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Original Article

Data on cocaine seizures in the western region of Pará from 2018 to 2020

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Objective: this research aims at analyzing the expert reports released by the Scientific Police of Pará through sociodemographic data, gender and amount of cocaine received by the Public Security agency in the period from 2018 to 2020 regarding seizures in the municipality of Santarém/PA and adjacent cities. **Methodology:** this research is an exploratory and descriptive study with data validated in definitive expert reports of chemical analysis, performed on cocaine samples from seizures by police agencies in the state of Pará. **Results:** a total of 1,280 definitive expert reports with positive results for cocaine were consulted. With this, there was prevalence of males in involvement with trafficking; regarding schooling levels and age groups, this information was missing from the reports; in relation to seized cocaine there is growth in trafficking in 2019, with Santarém as the central city for trafficking in this region. **Conclusion:** the cocaine quantified in this study shows that, during the three years of analysis of data from the Scientific Police of Pará, a reasonable number of seized cocaine was noticed, not only in the city of Santarém, but also in adjacent cities, indicating active circulation of this substance in the western region of Pará, also pointing to male presence, mostly, in trafficking of this substance.

Descriptors: Drug Trafficking; Cocaine; Data analysis; Seizure of Substances.

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Dados das apreensões de cocaína na região
Oeste do Pará de 2018 a 2020

Objetivo: a presente pesquisa objetiva analisar os laudos periciais liberados pela Polícia Científica do Pará através de dados sociodemográficos, gênero e quantidade de cocaína recebida pelo órgão de segurança pública no período de 2018 a 2020, referentes às apreensões no município de Santarém/PA e cidades adjacentes. **Metodologia:** esta pesquisa trata-se de um estudo exploratório e descritivo com dados validados em laudos periciais definitivos de análises químicas, realizadas em amostras de cocaína provenientes de apreensões pelos órgãos policiais do Estado do Pará. **Resultados:** foram consultados 1.280 laudos periciais definitivos com resultados positivos para cocaína. Com isso, notou-se prevalência do sexo masculino no envolvimento com o tráfico; quanto ao grau de escolaridade e grupos etários houve grande ausência desta informação nos laudos; relativo à cocaína apreendida evidenciou-se o crescimento do tráfico no ano de 2019, colocando Santarém como cidade central do tráfico nessa região. **Conclusão:** a cocaína quantificada neste estudo mostra que durantes os três anos de análise dos dados da Polícia Científica do Pará notou-se um número razoável de cocaína apreendida, não somente na cidade de Santarém, como também nas cidades adjacentes, indicando circulação ativa dessa substância na região oeste do Pará, apontando também presença masculina, majoritariamente, no tráfico dessa substância.

Descritores: Tráfico de Drogas; Cocaína; Análise de Dados; Apreensão de Produtos.

Datos sobre incautaciones de cocaína en la región
occidental de Pará de 2018 a 2020

Objetivo: esta investigación tiene como objetivo analizar los peritajes difundidos por la Policía Científica de Pará a través de datos sociodemográficos, género y cantidad de cocaína recibida por el órgano de seguridad pública en el período de 2018 a 2020 sobre incautaciones en el municipio de Santarém/PA y ciudades adyacentes. **Metodología:** estudio exploratorio y descriptivo con datos validados en informes periciales definitivos de análisis químico, realizados en muestras de cocaína provenientes de incautaciones de organismos policiales en el Estado de Pará. **Resultados:** se consultaron 1.280 informes periciales definitivos con resultados positivos para cocaína. Se advirtió un predominio del sexo masculino en el involucramiento con el tráfico; en cuanto al nivel de educación y grupos de edad, esta información faltaba en los informes; en lo atinente a la cocaína incautada, muestra un crecimiento en el tráfico en 2019, lo que coloca a Santarém como la ciudad central para el tráfico en esta región. **Conclusión:** la cocaína cuantificada en este estudio muestra que durante los tres años de análisis de los datos de la Policía Científica de Pará, se observó un número razonable de cocaína incautada, no solo en la ciudad de Santarém, sino también en las ciudades adyacentes, lo que indica la circulación activa de esta sustancia en la región occidental de Pará, apuntando también a una presencia mayoritariamente masculina en el tráfico de esta sustancia.

Descriptores: Narcotráfico; Cocaína; Análisis de Datos; Incautación de Sustancias.

Introduction

Illicit drug trafficking continues to be one of the main public health problems in the world, as shown by data from the 2021 World Drug Report carried out by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)[1]. The world production of cocaine doubled in the period from 2014 to 2019, reaching 1,789 tons in 2019, the highest on record. The report also states that, in from 2018 to 2019, the South American continent was the largest responsible for most of the world's known cocaine, with a 5% increase in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Peru, the main countries responsible for such data[1].

With these high percentages of world production, there is cocaine (benzoylmethylecgonine), as a substance extracted from the *Erytroxylum coca* plant and, in Brazil, its planting is not so viable due to the inadequate climate for its cultivation. As a result, and due to its contact with Andean countries, its transport is facilitated by the Amazonian rivers, resulting in a route for the international trafficking of this substance[2].

In Brazil, the National Health Surveillance Agency (*Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária*, ANVISA), the Brazilian supervisory body, through Resolution 404/20, includes cocaine in the F list of prohibited use, capable of causing physical and psychological dependence, being established in the F1 list of narcotic substances with the inscription "Cocaine" or benzoylecgonine "methyl ester", as well as all reagents that may undergo biotransformation and give rise to this narcotic[3].

In the Brazilian territory, the Amazon region has a cocaine trafficking route, as it borders the Andean countries that produce this drug, and also because it has several criminal factions operating in this territory, encouraging drug trafficking[4]. With this Amazonian context, it is important to carry out studies aimed at monitoring this substance and its damage to society. With a systematic review study, related to academic papers and graduate theses, it is possible to verify the North and Midwest regions of the country; there are no studies related to crack use/consumption, evidencing certain lack of incentive for this type of research in these regions and providing scarcity of data on this narcotic[5].

As a result, in Brazil and for being a prohibited substance, inspection and seizure, more specifically in the state of Pará, rely on all Public Security agencies in their three spheres: municipal, state and federal. In this sense, these bodies work together and are responsible for investigating trafficking, apprehending the substance, analyzing its chemical composition and, finally, disposing of it via incineration. Furthermore, some of the bodies involved in the Public Security process in the state are listed, namely: Civil Police, Military Police and the Scientific Police of the State of Pará[6].

In the Scientific Police of Pará, Regional Coordination Office III of Santarém/PA, the chemical analysis carried out on drugs seized in the West Region of Pará are under the responsibility of the Forensic Laboratory, which is responsible for identifying, verifying and proving of toxic substances and other drugs classified as causing physical and psychological dependence"[7]. According to the Brazilian Penal Procedural Code, there are professionals legally qualified to hold the position of Official Expert (Article 159 of Federal Law No. 11.690/2008) responsible for releasing the expert report on the nature and amount of the drug, which is subsequently sent to the judicial authorities for progress of the criminal process[8].

When it comes to studies related to the production of knowledge about crack, there is major emphasis and scope of research studies in the Southeast region, mainly by the universities of the state of São Paulo, which have 51.5% of all research studies related to the topic, which differs from the North and Midwest regions that go against this process, showing that there are few studies and investments in research aimed at understanding the nuances and challenges posed by crack on society[5].

In this way, it is important to highlight the need for scientific studies on illicit drugs, in particular cocaine and its derivatives, promoting monitoring of these seizures, quantification of these materials and possible trafficking profiles, so that they can contribute to public safety and provide to society with consistent data for possible disclosure[9].

The current research study aims at analyzing the expert reports released by the Scientific Police of Pará through sociodemographic data, gender and amount of cocaine received by the Public Security agency in the period from 2018 to 2020 referring to seizures in the municipality of Santarém/PA and adjacent cities.

Methodology

Study design

The research deals with an exploratory and descriptive study with data validated in definitive expert reports of chemical analyses carried out on cocaine samples from seizures by Police agencies in the region served by the Regional Coordination Office III of the Scientific Police of Pará, in particular, the city of Santarém, from 2018 to 2020.

Locus

This research was carried out at Regional Unit III of the Scientific Police of Pará, located in the city of Santarém/PA – Brazil, which serves adjacent municipalities such as: Alenquer, Faro, Almeirim,

Juruti, Monte Alegre, Óbidos, Oriximiná, Prainha, Mojuí dos Campos, Belterra, Terra Santa, Novo Progresso, Itaituba and Jacareacanga[10], forming the western region of the state of Pará in the North of the country, with a territorial extension of 17,898.389 km² and an estimated population of 308,339 inhabitants"[11]. Santarém, the main municipality in the region, is divided into five urban area zones: North, Central, East, West and South, and presents the main financial, cultural and commercial center of the western region. The waterway is its main transport route, as it is surrounded by several rivers for navigation, such as the Tapajós and Amazonas[12].

Period

The data were collected from January 2018 to December 2020.

Selection criteria

Reports that were within the established deadline (January 1st, 2018 - December 31st, 2020) and obtained positive results for cocaine were selected. In this way, all other reports that were outside the established deadline and that had negative results for the substance were excluded.

Definition of the sample

Definitive expert reports with positive results for benzoylmethylecgonine and data regarding the seizure profile were used, such as: location, gender of the person involved in the expert investigation, age, schooling and amount of cocaine seized. Documents attached to the expert investigation request were also used, such as: Police Report and Document/Term of Exhibit and Apprehension of Objects.

Data collection

The data were collected from January to March 2021 in the Secretariat of Criminalistics of the Scientific Police of Pará Regional Unit III, and incorporated into Excel Office 2019 spreadsheets (Microsoft Corp., United States).

Study variables

The study is based on five variables that were analyzed and are as follows: gender of the detained person, age, schooling, place of seizure and amount of cocaine seized.

Data treatment and analysis

For the descriptive analysis, all the variables were tabulated in Excel Office 2019 to obtain absolute and relative frequency tables.

Ethical aspects

The research was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the State University of Pará (*Universidade Estadual do Pará*, UEPA) – Campus XII - Tapajós, opinion number 4,959,615 and CAAE No. 47103621.4.0000.5168. It is noted that the research complies with the ethical standards required by the National Health Council/Ministry of Health (*Conselho Nacional de Saúde/Ministério da Saúde*, CNS/MS), Resolution No. 466/12.

Results

A total of 1,280 definitive expert reports with positive results for cocaine were analyzed. The following data were obtained regarding detained people's gender: 288 females and 1,300 males, separated between both groups analyzed: Santarém and other cities according to Table 1, as follows:

Table 1 – Results of the data referring to gender. Santarém, PA, Brazil, 2022

Cities	2018		2019		2020	
	Gender		Gender		Gender	
	F*	M†	F*	M†	F*	M†
Santarém	44	191	38	159	41	237
Other cities	68	236	63	306	34	171
Total (annual) of both groups	112	427	101	465	75	408
Total (three years), both groups	Women: 288			Men: 1,300		
Total of people detained in the three years	1,588 people					

*F = Female; †M = Male

As for the schooling level (Table 2), the data show lack of information, followed by incomplete Elementary School.

As for the age groups: Adolescents (12-17 years old), Adults I (18-24 years old), Adults II (25-29 years old), Adults III (30-34 years old) and Adults IV (34+ years old). There is once again a large amount of unknown data, followed by the age group that includes Adults I, as can be seen in Table 3:

Table 2 – Results of the data referring to schooling. Santarém, PA, Brazil, 2022

Schooling	2018		2019		2020	
	Santarém	Other cities	Santarém	Other cities	Santarém	Other cities
No information	163	264	161	317	250	186
Illiterate	0	2	0	0	0	0
Literate	4	1	6	1	1	0
Incomplete Elementary School	36	23	11	28	11	13
Complete Elementary School	5	2	10	6	2	1
Incomplete High School	11	3	7	11	8	3
Complete High School	12	7	2	3	4	2
Incomplete Higher Education	1	0	0	0	0	0
Student	3	2	0	3	2	0

Table 3 – Results of the data referring to the age group. Santarém, PA, Brazil, 2022

Age group	2018		2019		2020	
	Santarém	Other cities	Santarém	Other cities	Santarém	Other cities
Unknown	121	164	116	230	200	130
Adolescents	13	20	15	33	14	12
Adults I	42	52	35	52	32	28
Adults II	24	32	17	28	11	11
Adults III	18	18	5	17	7	10
Adults IV	16	18	9	9	14	14
Only Adults	1	0	0	0	0	0

On the other hand, Table 4 shows the cocaine seized and divided between the Santarém regions and other cities that make up the West of Pará, which shows the growth in the last two years and Santarém as the central trafficking city in this region.

The research also analyzed seizures by zones that make up the city of Santarém to identify where the highest number of seizures occur and their respective amounts in grams, which can be seen in Table 5:

Table 4 – Data referring to the amount of cocaine, in grams, seized in 2018, 2019 and 2020 and their respective annual percentages. Santarém, PA, Brazil, 2022

Cities	2018 (g*)	2018 (%†)	2019 (g*)	2019 (%†)	2020 (g*)	2020 (%†)
Santarém	**34. 373.968**	75.92%	68,968.084	50.53%	38,086.638	37.67%
Other regions	10,903.055	24.08%	67,523.907	49.47%	63,018.884	62.33%
Total (annual)	45,277.023	-	136,491.991	-	101,105.522	-
Total			**282,874.54**			

*g = Gram; †% = Percentage

Table 5 – Data referring to the number of cocaine seizures in the city of Santarém by zone and their weight in grams. Santarém, PA, Brazil, 2022

Zones	2018		2019		2020	
	No.* of seizures	Weight (g†)	No.* of seizures	Weight (g†)	No.* of seizures	Weight (g†)
Unknown	62	3,524.8	45	807.7	42	7,337
West	37	2,402.5	42	1,297.1	61	4,492
East	27	5,904.1	22	51,430.6	48	11,257
North	22	3,295.0	28	5,677.9	29	10,090
South	19	4,751.2	19	2766.7	18	473
Central	19	14,478.6	12	6,902.4	23	4,213
Strong Axis	5	10.1	9	37.8	5	20
Planalto	2	7.8	4	47.8	4	205

*No. = Number; †g = Gram

Discussion

Illicit drug trafficking is a serious public security problem worldwide, as it is a growing practice in several countries[13] and it is no different in Brazil, as it has a route for dissemination of this drug since producing countries are in the Andean location, and the Amazônia; as it borders and is close to these Andean countries and has maritime routes for the most part, it becomes attractive for this criminal practice, and its rivers serve as a route to take this drug to international trafficking. And in the midst of this process, this "merchandise" also arrives in Amazonian cities, causing the large number of seizures that are evident in this study.

This research contributed with relevant data for the West region of Pará, as pointed out in the literature[5], wherein the North region is a route for drug trafficking in the Amazon. It is also possible to verify that there are few studies on the subject matter in this area, resulting in scarcity of data related to this narcotic.

The data provided by Police agencies responsible for prosecuting the crime of drug trafficking throughout the national territory are indirect, but make it possible to identify possible use profiles in society[14]. In this sense, in the city of Santarém and during all three years of study, 141.5 kg of cocaine were seized, whether in small or large amounts.

The other cities that are part of the west of Pará, such as Alenquer, Faro, Almeirim, Juruti, Monte Alegre, Óbidos, Oriximiná, Prainha, Mojuí dos Campos, Belterra, Terra Santa, Novo Progresso, Itaituba and Jacareacanga, served by the Scientific Police of Pará also show a continuous and, in a way, intense flow in their territories, presenting an approximate total of 141.4 kg. In synthesis, the research evidenced significant circulation of cocaine in this region, emphasizing that, generally, it is the second drug most seized by the Police, as can be seen in a study[14], which points out the types of seized illicit drugs, with marijuana in first place followed by cocaine and its derivatives.

The Amazon region stands out as a trafficking route due to its great waterway potential that facilitates transport of these illicit substances; this is due to inspection weaknesses and even as a result of its dense forest that covers up trafficking[15]. In addition to that, it is worth mentioning that the city of Santarém is located between two large capitals, Manaus and Belém, being an important economic center in the region, which in the trafficking perspective, represents an interesting scenario for dissemination of this narcotic.

Data from the World Drug Report produced by UNODC in 2021 indicate that, in 2019, a 9.6% increase was obtained when compared to 2018 in global cocaine seizure, with a record level[1]. It also reports that, in relation to the same two years, South America increased seizure of this drug by 5% in 2019, with Brazil as one of the main countries responsible for this increase[1]. With this, the present paper shows that the total seizure of cocaine in these years of study had its highest rate in 2019, which is in agreement with the world report.

The data from this study also indicate that, in 2020, one of the most unusual years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the total amount of cocaine seized by the Police agencies in charge and analyzed in the Scientific Police of Pará, in the western region of the state, suffered a slight decline, although still with a very high value when compared to the first year of study. Comparing these data to the strategic study on drug trafficking in Brazil in the face of COVID-19 carried out by the Center of Excellence for the Reduction of the Supply of Illicit Drugs (CdE), it should be noted that, before the pandemic (March 2019 - February 2020), approximately 106,222 kg of cocaine were seized throughout the national territory, while in the most critical period of the pandemic (March 2020 - February 2021), approximately 84,787 kg of the drug were seized throughout the country, again pointing to a decline in these seizures[16], corroborating the research data. The study also reports that this reduction in cocaine seizures in several states of the Brazilian territory during the pandemic can be due to greater caution by traffickers in the face of stricter inspections in streets, highways, ports and airports due to the sanitary measures related to COVID-19, thus directly affecting intensification of the presence of the Police agencies involved in the fight against drugs in the streets of the cities and patrolling on the highways that connect all Brazilian states, thus making it difficult for cocaine to pass through the main trafficking corridors, the same scenario ratified in this research.

Data from the CdE[16] show that, from 2019 to 2020, there was a reduction in cocaine seizures by the Federal Highway Police in the states of Tocantins, Piauí, Sergipe, Espírito Santo and São Paulo. These data indicate that, despite the pandemic context, trafficking of this illicit substance continued, although there were adaptations in the cocaine distribution chain in the country.

In relation to the results found in the current research regarding gender, there is predominance of males, which corroborates the data from the CdE[16] which state that, from 2020 to 2021, men also stood out with a percentage of 87.95% in relation to women in involvement with drug trafficking.

When compared in the literature[15], age and gender data of this research are very similar, as the individuals arrested in possession of illicit drugs are mostly male aged between 18 and 25 years old. Another research study states that the most common profile among crack users is that of men, young people and adults, with low

schooling, without a job, with a family of little purchasing power and low family income[17].

As for the data related to age and schooling, young people in the age group from 18 to 24 years old with low schooling were noticed, corroborating the idea that people with low access to education and relatively young are easy targets for organized crime, becoming vehicles for the propagation of this substance in the region. A study[18] infers that most of the verified legal processes involve young people with low schooling; this becomes a preponderant factor for the insertion of young people in drug trafficking and influences them to indulge in risk behaviors related to criminal acts. The analysis of data from the CdE also assesses the schooling of people involved in drug trafficking; the unreported data regarding this variable have the highest percentage (34.8%), followed by incomplete Elementary School (21.2%)[16].

In addition to low schooling, the research also detected that the arrested people did not have large amounts of drugs, that is, they were users who, due to the circumstances of the act, were detained by the Police. This shows how much the young population is involved with trafficking, either as users or as traffickers; the profit obtained from this practice brings about the idea of quick and easy money. Unfortunately, due to different social situations, young people feel attracted to the idea, turning this topic into something that has really been gaining ground in society, highlighting a problem of public importance. This idea is also reinforced in a research study[15], stating that the illegal drug market becomes attractive to the mass of informal workers, which brings about an erroneous perception of how to ascend to a certain "social status", with possibilities of easy money and radically changing financial condition.

The study also identified lack of data on schooling, age and place of seizure in the requests for expert investigations and documents in attachments that arrive at the Scientific Police of Pará, which makes access to these variables impossible and difficult, pointing to many unknown data. In regards to the value in amount of the substance seized, the expert reports must contain this main information since, depending on the amount, nature of the drug, social behavior and personality of the individuals, the judges will direct the crimes towards trafficking or merely for use, according to Drug Law No. 11,343 of August 2006[19]. In the reports analyzed, the data are complete in regard to gender, making it possible to identify this variable in the documents attached to the process.

Finally, the research detected the seizures by zones that make up the city of Santarém (largest economic center in the region) for a better visualization, and noticed that the East zone was the one that presented the highest amount (kg) of drug seized, with an analysis of the cocaine flow (number of expert investigation requests generated per area) also carried out, finding a large rate of unknown data, revealing that most of the neighborhoods were not identified in the requests and, in second place, the West zone appears with 23% of the total numbers of requests generated in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The problem of accessing incomplete databases is highlighted here, which hinders research studies, making them deficient in some data, whether these data are unknown or underreported. In this study, especially in the case of the expert requests, the absence of complete data makes it difficult to provide more consistent information, corroborating the idea that conducting research in Brazil is not easy, especially in the criminal area, since the crucial sociodemographic mapping data of this study are not fully available in the database used, even with prior authorization. For paper[20], public data availability is not always sufficient for use, as it depends on understanding the parameters analyzed in collection, justifying the importance of the documentation used.

Conclusion

The cocaine quantified in this study shows that, during the three years of analysis of data from the Scientific Police of Pará, a reasonable amount of cocaine seized was noticed, not only in the central city of this analysis, Santarém, but also in adjacent ones, indicating active circulation of this substance in the western region of Pará and also pointing to the male presence, mostly, in involvement with trafficking.

The study revealed absence of data in the requests for expert investigation for the analysis of narcotics, making it difficult to access some variables of this research; however, with the little data presented, it is possible to indicate a probable profile of people detained in possession of the substance: men, adults aged between 18 and 24 years old and with low schooling.

The research contributes with relevant data on cocaine seizure in the western region of the state of Pará, mainly for the city of Santarém, which is the largest economic center in the region. It is emphasized that data on cocaine in article format were not found in the databases analyzed, pointing to lack of data and information related to this theme in the region.

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Authors' contribution

Study concept and design: Deliane dos Santos Soares, Flávia Garcez da Silva. **Obtaining Data:** Deliane dos Santos Soares. **Data analysis and interpretation:** Deliane dos Santos Soares. **Statistical analysis:** Deliane dos Santos Soares. **Drafting the manuscript:** Deliane dos Santos Soares, Flávia Garcez da Silva. **Critical review of the manuscript as to its relevant intellectual content:** Deliane dos Santos Soares, Flávia Garcez da Silva.

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