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Findings are produced by the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. For further copies contact:

Communication Development Unit
Room 264,
Home Office,
50 Queen Anne's Gate,
London SW1H 9AT.

Tel: 020 7273 2084
Fax: 020 7222 0211
publications.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

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Drug use and offending: summary results of the first two years of the NEW-ADAM programme

Trevor Bennet and Katy Holloway

The New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) programme is a national research study of interviews and voluntary urine tests designed to establish the prevalence of drug use among arrestees (suspected offenders arrested by the police). This rolling programme covers 16 locations in England and Wales and each data collection cycle lasts two years (8 sites were visited in Year 1 and the remaining 8 sites in Year 2). The first eight sites were revisited in Year 3.

The survey data collected provide information on the characteristics, drug use and offending behaviour of adults entering the Criminal Justice System. Summary data are presented from the 16 custody suites visited in the first two years. As interviewed arrestees are also asked about their offending behaviour (focusing on acquisitive crime), the relationship between drug use and certain types of criminal activity can be explored.

Key points

- Urine tests of arrestees revealed that 69% of arrestees tested positive for one or more illegal drugs, and 36% tested positive for two or more such substances.
- 38% of arrestees tested positive for opiates (including heroin) &/or cocaine (including crack).
- 18% of the interviewed arrestees were repeat offenders, regularly using heroin &/or cocaine &/or crack (HCC).
- Average expenditure on drugs, by those who had reported using drugs and spending money on them in the last 12 months, was highest for those consuming heroin and cocaine and crack, at £323 in the last seven days compared with £190 for drug users generally.
- Arrestees who reported using heroin *and* cocaine *and* crack in the last 12 months represented just over one-tenth of the arrestees interviewed, yet they were responsible for nearly one-third (31%) of the illegal income reported. On average, arrestees who had generated illegal income *and* who used heroin *and* cocaine *and* crack in the last 12 months, reported an average illegal income of more than £24,000 per year (median £12,490).
- 60% of arrestees who reported using one or more illegal drugs in the last 12 months and committing one or more acquisitive crimes acknowledged a link between their drug use and offending behaviour. This proportion rose to 89% among arrestees who said that they had committed one or more acquisitive crimes and that they had used heroin *and* cocaine *and* crack in the last 12 months.

3,091 arrestees were interviewed across the 16 locations, and 95% of these provided a urine sample for scientific testing. The first eight locations were revisited in 2001–2002 to assess any early changes in drug use and crime at these specific sites over the 3-year period.

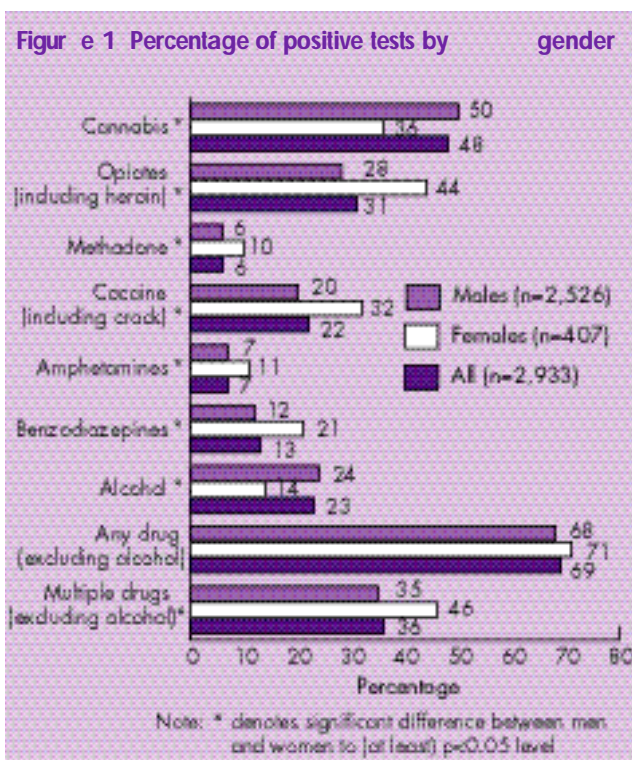
Drug use was measured in two ways:

- urine samples (urinalysis)
- self-reported information provided by arrestees.

Drug use – urinalysis

Urinalysis is a scientific procedure for determining whether arrestees have recently consumed (in most cases in the last few days) any of six illicit drug groups – cannabis, opiates (including heroin), cocaine (including crack), benzodiazepines, amphetamines, and methadone. The tests also cover alcohol but, as the body breaks this down more quickly, the results identify only very recent &/or heavy alcohol use.

Overall, more than two-thirds of arrestees tested positive for one or more of six illicit drugs, and more than one-third tested positive for two or more such substances. Evidence of cannabis use was detected in the urine of nearly half of those tested (see Figure 1). Equivalent figures for opiates (including heroin) and cocaine (including crack) were 31% and 22% respectively, with 38% testing positive for either or both drugs.

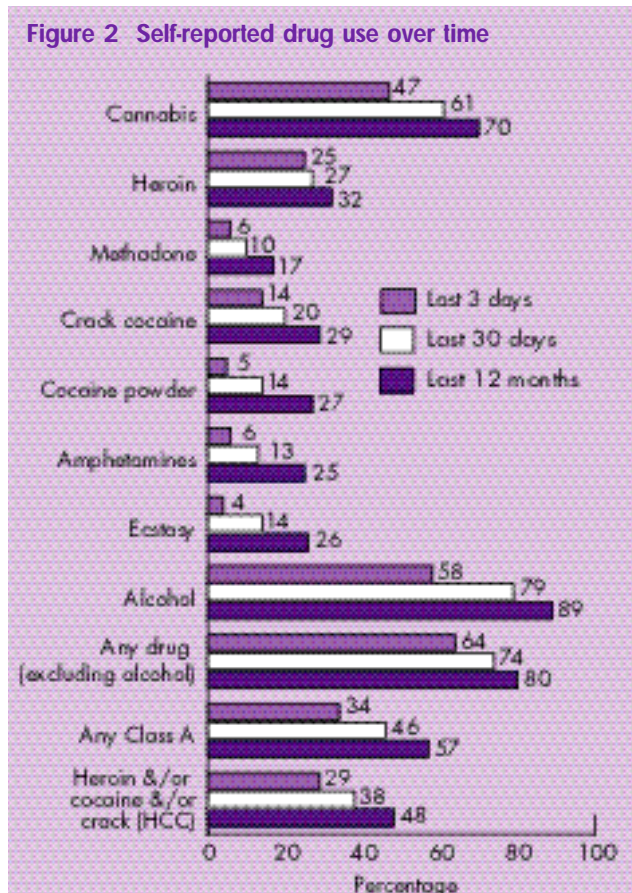


Although the overall prevalence of taking one or more illicit drugs was similar for male and female arrestees, the pattern of substances detected was different. The relatively small group of female arrestees (n=407) who provided a specimen had a significantly higher rate of positive tests for opiates (44%) than males (29%). Female arrestees were also significantly more likely to test positive for methadone, cocaine (including crack), amphetamines and benzodiazepines. However, it should be noted that this finding may say as much about male and female offending patterns and likelihood of arrest as it does about differences in drug use among men and women. A significantly higher proportion of older arrestees (aged 25–59) tested positive for each drug type (except cannabis and alcohol) than younger ones (aged 17–24). There were also some differences between whites and non-whites, with significantly more whites testing positive for opiates (including heroin), amphetamines, benzodiazepines, methadone and alcohol. By contrast, non-white arrestees were significantly more likely than white arrestees to test positive for cocaine. There was also some geographical variation in the

proportion of arrestees testing positive for any drug (excluding alcohol) ranging from 58% to 85% by site.

Self-reported drug use

The self-reported information covers a wider range of drugs, and provides information on drug use behaviour including the extent, frequency and method of taking drugs over different time periods. In particular, a distinction can be made between use of cocaine powder and crack cocaine. While the prevalence of cocaine powder use is similar to the prevalence of crack use over longer time periods (last 12 months and last 30 days), self-reported use of crack in the last three days (nearer the time of arrest) is nearly three times greater than that of cocaine powder (see Figure 2).



For the most part, those arrestees reporting drug use in the last 30 days were using drugs on a regular basis. 85% of those who reported using one or more illicit drugs in the last 30 days said that they had used the reported substance(s) on average at least once a week and 73% said that they had used them at least every other day.

Average expenditure on drugs among arrestees who reported using and spending money on drugs in the last 12 months was £190 in the last seven days or £10,000 per year (median of £70 per week or £4,000 per year). The average expenditure for users of HCC was substantially higher at £243 in the last week or £13,000 per year (median of £130 per week or £7,000 per year). Arrestees who had spent money on drugs and used heroin and cocaine and crack in the last 12 months, reported the highest level of expenditure on drugs in the last seven days, with a mean of £323 in the last week or £17,000 per year (median of £205 per week or £11,000 per year).

Drug use and offending

Arrestees interviewed as part of the NEW-ADAM programme are also asked about their past offending behaviour in relation to certain types of acquisitive crimes, including theft, burglary, shoplifting, fraud, handling stolen goods and drug supply offences. (Arrestees were also asked whether they had committed prostitution-related offences. However, as questions relating to prostitution were not included in the first survey (Sunderland), the offending data presented here excludes prostitution-related offences.) Just over half (54%) of the arrestees reported having committed one or more acquisitive crimes in the last 12 months. This increased to three-fifths (63%) of those who said that they had used one or more illicit drugs in the last 12 months, and three-quarters (75%) of those who said that they had used HCC in the last year.

Similarly, the average number of offences reported by those arrestees who had offended in the last 12 months varied according to their drug use. Those not reporting any drug use in the last year reported an average of 79 (median of 3) acquisitive crimes over the same period (see Figure 3). Drug use in general, and especially use of HCC, was associated with much higher levels of offending. Among users of HCC, respondents reported an average of 442 (median of 110) acquisitive crimes. This was nearly six times higher than for non-drug users.

Figure 3 Mean and median number of offences in last 12 months by drug use (last 12 months)

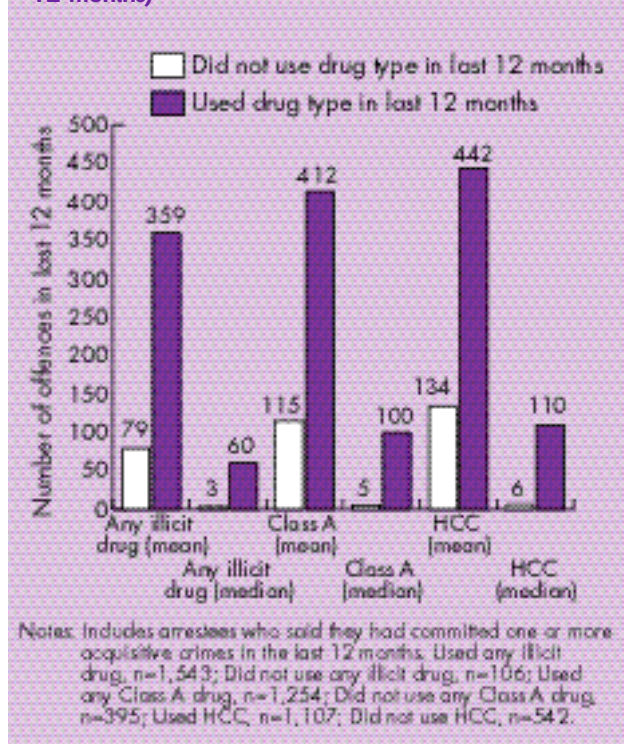
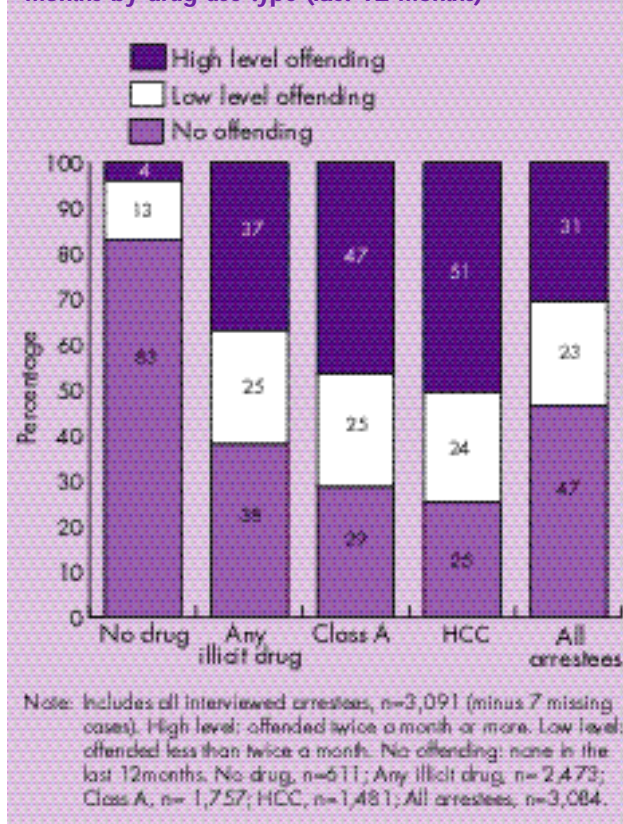


Figure 4 presents the relationship between offending and drug use in a different way. Around half of both HCC and Class A drug users, compared with 37% of drug users more generally, said that they had offended on average at least twice a month in the last year. This compares with just 4% of those arrestees who reported not using drugs and to 31% of all interviewed arrestees. By contrast, one-quarter

of arrestees who said that they had used HCC did not report any offending over the last year.

Figure 4 Levels of offending in last 12 months by drug use type (last 12 months)



Illegal income

Arrestees acquire illegal income in a number of ways. In addition to income-generating property crime, it includes undeclared earnings whilst fraudulently claiming benefits, drug dealing, prostitution-related offences and begging. Nearly half (49%) of those interviewed reported that they had some illegal income in the last 12 months. Among this group, the most commonly reported source of income was property crime (66% of those reporting illegal income), followed by drug dealing (25%) and undeclared earnings while claiming social security benefits (27%).

Drug-using arrestees reported higher levels of illegal income than non-drug using arrestees. Arrestees who said that they had generated some illegal income reported an average annual illegal income of nearly £17,000 (median of £5,000), compared with less than £6,000 among non-drug users. Arrestees who had generated illegal income and used heroin and cocaine and crack in the last 12 months, reported the highest level of illegal income, with an average of more than £24,000 (median of £12,490) per year. Users of heroin and cocaine and crack represented a tenth of all arrestees yet were responsible for 31% of the illegal income reported.

60% of arrestees who reported using one or more illicit drugs and committing one or more acquisitive crimes in the last 12 months thought that there was a connection between their drug use and offending behaviour. This proportion increased to 67% among arrestees who said that they had used cocaine, to 84% among arrestees who

said that they had used crack and to 87% among arrestees who said that they had used heroin. Among those arrestees who saw a link between their drug use and offending behaviour, the majority (83%) said the connection was that they needed money to buy drugs. The remainder thought that drugs affected their judgement, thereby making them more likely to commit crimes (27% of those who saw a connection) &/or that they used the money from crime to buy drugs (8%).

Drug misusing repeat offenders

One of the key target groups in the Government's drug strategy are persistent offenders that use heroin and cocaine, otherwise known as drug misusing repeat offenders (DMROs).

Given the prolific offending of arrestees using HCC, drug-misusing offenders have been defined as arrestees using some or all of those substances at least once a week. The measure of repeat offending is currently based on self-reported information provided by arrestees covering the 12

months prior to the interview, rather than on recorded convictions. It is defined as reporting, on average, two or more income-generating offences per month. The proportion of arrestees who were DMROs varied across the 16 sites, from a low of five per cent to a high of 31 per cent. Overall, 18% of arrestees fell within this definition in the first two years of the programme.

Since this current report only provides data on arrestees over the 16 NEW-ADAM sites, it is not possible to comment on trends in drug use or crime. However, a further recently published report from the NEW-ADAM programme, compares the results of the first and third year of the survey conducted in the same locations (Holloway, Bennett, and Lower, 2004). This report will provide the first opportunity to examine trends in drug use and crime across eight locations over a three-year period.

For an overview of the NEW-ADAM research programme, and current developments in the approach monitoring drug-related crime within the Home Office, please see <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/drugs1.html>

Methodological note

3,091 arrestees were interviewed during 1999–2001 in 16 police custody suites. The fieldwork period in each site covered 24 hours per day for 30 days (or until 210 interviews had been achieved). The 16 fieldwork sites were (in order of visit) Sunderland, Norwich, Newport, Southampton, Wolverhampton, Bournemouth, Bethnal Green, Hammersmith, Middlesbrough, Leeds, Liverpool, Plymouth, Bolton, Nottingham, Colindale and Brixton. Results from the first eight sites have previously been published in Home Office Research Findings 148 (Bennett, Holloway and Williams, 2001). Results from Sunderland have also been published in the last report on the developmental stage of NEW-ADAM (Bennett and Sibbitt, 2000). All but 16 arrestees were aged between 17 and 59 years; 49% were between 17 and 24 years. Most were male (86%) and white (82%).

The 3,091 achieved interviews represented 50% of all eligible arrestees (the largest groups deemed ineligible were juveniles and those held for drunkenness or breath test). The three factors accounting for the 50% non-response rates were: non-contact between researcher and arrestee (77%); refusal to participate (14%); and other/unknown (10%). Of those interviewed, 2,933 (95%) provided urine samples. Within this final group, 86% were male and 82% were white, the same proportions as interviewed.

With the exception of cannabis, which can be detected up to four weeks following chronic use, positive test results generally reflect use at least within the last three days. It should also be noted that the test for opiates detects both heroin and other opiates (such as codeine). However, the majority of arrestees who tested positive for opiates reported using heroin in the last three days.

The results of the significance tests should be interpreted with caution as the arrestees were selected using multi-stage rather than single-stage sampling methods. Median expenditure on drugs and median illegal income were calculated after excluding cases of zero expenditure and zero illegal income.

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Trevor Bennett is Professor of Criminology and Head of the Centre for Criminology, University of Glamorgan. Katy Holloway is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Criminology, University of Glamorgan.