

Individuals Incarcerated for Drug Offenses

Introduction

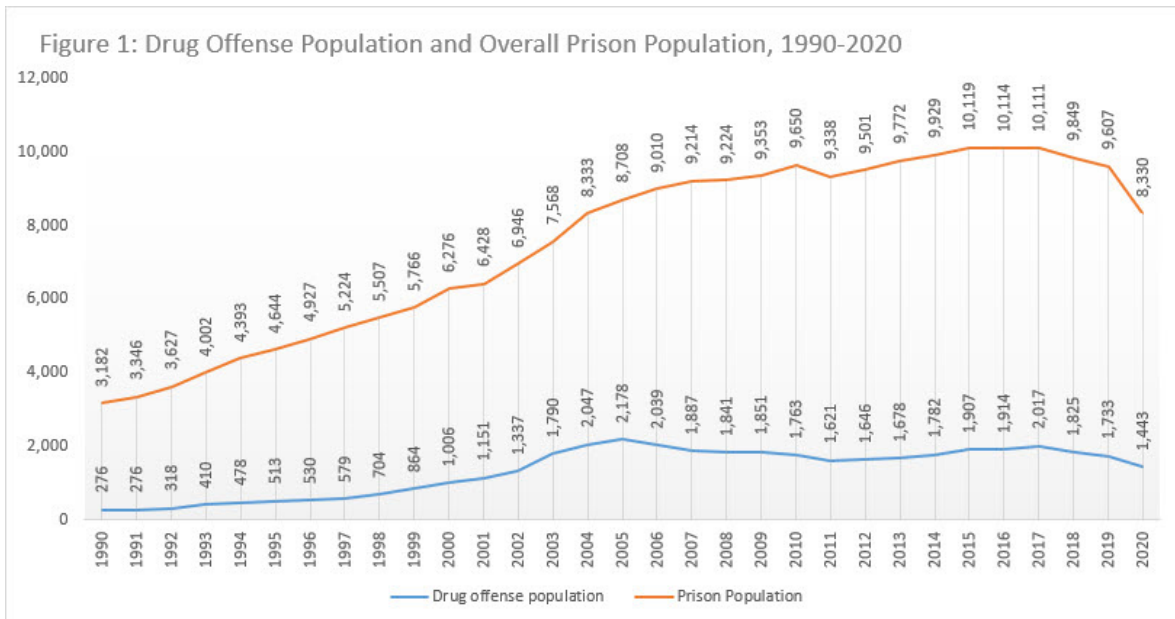
On July 1, 1990, 276 individuals were incarcerated in Minnesota state correctional facilities with a governing offense involving the sale, manufacture, possession, or possession with intent to distribute drugs. This was nine percent of the overall prison population. On July 1, 2005, individuals sentenced for drug crimes accounted for 25 percent of Minnesota’s adult incarcerated population. The number and percentage of individuals with a governing drug offense has declined since 2005, and on July 1, 2020, the 1,443 individuals with governing drug offenses accounted for 17 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 individuals sentenced for drug offenses increased at an average rate of 15 percent. The drug-offense sentenced population grew most rapidly between FY1998 and FY2005. During this period, their number 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 individuals convicted for methamphetamine offenses.

Demographics

As shown in Table 1 (“Profile of the drug offense population”; page 2), methamphetamine is the governing offense for 70 percent of drug offense population incarcerated on July 1, 2020, followed by heroin (11 percent) and cocaine (9 percent). The Table 1 population is overwhelmingly male (86 percent), but there are some variations by drug type. Nearly all those incarcerated for marijuana (100 percent), crack (97 percent), and cocaine (96 percent) are male compared to 83 percent of those incarcerated for methamphetamine. The average age of the entire drug-offense population is 38 years; the average age of those 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 minorities by drug type. Minorities account for 100 percent of the those incarcerated for an offense involving crack and 84 percent of those whose offense involved cocaine. In contrast, just 27 percent of those whose offense involved methamphetamine are minorities.



Offense and Sentencing

The majority of the drug-offense population (65 percent) are serving a sentence from outside the seven-county metropolitan area, due in part to the large percentage (72 percent) with methamphetamine offenses from Greater Minnesota. In contrast, 10 percent of those with a crack offense are serving a sentence from a county outside the metropolitan area. All of those incarcerated for manufacturing drugs were manufacturing methamphetamine.

Overall, 43 percent of the Table 1 population 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 (48 percent). Only 21 percent of those incarcerated for a marijuana-related offense were convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense.

Those with the longest average sentence length are those incarcerated for crack (84 months), followed by cocaine (77 months). Those incarcerated for an offense involving marijuana are serving the shortest sentences on average (51 months). Overall, the average sentence length of the drug offense population is 73 months.

Incarceration Histories

As shown in Table 1, fifty-nine percent of the drug population incarcerated on July 1, 2020 had been incarcerated as an adult in a Minnesota correctional facility prior to the present incarceration. There is some variation by drug type; 68 percent of individuals incarcerated for an offense involving crack had a previous incarceration, while for marijuana 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.

Demographic Characteristics	Meth	Crack	Cocaine	Marijuana	Heroin	Other¹	Total
Percent	70.1	2.1	9.3	2.7	11.0	4.7	100.0
Number	1012	31	134	39	159	68	1443
Percent male	83.2	96.8	95.5	100.0	93.7	79.4	86.1
Percent minority ²	27.4	100.0	83.6	64.1	80.5	42.6	41.7
Average age in years	38.7	42.7	38.0	34.3	36.4	35.6	38.2
Current Offense Characteristics							
Metro-area county of commitment (%)	28.2	90.3	66.4	46.2	42.8	35.3	35.5
Drug activity (%)							
Possession	59.9	25.8	47.0	46.2	39.6	63.2	55.5
Sale/possess with intent to distribute	36.6	71.0	52.2	53.8	59.1	33.8	41.6
Manufacture	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
Other	1.8	3.2	0.7	0.0	1.3	2.9	1.7
Percent 1st degree	44.5	35.5	47.8	20.5	40.3	27.9	42.7
Average sentence length in months	75.1	84.0	77.3	50.8	68.8	54.7	73.2
Criminal History Characteristics							
Average # of prior felony convictions ³	4.4	5.1	3.8	4.2	4.2	3.1	4.3
Percent with prior felony conviction	83.2	90.3	83.6	79.5	86.8	76.5	83.4
Average age at first felony conviction	25.2	22.6	23.5	22.3	22.1	24.6	24.5
Average # of prior incarcerations ⁴	1.5	2.0	1.2	0.7	0.9	0.9	1.3
Percent previously incarcerated	62.6	67.7	54.5	38.5	50.3	42.6	59.0
Average age at first incarceration	29.8	28.2	29.1	29.2	29.8	29.6	29.7
¹ Includes amphetamines, 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							