

DRUG OFFENDERS IN PRISON

Introduction

On July 1, 1989, there were 173 inmates in Minnesota state correctional facilities whose governing offense involved the sale, manufacture, possession, or possession with intent to distribute drugs (see Figure 1). This group comprised six percent of the overall prison population. On July 1, 2010, drug offenders accounted for 18 percent of Minnesota's adult inmate population.

The drug offender population grew most rapidly between FY1998 and FY2005, the point at which the drug offender population reached its peak. During this time period, the number of drug offenders increased by nearly 1,500, and the average annual growth rate was 18 percent. A little more than half of the growth that occurred between FY2001 and FY2005 was due primarily to the growing number of methamphetamine offenders. Beginning in FY2006, the drug offender population, including the subpopulation of methamphetamine offenders, began to decrease despite continued growth in the overall prison population. The decline from the peak of 2,178 offenders on July 1, 2005 to the current population of 1,763 represents a decrease of 19 percent in this population.

Demographic Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, methamphetamine is the governing offense for 43 percent of drug offenders, followed by crack (23%) and cocaine (21%). Drug offenders overwhelmingly are male, although inmates incarcerated for methamphetamine and other drug types are more likely to be female. The average age is 35 years.

One of the most dramatic findings shown in Table 1 is the variation in the percentage of minority offenders by drug type. Minorities account for 91 percent of the offenders incarcerated for an offense involving crack and 73 percent of those whose offense involved cocaine. In contrast, one-third of the offenders incarcerated for an offense involving amphetamine are minorities and just 20 percent of those whose offense involved methamphetamine are minorities.

Offense and Sentencing Characteristics

The majority of drug offenders (56%) are serving a sentence from outside the metropolitan area, due in part to the large percentage (66%) of offenders from Greater Minnesota whose offense involved methamphetamine. In contrast, 56 percent of crack offenders and 55 percent of cocaine

offenders are serving a sentence from a metropolitan-area county.

All of the offenders incarcerated for manufacturing drugs were manufacturing either methamphetamine or amphetamine. Overall, 31 percent of drug offenders were convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense. Those whose offense involved amphetamines were most likely to be convicted of a first-degree offense (43%) followed by those whose offense involved cocaine (41%) and methamphetamine (38%). Only five percent of the offenders incarcerated for a marijuana-related offense were convicted of first-degree controlled substance.

Average sentence lengths correspond in large part with the percentage of each drug type convicted of a first-degree offense. Offenders with the lon-

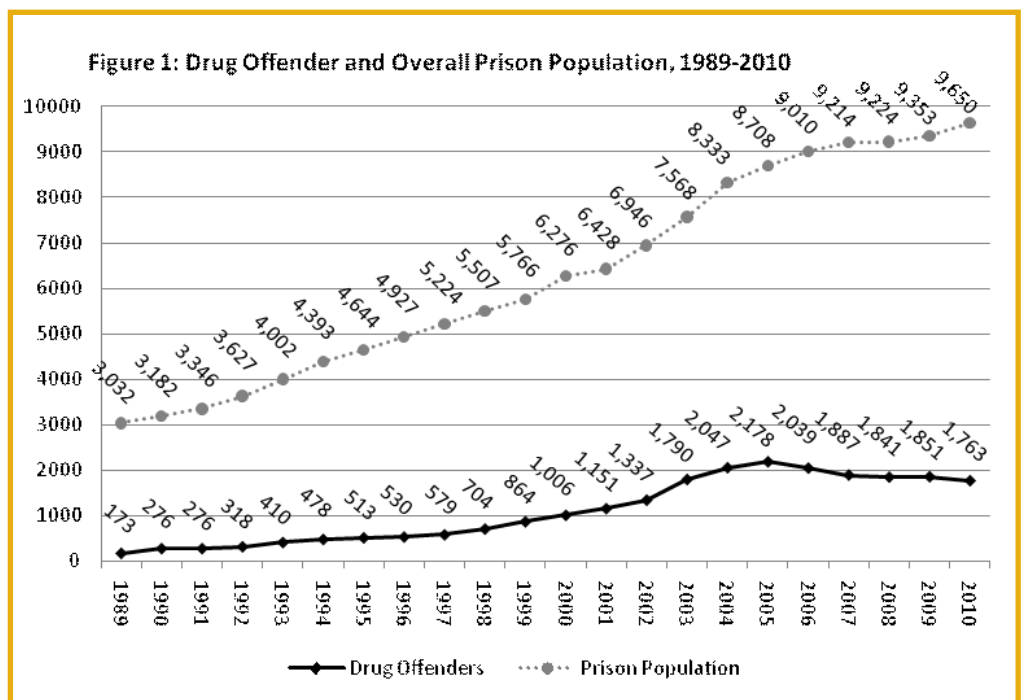


Table 1: Profile of the Drug Offender Population

	Meth	Crack	Cocaine	Marijuana	Amphetamine	Other ¹	Total	
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS	Percent	42.8	23.3	20.6	3.7	1.7	7.8	100.0
	Number	755	411	364	65	30	138	1,763
	Percent male	84.1	92.2	92.9	90.8	93.3	81.2	88.0
	Percent minority ²	19.9	90.5	73.1	49.2	33.4	47.1	50.8
	Average age in years	35.6	35.4	34.6	31.8	34.5	32.4	34.9
CURRENT OFFENSE CHARACTERISTICS	Metro-area county of commitment (%)	33.6	56.2	54.7	41.5	33.3	42.8	44.2
	Drug activity (%)							
	Manufacture	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.7	0.0	4.8
	Possession	47.0	45.3	52.7	55.4	56.7	47.8	48.3
	Sale/possess with intent to distribute	42.3	54.7	47.0	41.5	26.7	42.7	45.9
	Percent 1st degree	37.6	20.0	40.9	4.6	43.3	12.3	31.1
Average sentence length in months	70.5	55.2	66.4	31.4	60.2	37.4	61.9	
CRIMINAL HISTORY CHARACTERISTICS	Average # of prior felony convictions ³	3.2	3.3	2.4	2.3	2.7	2.8	3.0
	Percent with prior felony conviction ³	75.4	83.5	69.0	66.2	73.3	72.5	75.3
	Average age at first conviction ³	23.1	21.9	22.5	20.5	20.8	20.9	22.4
	Average # of prior incarcerations ^{4, 5}	0.8	0.9	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.8
	Percent previously incarcerated ^{4, 5}	46.0	47.0	33.5	33.8	46.7	31.9	42.1
	Average age at first incarceration ⁴	30.2	29.9	30.3	27.9	29.7	29.0	30.0

¹ Includes heroin, opium, barbiturates, synthetic narcotics, hallucinogens, & simulated substances

² Includes African American, American Indian, Asian, & Hispanic offenders

³ Based on data collected by Minnesota correctional facility caseworkers and en-

tered into DOC database at the time an offender is admitted to prison.

Includes juvenile offenses; excludes current conviction offenses

⁴ Includes only Minnesota adult state prison commitments

⁵ Excludes current incarceration

gest average sentence length are those incarcerated for methamphetamine (70.5 months), cocaine (66.4 months), and amphetamine (60.2 months). As noted previously, these are the three drug types most likely to have been convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense. Those incarcerated for an offense involving marijuana are serving the shortest sentence on average (31.4 months). Overall, the average sentence length of all drug offenders is 62 months.

Felony Conviction Histories

Overall, the 1,763 drug offenders had 5,289 prior felony convictions when admitted for their most recent drug offense. Three-quarters of these offenders had a prior felony conviction, and the average age at first conviction was 22 years old.

Crack offenders generally have more extensive conviction histories when compared to offenders incarcerated

for other drug offenses. Crack offenders were most likely to have a prior felony conviction (84%) as well as the highest average number of prior felony convictions (3.3). Offenders convicted of an offense involving methamphetamine had the next highest average number of prior felony convictions (3.2), but a smaller percentage of these offenders had a prior felony conviction (75%). Marijuana and cocaine offenders were least likely to have a prior felony conviction (66 and 69 percent, respectively).

Incarceration Histories

Shown in Table 1, the incarceration histories of drug offenders incarcerated on July 1, 2010, like felony conviction histories, vary by drug type. Overall, 42 percent of all drug offenders had been incarcerated as an adult in a Minnesota correctional facility prior to the present incarceration. Offenders incarcerated for an of-

fense involving crack, however, were somewhat more likely than other drug offenders to be previously incarcerated. Among crack offenders, 47 percent had been incarcerated previously in a Minnesota correctional facility. The percentage was similar among offenders incarcerated for an offense involving amphetamines and just slightly less (46%) among those incarcerated for an offense involving methamphetamine. Little variation was observed in the average age at first incarceration with the exception that marijuana offenders were 28 years old when first incarcerated; the average for nearly all other drug types was 30 years old.

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