

## **EVIL DRUG BARONS NET BILLIONS WITH 16,000% MARK-UP**



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**By Tom Whitehead**

**DRUG dealers in the UK are raking in £8billion a year, secret Home Office figures reveal.**

At least 300 major importers are flooding our streets with narcotics, which are then being distributed through 3,000 wholesalers and 70,000 street dealers.

It means the average dealer earns £100,000 a year. But ministers have sat on the startling statistics and never published them.

The true picture was only revealed yesterday in a separate report providing a remarkable insight into the workings of the drugs market and its huge profits.

It showed criminals are earning a 15,800 per cent mark-up on cocaine and 16,800 per cent on heroin.

By comparison, coffee production normally has a 223 per cent mark-up by the time it reaches the shops. Some gang bosses are earning as much as £114,750 a week – or £11 a minute – and run their dealings like legitimate businesses with staff even on salaries.

Three-quarters get involved after dealing to friends and family and there is virtually no barrier to anyone joining the market.

Most drug dealers do not even bother to learn about profit and costs because revenues are so high. It also showed crooks follow “career paths” to get to the top after joining the underworld as a low-level dealer.

Shadow Home Secretary David Davis said: “It is extraordinary that drugs are cheaper and more available, yet more lucrative than any other crime under this Government. Since drugs breed other crimes, including violence and murder, this figure amounts to a disgraceful condemnation of a central plank of this Government’s anti-drugs policy.”

The figures were finally published yesterday in a Home Office study built up from interviews with 222 convicted dealers and bosses.

It also revealed how many criminals climb a jobs ladder through the ranks.

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Gangs range from international, to national, local and retail. Around a fifth describe themselves as sole traders, while many of the remaining enterprises are likely to be small or medium-sized.

But trust was a big factor and many went through “elaborate, almost ritualistic experiences” to show they were trustworthy.

One, known only as Al, told how for his initiation, his boss told him to go and kill a client – and handed him a gun.

The man did as he was told, only to discover his gun was loaded with rubber bullets.

The “client”, who was uninjured, was another employee.

Previous prison sentences were also a sign people could be trusted and jails were also seen as a key place to build up contacts with other dealers.

Many drug dealers also regarded prison as an “occupational hazard.”

The report said: “Most individuals enter drug dealing through their family and/or friendship groups.

“This implies drug dealing spreads contagiously from dealer to new dealer.

“This, combined with the barriers to entry being minimal for individuals who know someone in the trade, has disappointing implications for policy and law enforcement.”