

Drug Offenders in Prison

Introduction

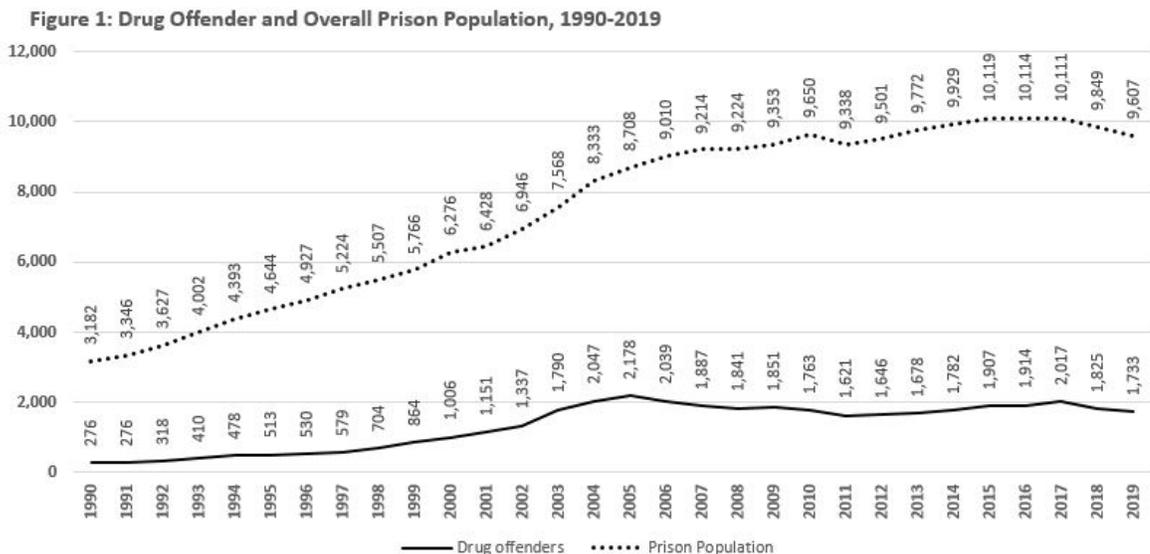
On July 1, 1990, 276 inmates were incarcerated in Minnesota state correctional facilities with a governing offense involving the sale, manufacture, possession, or possession with intent to distribute drugs. This was nine percent of the overall prison population. On July 1, 2005, drug offenders accounted for 25 percent of Minnesota’s adult inmate population. The number and percentage of drug offenders has declined since 2005, and on July 1, 2019, the 1,733 incarcerated drug offenders accounted for 18 percent of the overall prison population.

While the prison population grew at an average annual rate of seven percent from fiscal year (FY) 1990 through 2005, the number of drug offenders increased at an average rate of 15 percent. The drug offender population grew most rapidly between FY1998 and FY2005. 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 occurring between FY2001 and FY2005 was due to the growing number of methamphetamine offenders. Since peaking in 2005, the drug offender population decreased by an average of about 1.6 percent annually; comparatively, the overall prison population increased by an average of about 0.7 percent annually.

Demographics

As shown in Table 1 (page 2), methamphetamine is the governing offense for 69 percent of drug offenders incarcerated on July 1, 2019, followed by heroin (11 percent) and cocaine (9 percent). Drug offenders are overwhelmingly male (85 percent), but there are some variations by drug type. Nearly all offenders incarcerated for crack (98 percent), cocaine (97 percent), and marijuana (96 percent) are male compared to 83 percent of offenders incarcerated for methamphetamine. The average age of all drug offenders is 38 years; the average age of offenders incarcerated for marijuana is the youngest at 34 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 94 percent of the offenders incarcerated for an offense involving crack and 84 percent of those whose offense involved cocaine. In contrast, just 28 percent of those whose offense involved methamphetamine are minorities.



Offense and Sentencing

The majority of drug offenders (64 percent) are serving a sentence from outside the seven-county metropolitan area, due in part to the large percentage (72 percent) of methamphetamine offenders from Greater Minnesota. In contrast, 17 percent of crack offenders are serving a sentence from a county outside the metropolitan area. All of the offenders incarcerated for manufacturing drugs were manufacturing methamphetamine.

Overall, 37 percent of drug offenders were convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense. Those whose offense involved cocaine were most likely to be convicted of a first-degree offense (43 percent). Only 26 percent of the offenders incarcerated for a marijuana-related offense were convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense.

Offenders with the longest average sentence length are those incarcerated for cocaine (77.3 months), followed by crack (76.6 months). Those incarcerated for an offense involving marijuana are serving the shortest sentences on average (45.2 months). Overall, the average sentence length of all drug offenders is 69 months.

Incarceration Histories

As shown in Table 1, fifty-nine percent of all drug offenders incarcerated on July 1, 2019 had been incarcerated as an adult in a Minnesota correctional facility prior to the present incarceration. There is some variation by drug type; 69 percent of offenders incarcerated for an offense involving crack had a previous incarceration, while for marijuana offenders the figure was 38 percent. The average age at first incarceration was approximately 30 years old. Little variation was observed in the average age at first incarceration among the most prevalent drug types.

Table 1: Profile of the Drug Offender Population

Demographic Characteristics	Meth	Crack	Cocaine	Marijuana	Heroin	Other¹	Total
Percent	68.6	3.1	9.1	2.9	10.8	5.5	100.0
Number	1,189	54	158	50	187	95	1,733
Percent male	83.2	98.1	96.8	96.0	88.8	73.7	85.3
Percent minority ²	27.7	94.4	84.2	62.0	78.6	34.7	41.8
Average age in years	38.5	40.4	37.8	33.8	36.1	37.7	38.1
Current Offense Characteristics							
Metro-area county of commitment (%)	28.3	83.3	68.4	42.0	46.5	32.6	36.3
Drug activity (%)							
Possession	61.6	31.5	50.6	48.0	39.6	58.9	56.8
Sale/possess with intent to distribute	35.1	68.5	48.7	52.0	59.4	38.9	40.7
Manufacture	1.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
Other	1.4	0.0	0.6	0.0	1.1	2.1	1.3
Percent 1st degree	38.4	35.2	43.0	26.0	39.0	15.8	37.2
Average sentence length in months	70.0	76.6	77.3	45.2	66.5	47.5	68.6
Criminal History Characteristics							
Average # of prior felony convictions ³	4.4	5.1	4.1	3.1	4.5	4.2	4.4
Percent with prior felony conviction	82.3	87.0	82.9	66.0	86.1	85.1	82.6
Average age at first felony conviction	25.1	22.9	23.2	24.6	21.8	26.0	24.6
Average # of prior incarcerations ⁴	1.4	1.6	1.3	0.6	1.0	1.2	1.3
Percent previously incarcerated	61.6	68.5	52.5	38.0	50.8	58.5	58.9
Average age at first incarceration	29.7	27.5	29.5	29.2	29.6	30.0	29.6

¹ Includes amphetamines, morphine, opium, other narcotics, and instances where the drug was not entered in the DOC database.

² Includes African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic offenders.

³ Includes juvenile offenses; excludes current conviction offenses.

⁴ Prior incarceration figures include only Minnesota adult state prison commitments; excludes current incarceration.