

**Book review: Tough Choices: Risk, Security and the
Criminalization of Drug Policy**

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Toby Seddon, Lisa Williams and Robert Ralphs
Tough Choices: Risk, Security and the Criminalization of Drug Policy
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012: 240 pp

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A political preoccupation with the links between drugs and offending behavior has, in recent years, been matched by increasing academic scrutiny of the drugs-crime nexus. This latest work is an exploration of the logic underpinning the ‘Tough Choices’ agenda, launched by New Labour in 2005, and embraced by the current coalition government. Through various criminal justice interventions including testing on arrest and required treatment/assessment, the aim of this policy rubric has been to cut crime by addressing the use of heroin and crack cocaine.

In many ways, the book can be read as a sequel to Toby Seddon’s *History of Drugs* (2011) where he charts the development of the ‘drug problem’ according to changes in the ways social issues are imagined and addressed. One of this book’s key, and indeed persuasive, arguments is that the much maligned and supposed shift towards the governance of drug policy through the criminal justice system (the ‘criminal justice turn’), rather than by way of public health strategies, has been overstated. The authors argue that, contrary to the claims of other researchers in the drugs and crime field, public health measures such as ‘harm reduction’ programming and criminal justice responses to the ‘drug problem’ have developed *together* in recent decades. The authors suggest that the evolution of drug policy is better understood according to the conceptual category of ‘risk’ in the context of the growth in neo-liberal forms of governance, rather than ‘crime’. In this way, an analysis of drug policy also helps to illustrate moves towards risk-based governance in the securitization of social anxieties.

However, in departing from a focus on pure high-level cultural and political analysis, common to most ‘governmentality’ projects, this work is unique in its deployment of empirical research methods to consider questions of a ‘meta’ nature. Based on more than 200 interviews with policy makers, drug users and drug workers, as well as analyses of policy documents, the book examines the subject according to both ground-level institutional experiences and broader social theorizing by key thinkers such as David Garland. The authors skillfully guide us through various stages of the drug-crime security assemblage, including an historical analysis of recent drug policy-making and insights into the roles of police custody

and the criminal courts in risk identification and assessment. They finally use empirical data to critique major criminological works authored by Garland, the late Richard Ericson and Jonathan Simon. In this methodological endeavour, the book addresses the shortcomings of much governmentality orientated literature, which has been critiqued for its abstraction and focus on control culture rather than control practice. This ambitious and impressive attempt to blend high-level scholarship relating to broader social change with empirical grassroots exploration is quite a feat, and arguably the book's greatest achievement. The book is also ground-breaking because it is the first to provide such a broad, contextual analysis of the Drugs Intervention Programme (DIP), which was strengthened and expanded under the Tough Choices agenda. Until now, research on DIP has either been piecemeal or shackled by government-orientated impact analyses. This broader examination is much more critical and innovative and includes, for example, particularly interesting insights into the policy process and DIP practice.

As the authors state, they are interested in the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of the criminal justice turn, rather than evaluating its ethics or effectiveness, so we should perhaps not, therefore, be surprised or disappointed that the authors forgo policy recommendations. Rather, they somewhat optimistically claim to have 'prepared the ground' for normative solutions. Some however may doubt the scope for determining future approaches to policy. For example, the authors are wary of meta narratives about inequality and instrumental power in drug policy development, arguing, contra Alex Stevens (2011), that drug policy, rather than serving the interests of the powerful, reflects anxieties around risk and security. They thus frame the issue in the context of a *political culture*, rather than a politics of oppression. This is a moot point, and probably a question of epistemological approach. A consistent critique of governmentality scholarship has been that it fails to address the complicated actualities of unequal social relations, and so does not furrow particularly fertile ground for future policy analysis. In this instance, the emphasis on culture would seem to compound the dearth of critique on class and inequality which is so tied up with drug-crime policy but so lacking in many criminological ruminations on the subject, as authors including Stevens (2011) and Seddon (2000) have remarked. An injection of political science theory may have helped to bridge this gap between a reification of class power and the possible muting of vested interests in policy-making. Perhaps this could have assisted with assigning policy alternatives that burrow to the core of the 'drug problem'.

Still, research is often criticized on the basis of what it has *not* done. The authors have argued that the purpose of the book is not to provide solutions, but to deconstruct the

rationale behind the drugs-crime nexus; to 'diagnose' rather than resolve. This is a worthy ambition in itself, and results in essential reading for criminologists, risk and regulation theorists and drug researchers. Framing the conclusions in terms of future policy directions, if not specific outcomes, would have broadened the appeal for policy professionals and practitioners.

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