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DRUG RELATED CRIME ANALYSIS-HOMICIDE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The research project "Drug Related Crime Analysis-Homicide" (DRCA-H) was a cooperative effort by Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc., the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, and the New York State Division of Substance Abuse Services. The research was designed to study the drug relatedness of all homicides committed in New York State in 1984. The project involved the participation of all police departments in New York State, including the New York State Police, that reported at least one homicide in 1984.

The need for better data and data collection systems to elaborate on the drugs/violence nexus was the main impetus for the DRCA-H project. Uniform Crime Reports (UCR), collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, is the most visible source of crime data in the country. UCR contains aggregated statistics of crimes known to the police. However, the drug relatedness of violent events is simply not a focus of inquiry. Further, UCR reporting schedules to which local law enforcement agencies must adhere frequently result in data being submitted to UCR before investigative work has been completed. For this reason, large numbers of "unknowns" often appear in relevant categories. Finally, there are no universally accepted definitions of "drug relatedness" that are shared by all police departments. For all of these reasons it is just not possible to use the UCR data base to link specific violent acts, including homicide, to antecedent drug activities of either victim or perpetrator.

The major alternative criminological data source is the National Crime Survey (NCS). This annual report issued by the

Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is based on data obtained from a national sample of households. Respondents within households are asked for all instances of victimization in the past year. Projections are then made to the nation as a whole. As was the case with UCR, the NCS is not useful for elaborating on the drugs/violence nexus. Victims may not know the motivation of offenders for committing acts of violence, or be able to judge accurately the pharmacological state of offenders. Finally, because the NCS is a victim survey, it is obviously unsuitable for a study of homicide.

Medical examiner data have limited utility for elaborating on the drugs/violence nexus. Such data only provide information on the status of homicide victims. Evidence of the drug relatedness of homicides frequently is not contained in the victim's body; for example, when only the perpetrator had ingested drugs. Also, drug related violence and homicides can occur between persons who are not drug users themselves; for example, the murder of a drug trafficker by a rival trafficker.

DRCA-H data analysis is structured by both a tripartite explanatory framework and a tripartite reporting framework. The tripartite explanatory framework suggests that drugs and violence may be related in three different ways:

- 1) psychopharmacologically
- 2) economic compulsively
- 3) systemically

The psychopharmacological model suggests that some individuals, as a result of short or long term ingestion of specific substances, may become excitable, irrational, and may

act out in a violent fashion.

The economic compulsive model suggests that some drug users engage in economically oriented violent crime, such as a robbery that may result in a homicide, in order to support costly drug use.

Systemic violence refers to the traditionally aggressive patterns of interaction within the system of drug distribution and use. It includes disputes over territory between rival drug dealers; assaults and homicides committed within dealing hierarchies as a means of enforcing normative codes; robberies of drug dealers and the usual violent retaliation by the dealer or his/her bosses; elimination of informers; disputes over drugs and/or drug paraphernalia; punishment for selling adulterated or phony drugs; punishment for failing to pay one's drug related debts.

The tripartite reporting framework suggests that there are three types of knowledge available to police officers that enable them to make a determination as to whether a particular homicide is drug related. These types of knowledge are:

- 1) evidence of drug consumption by victim or perpetrator
- 2) drugs or drug paraphernalia found at the crime scene
- 3) known drug involvements

The first two types of knowledge listed above are self-explanatory. The third, known drug involvements, refers to information held by the police prior to the homicide, or to information gathered during the course of investigation. This could include the knowledge that victim and perpetrator were

members of rival gangs of drug traffickers, or that victim and perpetrator were known to be engaged in drug transactions with one another.

There are some natural congruences between the tripartite explanatory framework and the tripartite reporting framework. For example, evidence of drug consumption is most likely to provide information relating to psychopharmacological motivations. Known drug involvements are most likely to provide information referring to systemic motivations. However, the presence of drugs or drug paraphernalia at the scene of the homicide may be indicative of psychopharmacological or systemic motivations.

The different "means of knowing" that are represented in the tripartite reporting framework may have important implications for perceptions of the drugs/homicide nexus as represented by the tripartite explanatory framework. For example, to the extent that reporting agents rely only on evidence of drug consumption in order to make determinations of drug relatedness, they are likely to overstate the role of psychopharmacological violence. This is because psychopharmacological acting out assumes the prior ingestion of a substance. However, the other forms of drug related violence, economic compulsive and systemic, do not assume the prior ingestion of a substance.

The different means of knowing are also likely to influence perceptions of which substances are most contributory to homicide violence. For example, one might reasonably hypothesize that alcohol is most likely to be related to psychopharmacological events, and heroin and cocaine to economic compulsive and systemic events. To the extent to which we rely on evidence of

drug consumption as the principal means of identifying drug related homicides, we are likely to not only overstate the psychopharmacological dimension but also to overstate the role of the substance that is the principal contributor to that dimension, that is, alcohol. Such a situation leads to a concomittant understating of the role of substances that are major contributors to other dimensions, that is, heroin and cocaine.

The importance of the tripartite reporting framework thus is doubly clear. It is important for us to know the basis upon which police agencies may make claims as to the drug relatedness of violent events in order to design the most effective monitoring systems. It is also important to realize that the method of knowing may well predict the substance of what is known.

During the first stage of DRCA-H, all police agencies in New York State that reported at least one homicide in 1984 were contacted. DRCA-H staff met with local police officials and gained their support for the project. Staff assessed the quality and comparability of records being maintained by the different departments. Police officials were given the opportunity to provide input for the design of data collection procedures. Local police officials were consistently interested in and supportive of DRCA-H.

The DRCA-H data base consists of 1,768 homicides; 1,459 are from New York City and 309 are from elsewhere in New York State. New York City, with about 83 percent of the total, presented a

special problem for data collection. It was impossible to physically examine the records for all their homicides. However, the Crime Analysis Unit (CAU) of the New York City Police Department conducts annual debriefings of all homicide squad commanders. The CAU agreed to include some questions concerning drug relatedness in these debriefings and to provide DRCA-H with the data. However, the New York City data were not as extensive as, or fully comparable to, that collected from the rest of New York State.

Major findings of the DRCA-H project include the following.

> 23.8 percent of the New York City homicides were identified as drug related.

> 41.7 percent of the homicides in the rest of New York State were classified as drug related.

> The lower proportion of drug related homicides in New York City reflects primarily the exclusion of alcohol as a drug from the New York City data base.

> In about 13 percent of the New York City homicides, and about 18 percent of the homicides from the rest of the State, general drug relatedness was impossible to determine from existing records.

> There was insufficient case level information to categorize New York City homicides according to either the tripartite explanatory framework or the tripartite reporting framework.

> About 25 percent of the non-New York City homicides were classified as psychopharmacological.

> About 9 percent of the non-New York City homicides were

classified as systemic.

> Only about one percent of the non-New York City homicides were classified as economic compulsive.

> About 6 percent of the non-New York City homicides were classified as multidimensional. This meant that they included two or more of the dimensions of the tripartite explanatory framework with roughly equal magnitude.

> Only about one percent of the non-New York City homicides that were classified as drug related were unable to be categorized by the tripartite explanatory framework.

> New York City police reported that about 19 percent of all homicide victims were believed to be drug traffickers.

> Police throughout the rest of New York State reported that about 15 percent of all homicide victims were believed to be drug traffickers.

> New York City police reported that about 13 percent of all perpetrators of homicides were believed to be drug traffickers.

> Police throughout the rest of New York State reported that about 14 percent of all perpetrators of homicides were believed to be drug traffickers.

> For about 22 percent of the homicide victims, and about 44 percent of the homicide perpetrators, non-New York City police were unable to make a determination as to whether or not they were drug traffickers.

> No information was available concerning the specific types of drugs that may have been related to homicides in New York City.

> With the exception of alcohol, the specific types of drugs that may have been related to non-New York City homicides were unknown in 50 percent or more of the cases.

> With regard to the tripartite reporting framework, among non-New York City drug related homicides, there was evidence of drug consumption in about 89 percent of the cases, known drug involvement in about 88 percent of the cases, and contraband found at the scene in about 38 percent of the cases.

> Among non-New York City homicides that were not drug related, there was evidence of drug consumption in about 21 percent of the cases, known drug involvement in about 20 percent of the cases, and contraband found at the scene in about 6 percent of the cases.

> About 18 percent of all non-New York City homicides were categorized as "unknown" with regard to drug relatedness. Of these "unknowns," there was evidence of drug consumption in about 74 percent of the cases, known drug involvement in about 68 percent of the cases, and contraband found at the scene in about 18 percent of the cases.

A major finding of DRCA-H is that in 1984, police departments throughout New York State did not maintain records concerning the drug relatedness of homicides. Given limited criminal justice resources, policy makers and practitioners need more valid and reliable information to make difficult decisions about the most effective and efficient utilization of those resources. Clearly, much more needs to be known about the complex interrelationships between drugs and violent crime.