the forensic bulletin published by Brazil’s federal police, it is not clear whether the substance is or is not a unique product vis-à-vis other varieties of smokeable cocaine, due to the variable denomination and composition of the coca/cocaine derivatives seized by the federal police in different contexts of Brazil and its border areas. Notwithstanding the debate on their pharmacology, such substances are perceived as distinct drugs by the drug users themselves, as well as by community outreach workers, circulating through different routes and trafficking networks.

Declarations of interest

The project was carried out by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, funded by SENAD.

FRANCISCO INACIO BASTOS1, ALVARO MENDES2, PAULINA DO CARMO ARRUDA VIEIRA DUARTE3 & NEILANE BERTONI4

Oswaldo Cruz Foundation—FIOCRUZ, Biblioteca de Manguinhos suite 229 Av. Brasil 4365, Rio de Janeiro 21045-900, Brazil;1 Municipal Administration—Social Development, Rio Branco, Acre, Brazil;2 Brazilian National Secretariat for Policies on Drugs, Brasilia, DF; Brazil;3 and Oswaldo Cruz Foundation—Health Information, Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil4

E-mail: francisco.inacio.bastos@hotmail.com

References


MAKING SPACE FOR CANNABIS POLICY EXPERIMENTS

We thank Mark Kleiman for his considered and critical analysis of our book [1]. In the space of a brief reply we can address only some of the many interesting issues that he raised.

We acknowledge that our book has not broken the cannabis policy stalemate. Our subtitle was, after all, moving beyond stalemate. Our aims were more realistic. We wanted to describe the important ways in which cannabis differs from other illicit drugs, namely: the greater extent of its global use, the modest adverse impacts it has on mortality and morbidity compared to the opioids and cocaine; and the selective and commonly discriminatory enforcement of criminal penalties against its use, even in countries such as the United States that are nominally tough on cannabis. We also wanted to summarize the international evidence on the mixed impacts of the limited policy reform options that are available to nation states under existing international drug control treaties.

Secondly, we wanted to make the case for modifying the way that international control treaties govern cannabis to permit nation states to conduct and evaluate cannabis policy experiments that extend beyond minor variations in the severity of penalties for cannabis use. As Kleiman notes, such policy experiments could possibly include the regulation of a commercial cannabis market along the lines of current regulatory regimes for alcohol. We include this as one among a series of options without privileging it over the others. In choosing between these regimes, states will need to take into consideration many of the issues that Kleiman raised, namely, the potential irreversibility of such a policy; the likelihood that legal markets, lower price, implicit social approval and commercial promotion of the product could increase heavy cannabis use and cannabis-related harm; and uncertainty about the impact that increased cannabis use would have on alcohol-related harm. However, these states should not only look at the consequences of changing policy; they also need to examine the extensive adverse effects of current cannabis control regimes.

We agree that there are policy options other than a legal cannabis market that deserve consideration as policy experiments. These include: the Spanish growers’ clubs; the Californian quasi-medical marijuana prescription regime; and state monopolies modelled on those adopted for alcohol in Scandinavia, Canada and many US
states in the first part of the last century. All these are potentially interesting policy frameworks for cannabis, but there is necessarily very limited evidence on their impact because all are proscribed under current international treaties. Adequate evaluations will require serious trials and rigorous evaluations of these policy regimes.

Our aim was to encourage the type of policy experiments and evaluations needed to better inform the development of cannabis policy. To that end we suggested how the international treaties could be liberalized to allow such experiments while allowing states to operate under the current treaty, if that is what they prefer.

In our view, cannabis control systems that operate under the constraints of the current international regime fail to deliver good public policy and have an unfavourable balance of policy benefits and harms. There is a danger that the high standards that Mark Kleiman demands for evidence of the effectiveness of alternative cannabis policies will prevent the policy experimentation we advocate and so, by default, perpetuate the policy stalemate that we hoped to show a way beyond.

Declarations of interest
None.