

# The impact of the 'war on drugs' for female 'mules'

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Dr. Nayeli Urquiza Haas. Credit: Dr Nayeli Urquiza Haas

University of Kent research on women working as drug 'mules' has

found they aren't victims of their sex but of the trade, and its illegal status.

Dr Nayeli Urquiza Haas of the University's Kent Law School compared different legal developments and strategies in Europe and Latin America.

Globally, women who traffic drugs across borders are over-represented in prison in relation to their limited role in the trade. Dr Urquiza Haas found attributing victim status to women who traffic drugs is used to minimise prison sentences if they are arrested and charged.

But she suggests this legal bias, born from pre-conceived judgments and expectations about women's behaviour, distracts law and policy-makers from paying attention to the negative effects of punitive drug control laws and the so-called 'war on drugs'.

Her research examined how courts fail to consider how drug mules, among other participants in the drug trade, endure precarious work conditions in foreign countries; disregarding the conditions which make them more vulnerable to exploitation.

Dr Urquiza Haas says gender does play a role but only in the same way as in any other 'workplace' where sexism and poverty may restrict women's access to safe working conditions.

Dr Urquiza Haas presented her research at a workshop bringing together international researchers, activists and practitioners from the field of global drug policy reform in Budapest, Hungary, earlier this year.

Vulnerability Discourses and Drug Mule Work: Legal Approaches in Sentencing and Non-Prosecution/Non-Punishment Norms is published in a special issue of *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* dedicated to

international advances in research and policy regarding [drug](#) mules and couriers.

**More information:** NAYELI URQUIZA-HAAS, Vulnerability Discourses and Drug Mule Work: Legal Approaches in Sentencing and Non-Prosecution/Non-Punishment Norms, *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/hojo.12217](https://doi.org/10.1111/hojo.12217)

Provided by University of Kent

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