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A Study and Comparison of Drug Offenders
and the Correlation to Property Crimes

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ABSTRACT

Is there a direct correlation between illicit drug users and criminal offenders who commit property crimes? Could law enforcement's focus on arrest and incarceration of drug abusers have a decreasing effect on property crimes?

The correlation between drug abuse and crime has been clearly acknowledged by researchers. Studies conclude that drug abusers resort to committing crimes or increase their criminal activity. Thus, studies examining drug offenders reveal that a large proportion of convicted drug and property offenders committed their crimes to get money for drugs, or were under the influence of drugs when they committed their crime. This research, combined with the author's knowledge and experience in this topic, infers the definite need to research drug offenders and their direct impact on property crimes.

This author proposes that each police department focus on illicit drug users, specifically their arrest and rehabilitation, in order to reduce their respective community's property crime rate. It is also recommended that police departments should reallocate manpower to focus more on illicit drug users and illicit drug trade. This practice would ensure the reduction of property crime, and

significantly reduce crime associated to drug offenders. Additionally, this focus on drug offenders could significantly reduce the manpower needed to investigate both drug and property related crimes. Further, a focus on illicit drug abusers will reduce the social and financial burden placed upon the communities that support these criminals.

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Introduction

Is there a positive link between illicit drug users and criminal offenders who commit property crimes, such as residential and commercial burglaries, theft, credit card abuse, forgery, auto theft and robbery?

Property crimes and drug crimes are significant social problems facing police departments all around the nation. There has been a significant increase in property crime statistics over the last several years and drug crimes continue to be a focus for police departments and governments evidenced by the "war on drugs." Most research supports the belief that drug abuse and criminal activity are related. Specifically, it is accepted among researchers that the effects of drugs on the drug abuser may result in other illegal activity including violence. However, researchers continue to debate the causal relationship between the two. In other words, does illicit drug use perpetuate criminal activity or does being involved in the criminal environment present the individual with the opportunity to use drugs?

The purpose of this research is to examine the correlation between criminals that commit property crimes and those that abuse drugs; and to determine if focusing on

the arrest and incarceration of drug abusers will have a decreasing effect on skyrocketing property crimes.

This research will consist of books and journals that have previously researched this link between crime and drug use. Additionally, the researcher will analyze data provided by the Texas Department of Corrections to determine any correlation in the criminal history of parolees. This process will be conducted by examining data contained within the FUGINET database. The data will focus on a high crime area located within the city limits of Arlington, Texas specifically zip code area 76010. This research will also include the researcher's twenty-three years of law enforcement experience working in both patrol and criminal investigations.

The results of this research will be provided to law enforcement agencies around the country. The information will emphasize the link of these crimes and articulate how law enforcement can more effectively deploy its limited manpower in the most beneficial manner to address the problem of rising property crimes. The approach will have a two-fold benefit to the communities served by our police, by addressing the rising property crimes rate and also addressing the illicit drug problems that plague our communities.

Review of Literature

Drug use in America continues to be a social problem that affects our country economically, legally, and socially. Recent data suggests that the drug user population in America consists of four million people who consume the majority of the cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana consumed in the United States (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1999). These drugs and the abuse of drugs are without a doubt related to crime, as supported in research.

Furthermore, research has consistently maintained the idea that drug users are more likely than non-drug users to commit crimes. A national survey on drug abuse conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that in 1991, adult respondents who use marijuana or cocaine were much more likely to commit crimes of all types than those who do not use these substances. Furthermore, in Australia, drug use monitoring was done to gather information on drug use from people detained at police stations. Of those detainees whose most serious charge was a property offense, 43 percent tested positive for opiates. Additionally, three quarters of the detainees had urine samples which tested positive to one or more illicit drugs (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2000).

Property crimes reported to police have increased over the last ten years. Reporting to the police increased from thirty-four percent of all property crimes in 1993 to forty percent in 2002 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey, U.S. residents twelve years or older experienced an estimated 17.5 million property victimizations in 2002 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2003). The magnitude of property crimes committed has resulted in researchers analyzing the causes and solutions for these crimes. Many researchers adamantly claim that these crimes continue to be, at least in part, a result of drug users trying to support their drug use. In 1989, 13 percent of convicted jail inmates alleged that they committed their offense to obtain money for drugs. Specifically, inmates incarcerated for robbery, burglary, larceny, and drug trafficking most committed their crime to obtain money for drugs (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994).

Drugs have also been related to property crimes, in that many offenders admit using drugs during the commission of the property crime. According to a survey of state prison inmates in 1989, forty-four percent used drugs in the month before the offense, thirty percent used drugs daily in the month before the offense, and twenty-seven

percent used drugs at the time of the offense (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994). Similar findings were reported in 1991, where forty-nine percent of all state prison inmates reported that they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol or both at the time that they committed the offense (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1994). Further, the 1998 Arrestee and Drug Abuse Monitoring report found that roughly two-thirds of adult arrestees and more than one-half of juvenile arrestees test positive for at least one illicit drug (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1999). In 1997, one-thirds of state prisoners and about one-in-five federal prisoners alleged that they had committed their imprisoning offense while under the influence of drugs. Nineteen percent of state prisoners alleged that they committed their offense in order to obtain money to buy drugs (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1999). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (1997), sixteen percent of federal inmates said that they committed their current offense to obtain money for drugs. Similar findings were reported in the United Kingdom which estimates that there are between 100,000 and 200,000 problem drug users in England and that they alone may commit some 150 crimes a year (Government's Crime Reduction Strategy, 2002). In addition, studies show that

a young person who uses marijuana is four times as likely to destroy another person's property, than a peer who never uses marijuana (Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1999).

Findings on property crimes and drug use have also been extended to women and show that women also commit crimes to obtain money for drugs at high rates. For example, a study in Utah's Salt Lake County Jail found that the majority of women inmates were imprisoned for drug offenses or property crimes related to drug use (Hagerstown, 1999).

In response to the widely accepted belief that drug use is a possible factor in the increase of property crimes, politicians and law enforcement officials have continued to seek methods to reduce drug use. Likewise, researchers have investigated possible ways of affecting the large number of people abusing drugs. There is substantial evidence that drug enforcement can increase drug prices and that higher prices suppress drug use (Caulkins & Reuter, 1998). Also, Mendes (2000) found that the probability of arrest for property crimes falls with an increase in drug arrests (Benson, Leburn, & Rasmussen, 2001). A United Kingdom strategy for the reduction of burglary and property crime included an arrest referral

scheme in every police station to encourage offenders with drug problems to seek treatment; extending drug testing at arrest and at large; a new community sentence for those who show evidence of drug use linked to their offending (Government's Crime Reduction Strategy, 2002).

Although not prevalent, there are researchers who believe that a crackdown on drug use would not result in a reduction of property or violent crime. Benson and Rasmussen (2002) concluded that only a small percentage of drug users commit violent or property crimes. They further suggest that many criminals who use drugs did not begin doing so until after they began committing non-drug related offenses, therefore finding that law enforcement's targeting drugs is an inefficient strategy. However, many researchers remain convinced that drug use is the principal cause of high crime rates among addicts even after controlling for other factors (Bell et al., 1981 in Powers et al., 1991).

Methodology

Can a correlation be established between property crime offenses and illicit drug users when examining offenders?

This study will take a sample of current Texas Department of Corrections parolees and analyze the data to determine if a correlation can be established from their criminal histories linking property crime offenses and the use of illicit drugs. The data will be pulled from the FUGINET database for comparison. FUGINET is a database set up by the Texas Department of Corrections for law enforcement officers to research and track parolees in the state and within their jurisdictions. The data is current as of the day of the search. The database gives a myriad of information but for this study the author will be focusing on offenders within a predetermined area and looking at their complete criminal histories for links between the crimes. FUGINET gives a current listing of all parolees within the state, the offense they were incarcerated for, their address, physical description including photo, complete criminal history, arrest and release date, and their parolee status.

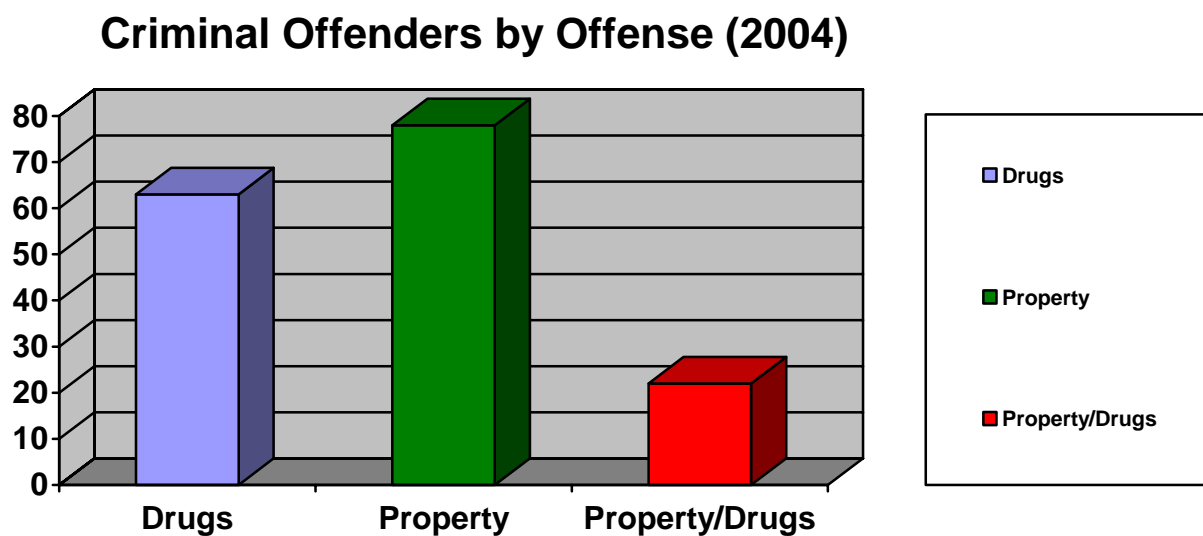
During the course of this study the author will be focusing on parolees in Tarrant County, Texas and specifically parolees within the predetermined zip code of 76010. This zip code area is located within the city limits of Arlington, Texas. Based on current Uniform Crime

Report (UCR) and crime statistical data, 76010 is one of the most crime ridden areas within Arlington, Texas.

Findings

A search of Texas parolees indicates that there are 5918 parolees living in Tarrant County, Texas. Of that 5918, there are 171 parolees living in the 76010 zip code.

A breakdown of these criminal offenders by offense reveals the following data:



The data indicates that sixty-three out of the 171 parolees within this region had criminal histories for drug related offenses, seventy-eight had criminal histories for robbery and property crimes, and twenty-two had been

incarcerated for both property crimes and drug related offenses.

This data does not take into account numerous variables that could increase the correlation between illicit drug users and property crime offenders. For instance, just because a subject has been arrested for a particular offense does not mean that another type of crime was not committed. It only means that the subject was not charged with that offense or was not caught committing that offense. However, based on this data there is a direct correlation between the two types of crimes in 13% of the subjects on parole in the area studied. Of the study group, thirty-six percent had been arrested for drug related offenses only, and forty-six percent had been arrested for property offenses only. The remainder of offenders had been incarcerated for other types of offenses unrelated to this study.

Conclusion/Discussion

This data supports the current research that suggests that approximately 10-20 percent of property crime offenders are illicit drugs users. However, the correlation between the two is not necessarily the causation.

The public's perception of crime would have one believe that a large majority of crime is perpetuated by drugs. This belief, whether justified or not, has enhanced our current policies on illicit drugs and their users. The current "war on drugs" is a prime example of that belief.

It has been consistently established that there is a relationship between the two offenses; however the significance of this relationship will require further research. One suggestion is that researchers could broaden the search database from a zip code area to an entire county, or maybe even the entire state.

This study and the review of literature have concluded that there is a correlation, but what can be done to better address the issue of rising property crime? Based on this researcher's twenty-three years of law enforcement experience working in a variety of fields within the profession, it is believed to be much harder to arrest individuals committing property related offenses such as burglary, forgery, auto theft, larceny, robbery, and burglary of motor vehicles than it is to arrest individuals for drug-related offenses. This researcher believes that drug users, due to their need for the drugs, are more likely to make mistakes when it comes to buying and selling drugs than when committing the property crimes that support

their habit. As well, the data researched indicates that the largest majority of parolees have been arrested for drug-related offenses.

If police departments would place a larger allocation of manpower on illicit drug users we could directly affect the amount of property crime within a specific area. Research indicates that on average, illicit drug users who support their habits by committing property crimes commit between one hundred and fifty to two hundred property offenses each year (Government's Crime Reduction Strategy, 2002). This research indicates that of the twenty-two parolees incarcerated, an estimated 3300 to 4400 property crimes were prevented for each year they were incarcerated.

Further, a reallocation of manpower can only be effective if the offenders are removed from the streets and rehabilitated from their dependency on the illicit drugs. This minor reallocation of manpower can directly affect the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) part one crimes that drive our police departments. As well, it can greatly improve the quality of life for the citizens we serve within our communities.

This type of enforcement has been used in numerous crime ridden communities with favorable results. The "Weed and Seed" initiative is a prime example of this type of

proactive law enforcement. However, most of the funding for this type of aggressive law enforcement is funded by government grants.

What do police departments do when the funding dries up for these types of programs? In order to prevent the targeted area from returning to its previous state, communities will have to absorb the cost and involve the community itself to prevent future decay.

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