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Why the Drop In Crime? Part VI Drug Use Prevalence

This Bulletin is the last in a series of six exploring the recent drop in crime and the role played by police agencies.

Introduction

There are biological, psychological, and social theories of crime. Each school of thought has its own assumptions regarding the specific causes of crime. Proponents of each school rarely agree with one another on specifics. However, all acknowledge that criminals of all types are disproportionately drug users. There are several assumptions made about the relationship between drugs and crime. First, drugs are sometimes used to build the courage to commit additional crimes (assuming using the drug itself is a crime). Second, many users have little income and must therefore resort to crime to support their habits. Third, certain drugs create psychoactive effects which then cause violent behavior. Finally, participating in a drug culture fosters deviant values which could lead a person to find committing crimes to be an acceptable activity.

Crime has been decreasing since 1991. Is the war on drugs being won and a major factor in the decrease in crime rates? This Bulletin examines the relationship between substance abuse and crime in the 1990s.

Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM)

The Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) report is an expansion and re-engineering of the Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) program (NIJ, 1999). The ADAM network collects information from 35 sites, 12 added to supplement the 23

that were already part of DUF. The ADAM program obtains urinalysis and self-report data from juvenile and adult arrestees. Because ADAM collects data from sites around the country, it is possible to describe regional trends. Also, information regarding usage trends over time is available.

The DUF data that preceded the expanded ADAM information did not indicate declining drug use in the early 1990s. Between 1988 and 1991, marijuana use decreased in most DUF sites, but then increased between 1992 and 1996. Cocaine use declined or stabilized in most sites between 1988 and 1993. In 1994, it increased at six sites. In 1995, it decreased at 12 sites, was stable at two, but increased at nine sites. The data thus indicate relatively stable rates of drug use among arrestees in the early 1990s.

The percentage of persons testing positive for cocaine declined slightly between 1997 and 1998. The median site rate of cocaine positives among male arrestees declined from 37 to 36 percent during this time frame. For adult females, the site median was 45 percent in 1997 versus 41 percent in 1998. However, ADAM data indicate that the use of powdered cocaine among young adults in the southern United States is increasing. Also, female crack use seems to be increasing, while it is decreasing among males. ADAM

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data indicate that there has been little change in the rates of opiate usage. Female arrestees are more likely to test positive for opiates than are males. Data further indicate that opiate use tends to be concentrated among older offenders (those 31+ years). Finally, multiple drug use tends to be a problem for opiate users, as 64 percent of those who tested positive for opiates also tested positive for cocaine, and 30 percent were also positive for marijuana. Methamphetamine is a problem primarily in the Western portion of the country. However, usage rates have remained stable. Marijuana tends to be a problem among young male offenders. All 35 sites had at least 20 percent of their adult male arrestees test positive for marijuana. The majority of sites report that approximately one-third of arrestees tested positive for marijuana use. This is comparable to 1997 data. Overall, the majority of marijuana use is found among younger arrestees, who also happen to commit a disproportionate amount of crime. Overall, the ADAM data suggest that the majority of arrestees have used at least one illegal drug, and many are the users of multiple drugs. The final conclusion drawn is that as crime rates have decreased, drug use among arrestees has tended to remain stable.

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse

Conducted annually, one of the more widely known surveys of drug abuse, the National Household Survey, has reported patterns of alcohol and drug abuse within the general population since 1971. A random sample of persons age 12 and over are interviewed regarding their drug usage. In 1979, 31.3 percent of respondents reported having used an illicit drug at some time during their lives. By 1995, this figure was 34.2 percent. As Table 1 indicates, the percentage of people who admit to using an illicit substance at least once in their lives has tended to drop over time. From the table, it can be noted that while decreases have been reported, the overall numbers are fairly stable across time. In other words, according to these self-reported data, drug use has remained relatively constant.

Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN)

DAWN, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, was initiated in 1975. DAWN collects information on drug-related admissions to emergency rooms and drug-related deaths from medical examiners. The emergency room data come from a national probability sample of hospitals, and medical examiner data is collected from 145 jurisdictions in 43 metropolitan areas. As Table 2 indicates, the total number of episodes has increased slightly. In 1995, there were 531,827 episodes reported contrasted to the 403,578 episodes reported in 1988. From 1990 to 1994, drug-related episodes increased

by 40 percent (from 371,200 to 518,500). DAWN data also indicate that cocaine-related episodes were at their highest levels in 1996. Heroin episodes increased between 1994 and 1995, but there were no significant differences between 1995 and 1996. Marijuana episodes have increased 25 percent from 1994 to 1996. Methamphetamine, PCP, and LSD episodes have all decreased from 1995 to 1996. These data suggest that while drugs of choice may change over time, overall rates have remained fairly stable or even increased.

Monitoring the Future

The Monitoring the Future survey is sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and has been administered to students since 1975. Approximately 16,000 high school seniors are surveyed in reference to their past and current drug usage and their attitudes toward drug usage. Since 1991, the survey also questions similar sample sizes of 8th and 10th graders. Table 3 shows the lifetime prevalence rates for any drug usage by 8th, 10th, and 12th graders. While the table indicates that overall usage rates are down somewhat from 1996 to 1997, these figures are not statistically significant. In other words, the changes could be due to sampling error. Also, the percentages from 1991 to 1997 show increases in drug use reported by all three groups. For example, from 1991 to 1997, the percentage of 8th graders who reported using drugs increased by almost 11 percent. For 10th graders, the increase over the same time period was 17 percent, followed by 10 percent for 12th graders.

Students are also questioned regarding the availability of drugs. Table 4 indicates the results of this line of questioning. Basically, students perceived that it was easier to obtain drugs in every category in 1998 than it was in 1997. Marijuana was cited as the easiest drug to obtain. Ninety percent responded that marijuana would be either "fairly easy" or "very easy" to obtain. Nearly 50 percent said the same about LSD. Students rated crystal methamphetamine (ice) as the most difficult drug to obtain. Overall, the students surveyed indicated that they could obtain almost any drug that they wanted with relative ease.

Drug Arrests, Seizures and Sentencing Practices

In 1996, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that there were 1,506,200 arrests made for drug law violations in the United States (ONDCP, 1998). As Table 5 indicates, the number of arrests made for drug-related crimes decreased somewhat during the early '90s. This trend started to reverse in 1993 when rates began to increase and have increased every year since. It is also interesting to note that in 1987, drug arrests accounted for 7.4 percent of all arrests, but in

Table 1

Trends in the Percentage of Persons Reporting Any Illicit Drug Use Ever (1979-1995)

Age of respondent And recency of drug use	Year								
	1979	1985	1988	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
12-17 Ever	31.8	27.4	22.8	20.9	18.4	15.1	16.4	20.3	22.2
18-25 Ever	69.0	62.9	58.1	54.9	53.9	50.9	50.2	46.3	45.8
26-34 Ever	49.0	59.5	61.2	59.8	58.9	57.9	58.2	56.1	54.8
35 and older Ever	11.8	18.1	20.0	22.5	23.7	24.4	26.1	27.7	27.9
All ages 12 and older Ever	31.3	34.4	34.0	34.2	34.1	33.3	34.2	34.4	34.2

Source: *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse*

Table 2

Drug-Related Emergency Episodes Reported in the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN)

Drug Type	1988	1990	1992	1994	1995	1996
Total Episodes	403,578	371,208	433,493	518,521	531,827	487,600
Cocaine	101,578	80,355	119,843	142,878	142,494	144,200
Heroin	38,063	33,844	48,003	64,013	72,200	70,500
Marijuana	19,972	15,706	23,997	40,183	47,069	50,000
Methamphetamine	8,992	5,236	6,563	17,655	6,300	3,600
PCP	12,346	4,408	5,282	6,019	6,300	3,600
LSD	3,835	3,869	3,499	5,150	5,700	4,500

Source: http://www.health.org_dawn

Table 3

**Trends in Lifetime Prevalence of Use of Drugs for
8th, 10th and 12th Graders**

	Lifetime								'97-'98 change
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	
Any Illicit Drug									
8 th Grade	18.7	20.6	22.5	25.7	28.5	31.2	29.4	29.0	-0.4
10 th Grade	30.6	29.8	32.8	37.4	40.9	45.4	47.3	44.9	-2.4
12 th Grade	44.1	40.7	42.9	45.6	48.4	50.8	54.3	54.1	-0.2

Source: <http://www.isr.umich.edu/src/mlf/pr98t1aa.html>

Table 4

**High School Seniors' Perceptions of Availability of Drugs (1990-1998)
(Long-term Trends in Perceived Availability of Drugs, 12th Graders)**

How difficult do you think it would be for you to get each of the following types of drugs, if you wanted some? Percent saying "fairly easy" or "very easy" to get:

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Marijuana	84.4	83.3	82.7	83.0	85.5	88.5	88.7	89.6	90.4
Amyl Butyl Nitrites	24.4	22.7	25.9	25.9	26.7	26.0	23.9	23.8	25.1
LSD	40.7	39.5	44.5	49.2	50.8	53.8	51.3	50.7	48.8
Some other psychedelic	28.3	28.0	29.9	33.5	33.8	35.8	33.9	33.9	35.1
PCP	27.7	27.6	31.7	31.7	31.4	31.0	30.5	30.0	30.7
MDMA (Ecstasy)	22.0	22.1	24.2	28.1	31.2	34.2	36.9	38.8	38.2
Cocaine	54.5	51.0	52.7	48.5	46.6	47.7	48.1	48.5	51.3
Crack	42.4	39.9	43.5	43.6	40.5	41.9	40.7	40.6	43.8
Cocaine powder	49.0	46.0	48.0	45.4	43.7	43.8	44.4	43.3	45.7
Heroin	31.9	30.6	34.9	33.7	34.1	35.1	32.2	33.8	35.6
Some other narcotic (including methadone)	38.1	34.6	37.1	37.5	38.0	39.8	40.0	38.9	42.8
Amphetamines	59.7	57.3	58.8	61.5	62.0	62.8	59.4	59.8	60.8
Crystal meth. (ice)	24.1	24.3	26.0	26.6	25.6	27.0	26.9	27.6	29.8
Barbiturates	45.9	42.4	44.0	44.5	43.3	42.3	41.4	40.0	40.7
Tranquilizers	44.7	40.8	40.9	41.1	39.2	37.8	36.0	35.4	36.2
Steroids	--	46.7	46.8	44.8	42.9	45.5	40.3	41.7	44.5
Approx. N	2549	2476	2586	2670	2526	2552	2340	2517	2520

Source: <http://www.isr.umich.edu/src/mlf/pr98t11.html>

Table 5

Estimated Arrests for Drug Offenses

Year	Total Arrests	Sale/ Manufacturing	Possession	Percent of all Arrests
1987	937,400	241,849	695,551	7.4
1988	1,155,200	316,525	838,675	8.4
1989	1,361,700	441,191	920,509	9.5
1990	1,089,500	344,282	745,218	7.7
1991	1,010,000	337,340	672,660	7.1
1992	1,066,400	338,049	728,351	7.6
1993	1,126,300	334,511	791,789	8.0
1994	1,351,400	360,824	990,576	9.2
1995	1,476,100	367,549	1,108,551	9.8
1996	1,506,200	375,044	1,131,156	9.9

Source: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>

1996 they accounted for 9.9 percent of all arrests. Interestingly, the arrests for possession have increased dramatically, as opposed to arrests for sales and/or manufacturing.

Table 6 outlines the total amount of drugs seized in pounds (ONDCP, 1998) by federal agencies. Marijuana is the most frequently seized drug, with heroin being the least seized drug. Hashish seizures have increased dramatically since 1994, and cocaine seizures have tended to be somewhat

erratic over the last few years. Overall, the amounts seized have increased.

Table 7 presents the average sentences imposed by U. S. district courts on various types of offenders (ONDCP, 1998). From the data it can be seen that drug offenders receive harsh sentencing. Violent offenders receive sentences that are, on average, only a few months longer than those of drug offenders.

Table 6

Drug Seizures in Pounds

Drug	FY 1994	FY 1995	FY 1996
Heroin	2,887	2,567	3,378
Cocaine	309,709	234,097	254,191
Marijuana	1,041,425	1,306,895	1,429,922
Hashish	1,625	32,020	33,018

Source: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>

Table 7

U.S. District Court Average Sentence Length Imposed

Most serious offense of conviction	Months			
	1980	1985	1990	1995*
All offenses	44.3	50.7	57.2	64.5
Violent offenses	125.4	131.2	89.2	92.3
Property offenses	29.4	31.9	22.0	26.4
Drug offenses	47.1	57.5	80.9	85.4
Public-order offenses	24.5	30.6	28.3	51.1

*1995 data is calculated on the fiscal year and excludes misdemeanor offenses. 1980, 1985, 1990 data represent calendar years.

Source: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>

Table 8 shows the worldwide potential net drug production from 1992 to 1996 (ONDCP, 1998). As can be seen, cocaine and opium production remain high. These numbers indicate that the "raw supplies" necessary for production are in abundance. Table 9 indicates the amounts being spent on drug control efforts (ONDCP, 1998). Overall, the totals being spent have increased over time. The vast majority of the money is spent on the criminal justice system. Intelligence efforts receive the smallest share of the pie.

Conclusion

During a time when crime rates have been decreasing, the rate of drug use has either remained stable or even increased. Ignoring drug usage itself as a crime, the question must be asked, "How much does drug usage influence the crime rate?" There are numerous examples of people committing crimes while under the influence of drugs. However, many users do not commit additional crimes, and most crimes are committed by people who are not under the influence. The crime rate is affected by numerous factors, and it is not possible to explain the crime rate using just one variable. Also note that while efforts to reduce drug supplies worldwide have increased, such supplies have actually increased. While increased funding has been made available to control drugs, use and distribution has actually increased. Thus, our current policies are not having much effect on availability or usage of drugs. These data challenge the assumption that there is a close nexus between drug use prevalence and crime rates.

Epilogue

This Bulletin concludes the *TELEMASP* series on "Why the Drop in Crime?" We first examined Measures of Crime and Crime Rate Trends, then reviewed possible explanations for the drop in crime—Incarceration Rates, The Economy, Social Demographic Trends, and Drug Use Prevalence. Bulletins in 1998 included review of police programs designed to reduce crime, including Youth and Gang Programs, Neighborhood Programs, Problem Oriented Policing and Targeted Enforcement. Overwhelming evidence argues that the drop in crime cannot be attributed to either social demographic trends or drug use prevalence. Conversely, strong evidence suggests that the drop is attributable to a booming economy, dramatically increased incarceration rates, and proactive policing efforts.

Table 8

**Worldwide Potential Net Drug Production
(1992-1996) (in metric tons)**

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Opium					
Total	3,389	3,745	3,409	4,165	4,285
Coca Leaf					
Total	333,900	271,700	290,900	309,400	303,600
Marijuana					
Total	13,208	14,407	13,386	11,489	11,389

Source: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>

Table 9

Federal Drug Control Spending by Function (in millions)

	FY 1981 actual	FY 1989 actual	FY 1991 actual	FY 1992 actual	FY 1995 actual	FY 1996 actual	FY 1997 actual	FY 1998 enacted	FY 1999 requested
Total	1,531.8	6,663.7	10,957.6	11,910.1	13,251.2	13,454.0	15,033.2	15,977.4	17,069.8
Drug Treatment	513.8	1,148.2	1,877.3	2,204.7	2,692.0	2,553.8	2,756.2	2,885.6	3,092.2
Drug Prevention	86.4	725.4	1,479.2	1,538.7	1,559.1	1,400.7	1,643.3	1,926.4	2,158.8
Criminal Justice System	415.6	2,761.4	4,385.6	4,943.0	6,756.9	7,164.9	7,684.4	8,187.2	8,544.0
International	66.8	304.0	633.4	660.4	295.8	289.8	416.7	500.0	548.1
Interdiction	349.7	1,440.7	2,027.9	1,960.2	1,280.1	1,321.0	1,723.3	1,615.3	1,805.2
Research	76.5	230.6	450.1	504.5	542.2	609.3	655.2	679.5	725.1
Intelligence	23.1	53.4	104.1	98.6	125.0	114.5	154.2	183.3	196.5

Source: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>

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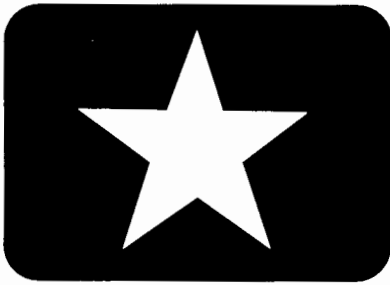
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