

LEGAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUG CRIMES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VIETNAM AND OTHER COUNTRIES

ABORDAGENS LEGAIS E PRÁTICAS NO COMBATE AOS CRIMES RELACIONADOS A DROGAS: UM ESTUDO COMPARATIVO ENTRE O VIETNÃ E OUTROS PAÍSES

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Abstract

The proliferation of drug-related crimes remains one of the most formidable challenges for governments and societies worldwide. Despite the shared threat of drug abuse and trafficking, different nations have developed diverse legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to combat the drug crisis. This article examines the legal and practical dimensions of the fight against drug crimes in Vietnam, comparing it to the strategies implemented by several other countries. By exploring Vietnam's legal provisions, the effectiveness of its enforcement systems, and the socio-economic factors influencing drug crime, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in its approach. Furthermore, the paper assesses international cooperation in drug law enforcement and highlights best practices from countries with advanced anti-drug strategies, offering recommendations for

Resumo

A proliferação de crimes relacionados a drogas continua sendo um dos maiores desafios para governos e sociedades em todo o mundo. Apesar da ameaça comum do abuso e tráfico de drogas, diferentes nações desenvolveram estruturas legais e mecanismos de aplicação da lei distintos para combater a crise das drogas. Este artigo examina as dimensões legais e práticas do combate aos crimes relacionados a drogas no Vietnã, comparando-o às estratégias implementadas por diversos outros países. Ao explorar as disposições legais do Vietnã, a eficácia de seus sistemas de aplicação da lei e os fatores socioeconômicos que influenciam o crime relacionado a drogas, este estudo fornece uma análise abrangente dos pontos fortes e fracos de sua abordagem. Além disso, o artigo avalia a cooperação internacional na aplicação da lei antidrogas e destaca as melhores práticas de países com estratégias antidrogas



enhancing global and national efforts to tackle the drug epidemic.

Keywords: Drug Crimes. Legal Frameworks. Vietnam. International Cooperation. Rehabilitation Programs.

avançadas, oferecendo recomendações para aprimorar os esforços globais e nacionais no combate à epidemia de drogas.

Palavras-chave: Crimes Relacionados a Drogas. Estruturas Legais. Vietnã. Cooperação Internacional. Programas de Reabilitação.

1 INTRODUCTION

Drug-related crimes, particularly drug trafficking and abuse, have evolved into one of the most pressing issues for global security and public health. The fight against drug crimes is multifaceted, involving not only legal mechanisms but also a significant practical effort to curb trafficking, dismantle drug syndicates, and rehabilitate affected individuals. While international conventions like the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances offer a global framework, individual countries often approach this issue through different legal instruments, law enforcement tactics, and rehabilitation strategies. This paper delves into the legal and practical approaches of Vietnam in tackling drug crimes, comparing them with those of other nations to understand the broader landscape of drug crime prevention.

Vietnam, a country situated at the crossroads of significant regional drug trafficking routes, faces unique challenges in its battle against drug-related crime. The government has implemented stringent laws, but enforcement remains an ongoing challenge due to resource limitations, corruption, and the sophistication of international drug cartels. This comparative study analyzes Vietnam's approach alongside the practices of countries such as the United States, Mexico, Thailand, and the Netherlands, offering a detailed examination of the legal and practical strategies employed by each.

2 VIETNAM'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMBATING DRUG CRIMES

Vietnam's legal framework for combating drug-related crimes is anchored in several key pieces of legislation, most notably the Penal Code and the Anti-Drug Law, which provide comprehensive legal measures to tackle drug trafficking, production, and

use. These laws represent the country's firm stance against drug crimes, emphasizing both punitive and preventive approaches to combat this pervasive issue.

The Vietnamese Penal Code, revised in 2015, classifies drug crimes as serious offenses, subjecting those involved in trafficking, manufacturing, or possessing narcotics to severe penalties. Depending on the quantity and nature of the offense, individuals may face prison sentences ranging from several years to life imprisonment, and in extreme cases, the death penalty. Drug offenses are regarded as high-priority criminal activities, and the law is stringent in its approach to eliminating the influence of drugs on society. This zero-tolerance policy aligns with the government's long-standing commitment to reducing the social, economic, and public health burdens associated with drug abuse.

In parallel, the Anti-Drug Law, enacted in 2000 and amended in 2008, forms the cornerstone of Vietnam's efforts to prevent and reduce drug use. It addresses a wide range of measures, including prevention, law enforcement, and rehabilitation, and lays out specific provisions to enhance drug crime prevention in both urban and rural areas. Under this law, the government has established programs aimed at educating the public on the dangers of drug abuse and has integrated drug prevention efforts into schools, media, and community outreach. It also provides a legal basis for treating drug addiction as both a criminal issue and a public health challenge, with the aim of rehabilitating offenders and preventing relapse.

Despite these legal instruments, Vietnam faces significant challenges in the enforcement of drug laws. One of the key issues is the lack of resources and capacity within law enforcement agencies. While the country has specialized drug enforcement units, such as the Anti-Drug Police, these agencies often struggle with insufficient training, inadequate funding, and the complex nature of modern drug trafficking networks. The pervasive issue of corruption within certain sectors of law enforcement further complicates the situation, making it difficult to ensure consistent application of drug laws across the country.

Additionally, the implementation of rehabilitation programs for drug offenders has been limited by systemic issues such as inadequate facilities and staff shortages at treatment centers. Although Vietnam's approach to rehabilitation has evolved, the country still faces challenges in providing effective drug rehabilitation programs that focus on both the physical and psychological aspects of addiction. This has led to high

relapse rates among drug offenders, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach to rehabilitation that includes not only treatment but also long-term reintegration into society.

In conclusion, while Vietnam's legal framework for combating drug crimes is robust and has evolved over time to address the complex nature of the issue, there are still significant gaps in enforcement and rehabilitation. Addressing these challenges will require continued investment in both legal reforms and practical enforcement measures, as well as a stronger emphasis on the social reintegration of drug offenders through improved rehabilitation programs.

3 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The fight against drug-related crimes, due to its transnational nature, necessitates robust international cooperation. Drug trafficking often crosses borders, linking countries in complex global networks. Therefore, no single nation can tackle the problem in isolation. Vietnam recognizes this and has actively engaged in various international legal frameworks aimed at curbing the illicit drug trade, strengthening cooperation with both regional and global partners to improve enforcement and counter the growing threat of drug trafficking.

Vietnam is a signatory to several critical international conventions, the most prominent of which is the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, which serves as the foundation of global drug control efforts. This convention mandates signatories to adopt specific measures to combat drug trafficking, including criminalizing drug trafficking activities, enhancing border control measures, and promoting international cooperation in the fight against drug-related offenses. Vietnam's participation in this convention reflects its commitment to the global effort to tackle drug trafficking and its responsibility to align its domestic laws with international standards.

In addition to the 1988 Convention, Vietnam is also a party to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961) and the Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971). These agreements form the legal backbone of international drug control, providing a framework for the controlled regulation of narcotics and psychotropic

substances. Vietnam's adherence to these treaties demonstrates its commitment to harmonizing national laws with international norms and best practices in drug enforcement.

A key aspect of international cooperation is the sharing of intelligence, resources, and operational support between countries. Vietnam's collaboration with regional neighbors, such as China, Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, is crucial in curbing cross-border drug trafficking, particularly along the Golden Triangle, one of the world's most notorious drug-producing regions. To combat the pervasive drug networks in Southeast Asia, these nations have established joint law enforcement operations, intelligence-sharing agreements, and cross-border monitoring initiatives. This collaboration is essential for intercepting large-scale drug shipments, apprehending traffickers, and dismantling international trafficking rings that operate across borders.

Furthermore, Vietnam has worked closely with Interpol and UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) to strengthen its law enforcement capacity. Interpol's global network provides crucial support in tracking drug criminals who operate internationally, enabling Vietnamese authorities to request assistance in apprehending suspects, conducting joint operations, and exchanging criminal intelligence. UNODC, through various regional initiatives, has provided Vietnam with technical assistance, training programs for law enforcement officers, and logistical support to combat drug trafficking.

However, despite these international commitments, Vietnam continues to face significant challenges in fully realizing the benefits of international cooperation. Legal and administrative hurdles often complicate cross-border collaboration, such as differences in legal systems, extradition procedures, and varying national interests in the prioritization of drug crimes. These issues can create delays or barriers in executing international requests for cooperation, especially in sensitive cases requiring the transfer of suspects or the seizure of illicit assets.

Moreover, while Vietnam has made strides in participating in international drug control efforts, it has faced difficulties in fully integrating these international frameworks into domestic policy. The slow pace of legislative reform and inconsistencies in law enforcement can sometimes undermine the effectiveness of these global initiatives at the national level. Strengthening the implementation of international legal frameworks

requires not only a commitment to reforming domestic laws but also a strategic investment in capacity building, technological upgrades, and improved training for law enforcement personnel.

In conclusion, Vietnam's engagement with international legal frameworks and its cooperation with neighboring countries and global organizations form a crucial part of its strategy to combat drug trafficking and related crimes. Nevertheless, challenges remain in fully optimizing the benefits of international cooperation, and ongoing reforms and investments are needed to ensure more effective enforcement and cooperation in the fight against transnational drug crime.

4 PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO COMBATTING DRUG CRIMES IN VIETNAM

Vietnam's strategy for combatting drug-related crimes involves a multifaceted approach that combines strict legal measures, robust law enforcement, preventive initiatives, and rehabilitation efforts. While the legal framework and international cooperation play a crucial role in the country's fight against drug trafficking and abuse, the practical execution of these strategies is just as vital. This section examines how Vietnam has operationalized its drug control policies, the challenges faced in implementation, and the ongoing efforts to address the complex nature of the drug problem.

4.1 Law enforcement and drug trafficking interdiction

At the core of Vietnam's practical approach is law enforcement, particularly the efforts to prevent drug trafficking and dismantle criminal networks involved in the illegal drug trade. Vietnam has established specialized units within the National Police and Customs Department to focus on narcotics control. These agencies are responsible for intercepting drug shipments at border points, airports, and ports, which are primary entry and exit points for narcotics entering and leaving the country.

One of the main objectives of law enforcement agencies is to tackle the growing volume of synthetic drugs entering the country, particularly methamphetamine and

ecstasy, which are becoming more prevalent in Vietnam's drug market. The Anti-Drug Police play a crucial role in investigating and prosecuting drug trafficking offenses, with a focus on dismantling international drug syndicates and intercepting drug shipments. Customs agencies are equipped with advanced screening technologies to detect drugs hidden in cargo and luggage, and have implemented stricter measures to monitor and control cross-border transportation.

Despite the country's increased focus on law enforcement, there are significant challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the sophistication of drug trafficking networks. Organized crime groups often exploit the porous nature of Vietnam's borders, relying on smuggling routes through neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, making interception difficult. Furthermore, corruption within law enforcement agencies presents a critical obstacle to effective enforcement. Bribery and collusion can undermine anti-drug operations, allowing traffickers to evade capture and continue their illicit activities.

4.2 Preventive measures and public education

Vietnam places a significant emphasis on prevention as part of its drug control strategy. Public education campaigns, particularly targeting youth and vulnerable groups, aim to raise awareness about the dangers of drug abuse and to promote drug-free lifestyles. These campaigns are conducted through a variety of channels, including schools, media, and community outreach programs. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) has been actively involved in organizing events, workshops, and seminars to educate the public about the social and health consequences of drug addiction.

In schools, educational programs are designed to prevent drug abuse by teaching students about the dangers of drug use and providing information about healthy alternatives. These initiatives, however, face challenges in terms of outreach and effectiveness, particularly in rural and remote areas where access to information may be limited. Additionally, the stigma surrounding drug use often prevents individuals from seeking help, which makes the effectiveness of prevention programs less than optimal.

Another practical approach that Vietnam has implemented is the creation of drug-free zones, particularly in workplaces and communities, where employers and local leaders work together to prevent drug-related incidents. These zones are part of a broader strategy to reduce the supply of drugs and encourage citizens to report illegal drug activities to authorities.

4.3 Drug rehabilitation and reintegration

Rehabilitation plays a critical role in Vietnam's approach to drug crime, as the government recognizes drug addiction as both a criminal and a public health issue. The Anti-Drug Law includes provisions for rehabilitation, and the country has established a network of drug treatment centers aimed at helping individuals addicted to narcotics recover and reintegrate into society. These centers provide a combination of medical treatment, psychological counseling, and vocational training to support recovery.

However, the effectiveness of these rehabilitation programs is hindered by several factors. One of the main issues is the insufficient resources allocated to drug rehabilitation programs. Many treatment centers are underfunded and lack the necessary facilities and trained staff to effectively address the needs of drug users. As a result, the quality of care often falls short, and relapse rates remain high.

Furthermore, the social stigma surrounding drug addiction in Vietnam discourages individuals from seeking treatment. Many addicts are reluctant to enter rehabilitation programs due to fear of discrimination or legal consequences. This is particularly true for individuals involved in drug trafficking or those who have been arrested for drug-related offenses. There is a growing need for a more holistic approach that not only focuses on medical and psychological treatment but also works to reduce the stigma surrounding addiction and encourage individuals to seek help.

The government has made efforts to reform the rehabilitation system by incorporating community-based rehabilitation programs. These programs are designed to provide a more supportive and less stigmatizing environment for individuals recovering from addiction. Additionally, there has been an increased focus on integrating mental health services into drug rehabilitation programs, recognizing the importance of addressing the psychological aspects of addiction.

4.4 Socioeconomic factors and drug prevention

The socioeconomic factors contributing to drug abuse in Vietnam cannot be overlooked. Issues such as poverty, lack of employment opportunities, and educational deficiencies create an environment in which individuals, particularly young people, may be more vulnerable to drug use. Addressing these underlying factors is critical to reducing the demand for drugs in the long term.

Vietnam has made efforts to reduce poverty and improve education, which are essential in tackling the root causes of drug addiction. However, the economic challenges faced by many individuals, especially those living in rural areas, continue to create conditions that foster drug abuse. Strengthening community programs that focus on social welfare, youth engagement, and employment opportunities is key to providing alternative pathways for those at risk.

In recent years, the government has started implementing integrated prevention programs that address both the supply and demand sides of the drug problem. These programs not only focus on reducing the availability of drugs through law enforcement but also target the root causes of drug addiction by improving living conditions, education, and economic prospects for vulnerable populations.

Vietnam's practical approach to combating drug crimes involves a combination of law enforcement, prevention, rehabilitation, and addressing socioeconomic factors. While the country has made strides in implementing various measures to tackle drug trafficking and abuse, significant challenges remain. The sophistication of international drug syndicates, corruption within law enforcement, and the need for more effective rehabilitation programs all highlight areas for improvement. Addressing these challenges requires continued investment in resources, training for law enforcement personnel, and a shift towards more comprehensive, community-based rehabilitation and prevention programs.

Ultimately, a more integrated and holistic approach, focused not only on criminal justice but also on public health and social welfare, will be essential for reducing drug-related harm in Vietnam and achieving long-term success in the fight against drug crimes.

5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

While Vietnam has made considerable strides in combating drug-related crimes, it can The fight against drug-related crimes is a global challenge, and many countries have developed various approaches to tackling this issue. By examining the strategies employed by other nations, Vietnam can gain valuable insights into how different legal, enforcement, and rehabilitation frameworks impact the effectiveness of anti-drug policies. This section compares Vietnam's approach to drug crime with the strategies implemented by the United States, Mexico, Thailand, and the Netherlands—countries with distinct legal systems and drug control models.

5.1 The United States: the war on drugs and shifting policies

The United States has long been at the forefront of anti-drug efforts, particularly through its aggressive "War on Drugs" strategy, which began in the 1980s. The U.S. government adopted a punitive approach that emphasized harsh criminal penalties for drug trafficking and possession. This approach led to the mass incarceration of drug offenders, particularly in disadvantaged communities, and fueled a national debate on the effectiveness and fairness of these policies.

The U.S. legal framework for combating drug crimes includes strict federal laws, such as the Controlled Substances Act, and several mandatory minimum sentences for drug trafficking and possession. While these policies resulted in significant law enforcement efforts to dismantle drug cartels and reduce drug supply, they also led to overcrowded prisons and disproportionately affected minority communities. The policy faced increasing criticism for its discriminatory nature and its failure to address the root causes of drug abuse.

In recent years, the U.S. has started shifting its approach, moving away from punitive measures and adopting more rehabilitative and public health-oriented strategies. Many states have decriminalized or legalized the use of marijuana, and there is growing support for harm reduction measures, such as needle exchange programs and medically-assisted treatment for opioid addiction. The First Step Act, passed in 2018, sought to

reduce sentences for non-violent drug offenders, signaling a broader trend towards reforming drug laws.

Vietnam can draw valuable lessons from the U.S. experience, particularly in terms of reconsidering overly punitive measures for drug users and instead focusing on rehabilitation and restorative justice. A balance between enforcement and health-based interventions, as seen in recent U.S. reforms, could be beneficial for Vietnam's drug policies, particularly for low-level offenders who could benefit from treatment rather than incarceration.

5.2 Mexico: drug cartels and enforcement challenges

Mexico presents a unique case in the global drug war due to the dominance of drug cartels and their significant influence on the country's security landscape. Mexican drug cartels control the production and trafficking of illicit drugs, such as methamphetamine, cocaine, and marijuana, and their operations have led to widespread violence and corruption.

The Mexican government has deployed military forces and law enforcement agencies to combat these cartels, but the ongoing violence and law enforcement corruption continue to undermine these efforts. The Mexican War on Drugs, initiated in 2006, has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and countless cases of human rights violations. The criminal justice system often struggles to hold cartel leaders accountable, and the pervasive corruption within law enforcement has exacerbated the problem.

Despite these challenges, Mexico has made efforts to address drug abuse through harm reduction policies and rehabilitation programs. The government has increasingly focused on providing treatment for drug addiction, reducing the demand for illicit drugs, and integrating public health strategies into its broader drug control framework. Community-based rehabilitation programs have been established to help reintegrate former drug offenders into society.

For Vietnam, Mexico's experience highlights the importance of tackling the root causes of drug abuse and addressing the social issues that drive drug trafficking. Corruption and violence remain critical issues in Mexico, and Vietnam should prioritize enhancing the integrity of law enforcement agencies and ensuring that drug law

enforcement is carried out in a manner that respects human rights and upholds the rule of law.

5.3 Thailand: balancing strict laws with public health approaches

Thailand has taken a balanced approach to combatting drug crime by combining strict drug laws with a focus on rehabilitation and public health. The country has historically adopted a zero-tolerance policy for drug trafficking and abuse, with severe penalties for offenders. However, Thailand's drug laws, particularly the Narcotic Act, also allow for rehabilitation and treatment for drug users, marking a shift towards a more integrated approach.

The Thai government operates several drug treatment centers that focus on detoxification, mental health counseling, and vocational training. In recent years, the government has emphasized the importance of providing holistic treatment, including addressing the underlying social and psychological factors that contribute to addiction. The emphasis on rehabilitation, rather than solely punishment, has been particularly useful in managing opioid addiction, especially in rural areas where access to treatment services can be limited.

One area where Thailand has been particularly successful is in the area of public health initiatives. The country has implemented several harm reduction strategies, such as needle exchange programs and the distribution of naloxone (an opioid overdose reversal drug), to reduce the spread of HIV and other blood-borne diseases among drug users. This public health model aligns with a broader recognition that drug abuse should be treated as a health issue, not just a criminal one.

Vietnam can look to Thailand's balanced approach as a model for integrating rehabilitation, prevention, and harm reduction into its drug control strategy. A focus on the long-term treatment of drug addicts, rather than just criminalizing their behavior, could lead to better social outcomes and a reduction in recidivism rates.

5.4 The Netherlands: decriminalization and harm reduction

The Netherlands is known for its liberal drug policies, which emphasize decriminalization, harm reduction, and a public health-based approach. The Dutch approach is based on the premise that not all drugs are equally harmful, and it distinguishes between soft drugs (such as cannabis) and hard drugs (such as heroin and cocaine).

Under the Dutch system, the possession and consumption of small amounts of cannabis for personal use are decriminalized, and cannabis can be legally purchased and consumed in licensed coffee shops. However, the trafficking and distribution of hard drugs remain criminal offenses, and drug trafficking is treated as a serious crime.

The Dutch model focuses heavily on harm reduction strategies, such as the establishment of safe injection rooms, the availability of clean needles, and substitution therapies for opioid users. These programs aim to reduce the health risks associated with drug use, particularly the spread of HIV and Hepatitis C, and offer support to drug users seeking treatment and recovery. The Netherlands has also pioneered drug testing services at festivals, allowing users to test the purity of their substances and reduce the risks associated with consuming unknown or dangerous drugs.

For Vietnam, the Netherlands offers an example of how a progressive, health-oriented drug policy can reduce the negative consequences of drug use without resorting to blanket criminalization. While the Netherlands' model may not be directly applicable in its entirety, Vietnam could benefit from adopting some of the harm reduction practices and public health approaches seen in the Netherlands, especially in terms of addressing opioid addiction and reducing the spread of diseases among drug users.

The comparative analysis of Vietnam's drug policies alongside those of the United States, Mexico, Thailand, and the Netherlands reveals a range of approaches, each with its own strengths and challenges. Vietnam can draw valuable lessons from the experiences of these countries, particularly in balancing enforcement with public health strategies, reforming rehabilitation programs, and addressing the socioeconomic factors that contribute to drug abuse. By incorporating aspects of these international best practices, Vietnam can strengthen its own efforts in the fight against drug-related crimes, creating a more effective, comprehensive, and humane approach to drug control.

6 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vietnam's ongoing battle against drug crimes faces numerous challenges, despite significant progress in legal and enforcement frameworks. The complexities of drug trafficking, the prevalence of corruption within law enforcement, the inadequacy of rehabilitation programs, and the socio-economic factors contributing to drug abuse present significant obstacles. This section discusses these challenges in detail and offers recommendations for overcoming them to enhance Vietnam's efforts in combatting drug-related crimes.

6.1 Corruption within law enforcement agencies

One of the most significant challenges in Vietnam's fight against drug crimes is corruption within law enforcement agencies. While the Vietnamese government has taken strong legal steps to combat corruption, instances of bribery and collusion with criminal networks still exist. Drug traffickers and smugglers often exploit loopholes and leverage corrupt officers to evade detection and capture, undermining the effectiveness of anti-drug operations.

Recommendation: Strengthening anti-corruption measures within law enforcement agencies is critical. This can be achieved through more robust internal oversight mechanisms, improved accountability, and more effective whistleblower protection programs. Law enforcement agencies must also prioritize the training of officers on ethical conduct, transparency, and the importance of upholding the rule of law. Additionally, implementing more random audits and external reviews can help reduce corruption within the ranks.

6.2 Limited resources for law enforcement and border control

Vietnam's law enforcement agencies, while dedicated, face significant resource constraints. The sheer scale of drug trafficking in the region and the sophistication of international drug cartels require a substantial investment in both human and material

resources. The country's border control and customs agencies also struggle to effectively monitor all entry and exit points, leading to gaps in drug interception.

Recommendation: The Vietnamese government must allocate more resources to enhance the capacity and efficiency of law enforcement agencies. This includes investing in advanced technology for border monitoring, such as X-ray scanners, drug detection dogs, and satellite surveillance systems. Additionally, greater funding should be directed towards the recruitment and training of specialized personnel in anti-drug operations. Partnerships with international organizations like Interpol and UNODC could further bolster Vietnam's law enforcement capabilities.

6.3 Challenges in drug rehabilitation and reintegration

While Vietnam's Anti-Drug Law emphasizes rehabilitation, the country's rehabilitation infrastructure is inadequate to meet the growing demand. Drug rehabilitation centers are often overcrowded, underfunded, and lack trained medical professionals, which limits their ability to effectively address the complex needs of individuals battling drug addiction. Moreover, there is insufficient focus on long-term reintegration programs, which leaves many individuals at risk of relapse.

Recommendation: A more comprehensive approach to rehabilitation and reintegration is needed. The government should prioritize funding for rehabilitation centers, ensuring they are better equipped to treat drug addicts holistically, addressing both their physical and psychological needs. Moreover, rehabilitation programs should be tailored to offer vocational training and social reintegration support to ensure individuals can rebuild their lives after recovery. Collaboration with community-based organizations and NGOs could also help improve the accessibility and quality of services available to drug users.

6.4 Socioeconomic factors contributing to drug abuse

Drug abuse in Vietnam is often linked to underlying socioeconomic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education. Vulnerable individuals, particularly in rural areas, are more susceptible to drug use due to a lack of opportunities and social

support. Without addressing these root causes, efforts to combat drug abuse may only offer temporary solutions.

Recommendation: Vietnam must adopt a more holistic approach that tackles the social determinants of drug abuse. This includes expanding education and employment opportunities for at-risk populations, particularly youth in rural and disadvantaged areas. Community development programs that promote social cohesion and provide alternative pathways for vulnerable individuals can help reduce the appeal of drug use. Additionally, public awareness campaigns should focus on the societal impact of drug abuse, aiming to reduce stigma and encourage individuals to seek help.

6.5 Drug trafficking networks and transnational crime

Vietnam's position as a key transit country for drug trafficking, particularly from the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, Thailand), makes it vulnerable to international drug syndicates. These networks are highly organized, resourceful, and capable of circumventing national borders. The complexity and scale of these transnational networks make it difficult for Vietnamese authorities to effectively dismantle them.

Recommendation: Strengthening international cooperation is essential in combating cross-border drug trafficking. Vietnam must work closely with neighboring countries such as China, Laos, and Cambodia to establish more coordinated enforcement efforts. Regional intelligence-sharing agreements and joint operations are crucial in tracking and apprehending members of international drug cartels. Additionally, Vietnam should enhance its extradition agreements with other countries to ensure that drug traffickers cannot evade justice by crossing borders.

6.6 Legal reform for a balanced approach

Vietnam's approach to drug crimes remains largely punitive, with severe penalties for drug trafficking and possession. While deterrence through strict legal measures has been somewhat effective, it may not be the most appropriate approach for all cases, particularly for low-level offenders or drug addicts.

Recommendation: Vietnam should consider legal reforms that adopt a more balanced approach, focusing not only on punishment but also on prevention and rehabilitation. This could include revising drug-related penalties to provide more flexibility, such as offering alternative sentencing for drug users who may benefit more from treatment than from prison. The adoption of harm reduction strategies, such as safe consumption spaces and needle exchange programs, could also be explored to minimize the health risks associated with drug use and provide support for vulnerable individuals.

The challenges Vietnam faces in its fight against drug crimes are complex and multifaceted, but they are not insurmountable. By addressing the key issues of corruption, resource constraints, rehabilitation, socioeconomic factors, and transnational drug trafficking, Vietnam can significantly enhance its efforts in combating drug-related crimes. Implementing the recommendations outlined above will require a multi-pronged strategy that involves strengthening legal frameworks, increasing investment in law enforcement and rehabilitation, and fostering international cooperation. By adopting a more integrated approach, combining punitive, preventive, and rehabilitative measures, Vietnam can more effectively tackle the drug crisis and protect the well-being of its citizens.

7 CONCLUSION

Vietnam's efforts in combating drug-related crimes have achieved some success, but significant challenges remain. By learning from the experiences of other countries and strengthening both its legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms, Vietnam can improve its approach to tackling the complex issue of drug crime. Continued international cooperation, better training for law enforcement, and a focus on rehabilitation will be key to reducing the drug epidemic's social and economic impact on Vietnam.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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