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**DRUG CRIME IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION: STATE AND  
TRENDS**

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**Abstract**

The article analyzes the state of crime in the sphere of illegal drug trafficking for the period from 2016 to 2020 on the territory of the Russian Federation. It is noted that drug-related crime continues to be one of the main threats to the state, public, and transport security. Countering drug-related crime is one of the priority tasks that must be addressed by most states of the world both at the national and interstate levels since the type of crime under study is closely related to transnational organized crime, is the financial basis for crimes of a terrorist nature and extremist orientation. The article contains the results of a study of official statistics along with this, there has been an increase in the level of drug-related crime and the number of drug-related crimes committed with complicity. The results of the study of drug crime at the regional level are presented. The Ural Federal District and the Far Eastern Federal District were identified as the most unfavorable in terms of crime at the level of federal districts, and at the level of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation – the Republic of North Ossetia Alania, the Republic of Tyva, the Jewish Autonomous Region, the Amur Region and the Republic of Khakassia. The following negative trends inherent in drug crime are of particular concern: a high degree of transnational organization; widespread use of the achievements of technical progress; rejuvenation of direct drug users; the rapid growth in the illegal circulation of drugs.

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*Keywords:* Criminological characteristics, drug crime, drug situation, drugs state, security threat, trends



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## 1. Introduction

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 31, 2015 No. 683 “On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation”), the Strategy of the State Anti-Drug Policy of the Russian Federation until 2030 (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 23.11. anti-drug policy of the Russian Federation until 2030) (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy of Anti-Drug Policy), illegal drug trafficking (hereinafter referred to as IT) is classified as one of the main threats to state and public security. Even though in the overall structure of crime over the past five years, the proportion of crimes and its constituents did not exceed 11.6 %. The importance of countering drug trafficking is since drug crime is transnational in nature, dominates the structure of organized crime (32–34 %), is closely related to corruption, crimes of a terrorist nature, extremist orientation, trafficking, negatively affects all spheres of public life, contributes to significant deterioration in the health status of the population. Organized criminal groups and criminal communities actively use the possibilities of all types of transport, especially railway, for the transportation of drugs, which negatively affects the provision of transport security. In this regard, criminological information on the state and trends of drug crime is essential for the purposeful and timely organization and implementation of preventive measures.

## 2. Problem Statement

Drug addiction as a social phenomenon appeared literally from the very beginning of mankind, at the same time, until the end of the 19th century, drug addiction and drug crime were not perceived as a serious international problem posing a threat to state security and requiring the consolidation of efforts of all states.

Without going into the details of the evolution of drug crime on the territory of the Russian Federation, we note that starting from the 90s of the 20th century; an active process of involving our state in the orbit of international organized crime dealing with the distribution of drugs began (Fedorov, 2019; Goodman, 2010; Matskevich & Zaripov, 2009). Until now, international criminal groups continue to attract the scale of the territory of Russia, which predetermines a large sales market; developed transport infrastructure, through which all regions of the country are connected into a single whole; favorable geographic location facilitating drug transit.

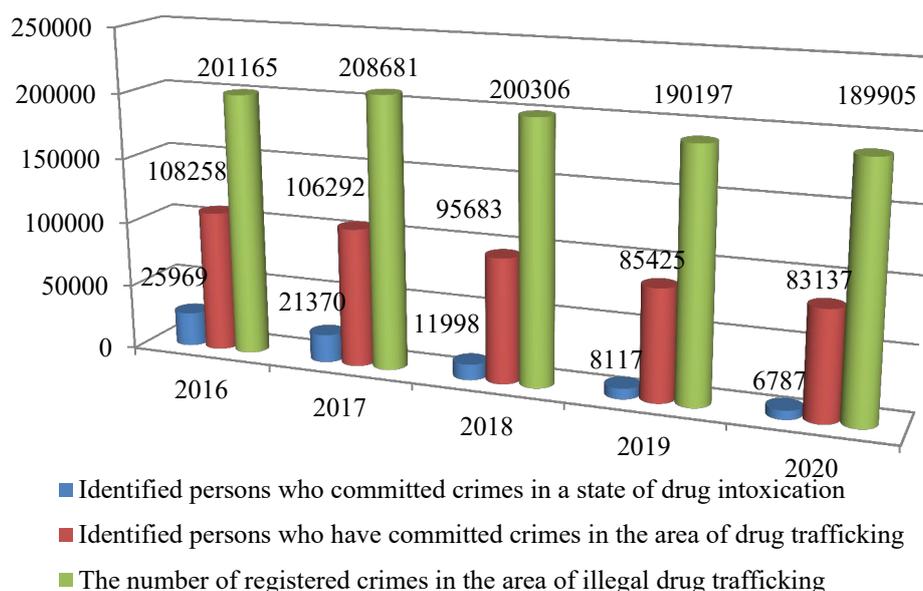
Within the framework of the article, drugs are understood as narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances or their analogs, as well as plants containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, or their parts containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances; precursors of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances; plants containing precursors of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances, or parts thereof, containing precursors of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances.

The results of a study of the data of the official statistical reporting of the Federal State Institution “Main Information and Analytical Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia” indicate a decrease in the number of drug crimes in 2020 compared to 2019, both in the country (–0.2 %) and in transport (–12, 0 %). This trend is observed against the background of a slight increase (+1.0 %) of all

registered crimes (statistical form No. 494 "On the state of crime and the results of crime investigation" for the period from 2016 to 2020).

According to all-Russian indicators, every tenth registered crime is related to drug trafficking, in the structure of transport crime – every fourth.

A downward trend is also characteristic of the number of persons identified for drug-related crimes (83,137; –2.7 %). Besides, the number of persons who committed crimes in a state of drug intoxication decreased significantly (6 787; –16.4 %) (Figure 1).



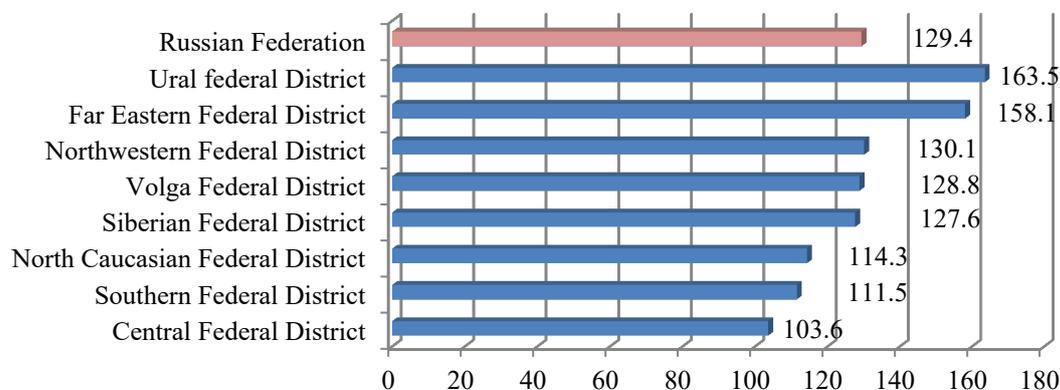
**Figure 1.** Dynamics of drug crime in the Russian Federation in 2016–2020

The overwhelming majority of persons identified for drug-related crimes are citizens of the Russian Federation (88 %), of which the overwhelming majority are males (90 %). The age groups of 30–49 years old and 25–29 years old have the highest criminal activity. The share of minors is insignificant – it does not exceed 3 % of all identified persons who have committed the investigated crimes. At the same time, there is a rejuvenation of direct users, since drugs are becoming an integral part of the youth subculture, a component of communication among adolescents and youth, and are gradually replacing alcohol as an attribute of youth entertainment activities. According to our research, the diagnosis of drug addiction is currently being established for the first time not only for young people but also for children less than 14 years of age.

The Strategy of the State Anti-Drug Policy of the Russian Federation states that according to the monitoring data carried out by the State Anti-Drug Committee, the drug situation in most regions of the Russian Federation remains tense, but in general throughout the country, it has stabilized.

The crime rate in the sphere of illegal drug trafficking (the number of crimes per 100 thousand of the population) increased by 4.8 % and amounted to 129.4 (in 2019 – 123.2). When distributed by federal districts, the maximum value of this indicator was noted in the Ural (163.5) and Far Eastern federal

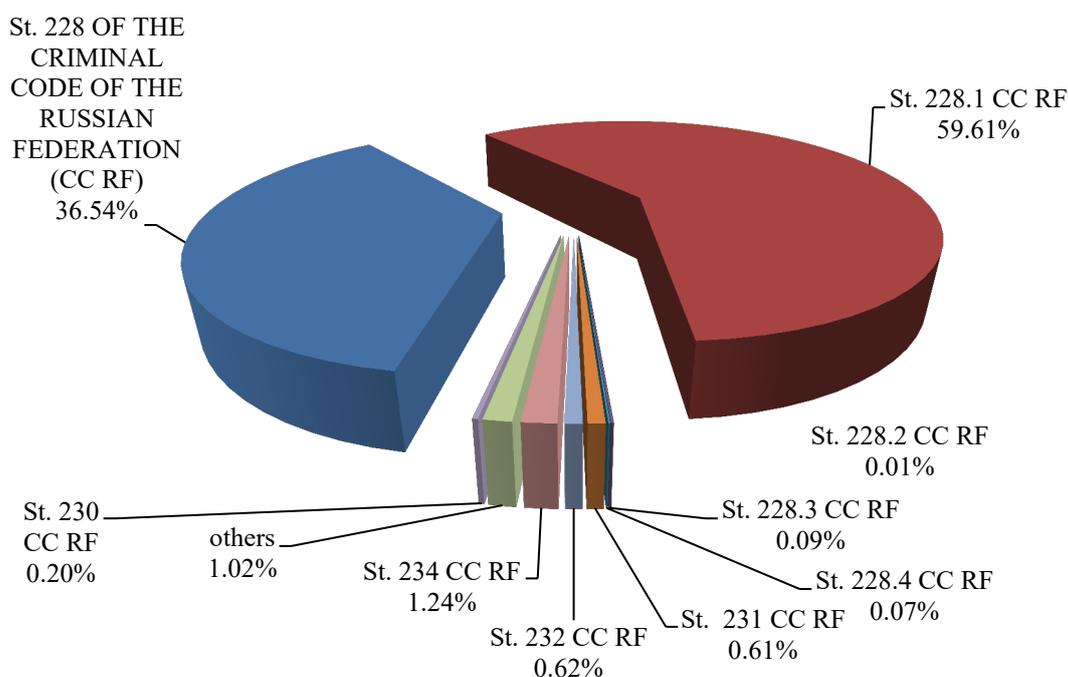
districts (158.1), the most favorable criminal situation in this area was in the Central (103.6) and Southern (111.5) federal districts (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Ranking of federal districts of the Russian Federation by the level of drug crime in 2020

The highest values of the crime rate in the sphere of drug trafficking were recorded in five constituent entities of the Russian Federation: in the Republic of North Ossetia Alania 274.5; in the Republic of Tuva – 248.9; in the Jewish Autonomous Region – 241.3; in the Amur region – 236.7 and in the Republic of Khakassia – 232.1.

In the general structure of drug-related crimes, heavy and especially heavy compositions account for 74.7 %. Crimes under Art. 228 (69 394; 36.54 %) and 2281 (113 193; 59.61 %) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (figure 3).



**Figure 3.** The structure of drug crime in 2020

It should be noted that other drug-related crimes, constituting in aggregate less than 1 %, demonstrate a significant increase in their absolute values: 2283 (163; +59.8 %), 2284 (128; +75.3 %), 230 (389; +28.8 %) and 234 (2,357; +78.6 %) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

There has been an increase in the number of drug-related crimes committed by a group of persons by prior agreement (14,068; + 14.2 %), as well as by organized groups (5,147; +7.1 %) and criminal communities, criminal organizations (1,349; + 37.0 %).

Most drug-related crimes (on average 96 %) are detected by employees of the internal affairs bodies.

The establishment of restrictions on the movement of citizens, cargo transportation, and other restrictive measures, as well as strengthening control, including temporary restrictions on the movement of persons and vehicles across the State Border of the Russian Federation and tightening control over the movement of goods and cargo on international routes, caused by the pandemic, resulted in changes in a number of tendencies of drug-related crime related to the methods of committing drug-related crimes, camouflage of criminal activity.

The use of the Internet has become more active in order to commit crimes in the sphere of illegal drug trafficking. So, in 2020, there was a 90.7 % increase in the number of revealed facts of drug trafficking committed using IT technologies. As a result, the non-contact method of drug trafficking has become predominant. The results of studying more than 800 verdicts of federal courts of general jurisdiction allow us to state that electronic payment systems are actively used (YuMoney, QIWI Wallet, LegalRC, WebMoney, etc.), hidden resources on pseudodomains (Afanasyeva & Shiyan, 2020).

The Russian Darknet marketplace for the sale of drugs has expanded. The movement of the drug trade into cyberspace provides anonymity to the participants in the illegal drug trafficking, which significantly complicates the implementation of measures aimed at identifying and suppressing the opened drug supply channels, as well as at proving their sale and the guilt of criminals (Adorjan, 2015; Likholetov, 2016):

- the number of registered crimes related to drug smuggling has decreased by almost a third (–29.0 %);
- the production of synthetic drugs in the country expanded due to the continued availability of precursors, reagents and chemical equipment on the Russian market.

In 2020, the volume of drugs seized by law enforcement agencies from circulation increased by 7.7 % (20,965,871).

According to all-Russian indicators, the last five years in the total volume of seized narcotic drugs, a significant share are drugs of the cannabis group (in 2020 – 10 604 984 g), synthetic drugs (8 663 538 g), drugs of the amphetamine group (8 244 910 g ) (statistical form No. 173 “Information on the seizure of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors, potent substances, narcotic plants, new potentially dangerous psychoactive substances from illicit trafficking” for the period from 2016 to 2020).

During the analyzed period, there has been a consistent increase in synthetic drugs and potent substances seized by law enforcement officials, which is explained by the unlimited possibilities of their synthesis, production and market introduction, as well as their low cost and high profitability (Khey et al., 2014).

One of the main trends should also be attributed to the knowledge-intensiveness of drug-related crimes, which determines the regular appearance of new drugs and the replenishment of the drug market with uncontrolled psychoactive substances. According to the just remark of Fedorov, the widespread uncontrolled circulation of new psychoactive substances is a consequence of a difficult and time-consuming decision on their inclusion in the list of controlled ones (Fedorov, 2015).

The results of the analysis of drug-related crime on the territory of the Russian Federation allow us to state that the main quantitative and qualitative indicators characterizing its state (volume) are inherent in decreasing tendencies, which, in our opinion, are due to two main factors. The first factor is the restrictive measures taken in connection with the coronavirus pandemic, the second is the effectiveness of preventive activities. Among the main measures: the adoption of the Anti-Drug Strategy of the SCO Member States (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) for 2018–2023, the Action Program for its implementation and the Concept for the Prevention of the Abuse of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances of the SCO Member States; carrying out comprehensive coordinated and / or joint preventive measures aimed at countering drug trafficking (for example, the international anti-drug operation “Web”, the interagency preventive operation “Children of Russia”, etc.); exchange of information between the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States on narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors seized from illicit trafficking, as well as on the methods used for the illegal movement and concealment of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and their precursors; on the turnover of precursors in order to identify their possible use for the illicit production of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances; on new methods of research of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, materials and products for testing in expert institutions of the CIS member states; elimination of clandestine laboratories mainly for the manufacture of synthetic drugs using special equipment, precursors or other chemicals and reagents. The propaganda of a healthy lifestyle carried out by the Russian Ministry of Defense, namely the annual All-Army Month “Army against Drugs!” is of essential importance. Among the participants in this event are representatives of law enforcement agencies, military prosecutors, health care institutions, government and local authorities, and public organizations.

The system of early detection of illegal consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances in educational institutions is being improved, including socio-psychological testing and preventive medical examinations of students.

The presented assessment of the state of drug-related crime and its current trends revealed once again allow us to speak about the relevance of Fedorov on the creation within the framework of criminological science of a new direction – drug criminology, a special part of which, according to the researcher, should include the criminological characteristics of regional drug crime. This approach will make it possible to move on to a systematic study of this type of crime (Fedorov, 2013).

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the article is drug crime as a negative social, historically changeable, systemic phenomenon, manifested in the aggregate of socially dangerous criminal acts and persons who committed

them, on the territory of the Russian Federation and its subjects for the period from 2016 to 2020, including its quantitative and quality indicators.

The study of quantitative indicators of drug-related crime involves measuring its volume (state) and intensity (level), determining the dynamics.

The study of qualitative indicators of drug-related crime involves comprehending its socially dangerous nature and structure, establishing the specifics of its territorial distribution.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the work is that, based on the analysis of official statistical data of the Federal State Institution “Main Information and Analytical Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia” (information on the state of crime and the results of the investigation of crimes for the period from 2016 to 2020; on crimes related to drug trafficking, psychotropic substances and their precursors or analogues, potent substances, plants (or their parts) containing narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances or their precursors, new potentially dangerous psychoactive substances, and people who committed them; summary report on the state of crime in transport), materials judicial practice, fundamental provisions of domestic criminology to assess the state of drug crime and identify its current trends.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The research is based on the general scientific dialectical method of cognition. In addition, a set of research methods that had been repeatedly tested in criminological and criminal law science, such as: analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, systemic-structural (when studying materials of judicial practice, volumes of drug crime and identifying its trends), statistical (when studying statistical data characterizing the number of registered drug-related crimes and perpetrators of them, as well as regional drug-related crime), formal-logical (when developing the main directions of countering drug crime), differentiation, integration, etc., which allowed the team of authors to achieve this goal.

#### **6. Findings**

The development of drug-related crime trends identified by the team of authors will depend on the duration and depth of the consequences of the crisis caused by the pandemic. After the removal of all restrictions, many criminal processes can return to their previous channel, at least on the same scale. At the same time, some serious negative changes associated with the adaptation of organized drug-related crime to the new realities are also possible.

It is possible to reverse the drug situation only if a balanced system of counteracting the drug threat is built, combining law enforcement, control, preventive, medical and rehabilitation measures, as well as common approaches to organizing international cooperation to counter drug expansion, establishing close interaction of competent authorities in the fight against drug trafficking.

The effectiveness of interaction between the subjects of drug crime prevention will be positively affected by the results of criminological research, which will make it possible to timely identify new

criminal threats, determine priority areas of preventive activities, and develop appropriate countermeasures.

It is advisable to intensify the implementation of joint complex research projects related to the problems of combating drug-related crime, relying on the significant scientific potential of the Russian Federation and the states bordering with it.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that despite the downward trend in the number of registered crimes in the sphere of illegal drug trafficking, the number of people who committed them, and people who are in a state of intoxication at the time of the crime, drug crime prevention measures should be constantly improved, have a comprehensive, regular and offensive nature. Given the transnational nature of drug-related crime, international cooperation should be an important area in its prevention. It is obvious that solving the problems arising in the field of combating drug-related crime cannot do without using the achievements of modern science.

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