

**National Institute of Justice
U.S. Department of Justice**

Drugs and Crime Practitioner's Workshop

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**Prepared by
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I. Introduction

On September 13 and 14, 2004, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), U.S. Department of Justice, hosted a meeting to develop suggestions for its future research agenda. Participants included some 25 representatives of drug treatment, law enforcement, and corrections organizations. The meeting was facilitated by Maria Stalzer Wyant Cuzzo, Associate Professor of Legal Studies and Mediator, University of Wisconsin–Superior. NIJ was represented by Glenn Schmitt, Deputy Director, and Thomas Feucht, Acting Assistant Director for Research and Evaluation, along with seven NIJ observers.

Dr. Feucht remarked that NIJ is much involved in research on the relationship between drugs and crime. Because NIJ focuses on State and local issues, the meeting's participants were drawn from around the country. He urged participants to exchange ideas, inform NIJ about the current state of research and practice regarding the drugs–crime relationship, and help NIJ with its strategic planning. “When research informs policy and practice,” he said, “it can make real improvements in the way things are done and help develop approaches that make neighborhoods safer.”

Dr. Feucht referred to a report that participants had been given, *Toward a Drugs and Crime Research Agenda for the 21st Century: NIJ Special Report*. The report was based on a 2001 meeting hosted by NIJ and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) for people who had been testing research questions across many issues relating to drugs and crime. Duane McBride, Director, Institute for the Prevention of Addictions, Andrews University, who had participated in that earlier meeting, observed that many researchers are committed to applied research in part because a high proportion of criminals are drug users, and a high proportion of drug users are criminals. Moreover, for a high proportion of people, the primary access point to drug treatment is the criminal justice system.

Dr. McBride noted that any national drug policy inherently must incorporate a broad spectrum of related issues because of the enormous variation between the States and local jurisdictions in how drug use is treated. An advantage of that variation is that the various jurisdictions may serve as natural laboratories: researchers can study States that emphasize deterrence, those that emphasize treatment, those that allow the use of marijuana for medical purposes, and those that employ other approaches to drugs. Some evidence suggests that certain drug treatment elements may work and be cost effective, but comprehensive assessment is crucial. Key concepts in treatment include the need to integrate community services and the importance of putting drug users in positive social networks. Those issues were debated at the 2001 meeting and are still of concern today.

Mr. Schmitt told participants that NIJ works for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. NIJ aims not merely to answer interesting questions, but to answer questions that have the capacity to influence practice and policy. He encouraged participants to tell NIJ whether it is researching the right questions.

Dr. Cuzzo charged participants with the task of assisting in the development of a drug research policy at NIJ, particularly regarding priorities of topics that could be researched over the coming years. She asked participants to name their most pressing

questions and concerns regarding drugs–crime research. Highlights from their responses are as follows:

- It is important to study female offenders, reentry in rural parts of States, the relationship between childhood victimization and drug use, and the introduction of buprenorphine.
- The end of the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program is a significant loss.
- What is the result of “zero tolerance” for youths? Does it put more youths in the criminal justice system, from which they never get out?
- What are the risk and protective factors for drug abuse? Are there causal links, not just correlations?
- How can the cycle of drug abuse be broken?
- How can treatment programs make best use of local resources?
- Which offenders should be directed to drug treatment and which should be incarcerated?
- How can drug offenders be encouraged to tell the truth when they are being monitored?
- How can the number of youth deaths from drugs be reduced?
- Is there a way to intervene in addiction before the person becomes ensnared in the criminal justice system?
- The public should be educated about the whole range of negative outcomes from alcohol and other drugs.
- Research should be put into practice on the street level.
- How long should drug users be in treatment, and how best can their progress be measured? Could measures be developed that are more sensitive than merely tracking recidivism versus nonrecidivism?
- What is the right level of supervisory conditions to impose?
- Many substances that adolescents abuse are not picked up on common drug screens. What is the relationship between use of these odd or boutique substances and later bad behavior?
- Longitudinal studies would provide much useful information about risk and protective factors, who is relatively safe to release, and recidivism issues.
- What is the role of gangs in distributing drugs?
- Can better technology be employed in the monitoring of drug use?

Dr. Cuzzo noted that the goal by the end of the workshop's second day was to develop five to eight research recommendations for NIJ.

II. What Is the Relationship Between Drugs and Crime?

Participants exchanged ideas on the relationship between drug use and crime. They did not attempt to reach firm conclusions but instead pointed out many factors to consider in trying to understand the relationship. One participant noted, “I am not so concerned about the chicken-and-egg debate; instead, I want to know the person’s primary situation: is he a criminal who also uses drugs, or is he a primarily prosocial person who also uses drugs?” Another participant similarly noted that it seems ineffective to lump together regular criminals and criminals who commit crimes because they are addicts. The following is a sample of participants’ observations on the drugs–crime relationship:

- Police know that after they incapacitate drug users and drug sellers, area crime declines.
- Violence in drug markets drives out good businesses, leading to lost employment opportunities, a reduction in the quality of life, and a downward spiral for the community.
- One clear relationship is that the criminal justice system defines some drug and alcohol use as a crime.
- The number one trigger for repeat sex offenses and domestic violence is alcohol. For other crimes, the major trigger is drugs.
- It would be useful to know which youths are serious drug users and which are more recreational users.
- The majority of drug arrests are for possession, and the majority of prosecutors would refer a 16-year-old first-time marijuana possessor to adult court.
- For some 16-year-olds, the local drug market is the most tempting job opportunity.
- It would be useful to find the right way to combine risk assessment and needs assessment instruments to learn, for example, that a person has a high propensity for relapse but a low propensity for violence.

Dr. Cuzzo noted that some participants see causal relationships between drugs and crime, while others feel the relationship is a mixture of many concurrent factors.

III. How Can Researchers and Practitioners Inform Each Other's Understanding of Drugs and Crime?

In this segment of the meeting, participants discussed how researchers and practitioners could help each other understand what works and what obstacles prevent practitioners from meeting success. The following are some of their observations:

- Practitioners think they know what works, but they often lack validation of their understanding. Moreover, they may be incorrect, and what they are doing may not actually work.
- Even the best system will not work without practitioners who are properly trained, qualified, or experienced.
- People make general statements like “boot camps don’t work,” but a year-long boot camp filled with treatment may work well. It is important to identify what elements of a program are effective and keep the parts that work. The same notion applies to drug courts and Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE). It may not be possible to implement certain programs only partially and expect them to work. Similarly, if it is necessary to reduce spending, what elements of a program can be cut without ruining the program?
- The families of addicts may be able to share certain knowledge about addiction.
- More research studies should provide detailed descriptions of what treatment programs actually consist of; monitor the quality or integrity of those programs; analyze the impact of subject selection bias; and study the degree to which treatment affected drug users.
- For treatment to work, people must want to improve. There are certain “teachable moments” when people are amenable to change. In medicine, those moments often occur at the emergency department. In criminal justice, the teachable moment may not be when a person is in court but rather when he or she is pulled over by a police officer.
- It may be cost-effective to take a different approach to drug testing. For example, in drug courts, it may be sufficient to test for the person’s drug of choice instead of testing for five drugs.
- Analysis and findings regarding “what works” should be distilled to a short, understandable format that is accessible to policymakers and the public (like the NIJ “Research in Brief” reports). Research findings should be reduced to a few paragraphs or a few pages so people can read and understand them.
- In field situations, it is hard to prove “what works” according to the standards required by research journals.

- Programs are important, but what must come first is effective need and risk assessment and an understanding of community influences.
- It would be interesting to know “what works” at the community level, not just the individual level. For example, does a particular intervention reduce homicide or other crimes in the community? What makes it acceptable for a person to commit a crime in his or her community?
- In a California jurisdiction, apartment owners are being made to provide apartment managers who are trained to look for signs of methamphetamine dealing in the units.
- It would be useful to analyze the value of drug treatment in prison, particularly the long-term effects on the individual, his family, and society, as well as the challenge of incomplete treatment due to moving the inmate around.
- Drug misusers and addicts may need to be approached and treated differently.
- The challenge of prevention is that it mostly takes place in the family, in the community, and in other places where the government cannot mandate behavior the way it does in, for example, prisons and schools. Still, some prevention efforts can be measured and shown to have a particular benefit in relation to their cost.
- Some research is widely applicable, while other research is highly tailored to specific programs and communities and may not be useful to anyone else.
- The disease model of addiction should be emphasized over the criminal model.
- Simplified data with cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses is most useful for practitioners who are working with policymakers.
- Many disciplines come together to address the drug–crime issue.
- In general, researchers should keep in mind the community’s effect on drugs and crime and in turn should make sure that any research will lead to significant benefits for communities.
- Organized crime groups (including international groups) play a role in the drugs–crime issue that is worthy of research.
- Researchers should examine what the various States are doing, how effective their efforts are, how model programs work, and which program components have the greatest impact.
- It is important to make sure there is no wrong door to knock on—in other words, that one need not be in trouble with the criminal justice system to get help.

IV. How Can Research Be Incorporated into Programs and Policies?

In this segment of the workshop, practitioners described how they had implemented research into their programs. The following are examples of their stories:

- We wanted to establish therapeutic communities in jail. There was little literature on how to proceed, so working with a Ph.D. psychologist on our staff, we used the general therapeutic community literature. Once we got started, we found that the inmates were very unhealthy. There was much more HIV and hepatitis C than we realized, and many inmates were victims of sexual abuse. In response, we turned to the research literature on those topics. Basically, because there was no model that accounted for all the concerns we discovered, we consulted a range of literature.

This is also a story of collaboration. We brought community groups into the jails to begin working with inmates there, before release. Inmates were then released to residential community treatment. Four to five years later, about 60 percent of the female former inmates are still out of jail, leading productive lives.

- In Nebraska, we were concerned about the length of time between a violation and returning to court. After examining the research on criminogenic risk, we began using a matrix to determine how to respond to different offenders with different violations. For example, a low-risk offender with a positive urinalysis would be treated differently than a high-risk offender with a positive urinalysis. In this program, probation and parole conditions can be modified immediately in the field if the offender agrees. If he does not, he ends up in court facing a violation; however, in our program, if the person abides by the matrix, we can put him in treatment and change his conditions. The difference in our program is that the response to violations is now swift and certain.
- We were unhappy with the LSI (Level of Service Inventory) and LSIR (Level of Service Inventory Revised) assessment tools, so we hired a researcher to help us design our own assessment. We have validated it on the county population and will soon use it statewide. The assessment tool enables us to deal with some of the high-risk, low-risk distinctions. The tool has also helped us convince the court to agree to terminal dispositions in cases where doing anything else would simply make the person worse.
- To improve drug and alcohol treatment, we are working with researchers to automate the tests and share information across agencies. In our effort to convince legislators, we are relying on documentation from the research. For example, at the lower end of needs, the research suggests that drug and alcohol treatment makes a person worse. We would like to extend our assessment tools to become placement tools. For low-risk peo-

ple, we might choose prevention-oriented treatment; for those at high risk, we might choose intervention (in treatment beds).

- We used on-the-ground data collection to reduce crime in a neighborhood. Through jail interviews, we learned that methamphetamine was mostly sold inside apartments. We trained apartment complex owners in crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). The owners would evict the dealers, who would move across the street and resume their activities, so calls for service remained the same for the neighborhood. We found that voluntary compliance was insufficient, so we had to make CPTED a community standard.

Participants also discussed what researchers should know about the world of practice and named the following conditions that may make research difficult:

- It is impractical and sometimes unethical to conduct randomized experiments in this field.
- There is a great deal of self-selection in drug treatment programs. Usually, people enter them because they want to, not because they were forced to, so the outcome proves little.
- The criminal justice environment is highly changeable, as legislatures make new laws constantly.
- Some assessment instruments are overly intrusive. Just because people are arrested for drug possession, is it right to start asking about their entire personal history and sexual practices?
- Research takes so long that practitioners sometimes must back out of the research protocols.
- The extant data is not necessarily automated.
- Research findings are not always presented in common English, with graphics and clear, brief explanations of results.
- Different States and jurisdictions use different definitions of recidivism.

In addition to the comments on research practices, participants offered the following ideas on what NIJ might be able to do to assist practitioners:

- Support longitudinal studies to learn the long-term outcomes of interventions.
- Design a national drug estimation program.
- Create best practices reports based on existing research. Focus on inexpensive best practices and the key elements of successful programs.
- Produce literature reviews in accessible formats.
- Conduct secondary data analyses.

- Host interagency conversations and meetings to bridge gaps and build understanding (specifically between researchers and practitioners; public health and criminal justice professionals; or researchers and policymakers).
- Coordinate with the National Institute on Drug Abuse and other government agencies to better move information to practitioners.
- Develop ways of measuring the impact of social science research budget cuts.
- Provide a common terminology.

V. What Should Researchers Study? A Research Agenda

A key goal of the workshop was to develop a proposed research agenda for NIJ. Throughout the session, participants suggested numerous research topics. All the topics were presented on flipcharts so that participants could examine them, place them into clusters, and consider which topics or clusters might be most important. Through several iterations of discussion and voting, the list was eventually pared down to five. Dr. Cuzzo assured participants that the topics that did not appear on the short list would still be captured for later consideration.

The long, initial list contained the following potential research topics:

- The mix of factors in drug use: individual variables, community risk variables, and others.
- Why some people abuse alcohol and drugs and other people do not: risk and protective factors.
- Effectiveness and techniques of in-custody treatment programs.
- Treatment of abusers with co-occurring medical problems.
- New drug assay: what it should be and what drugs it would test for.
- Abuse prevention; early intervention.
- Use of methadone and buprenorphine (a new opiate replacement therapy) in prisons and in hospital emergency departments.
- Path from treatment-skipping and positive drug tests to prison or absconding; alternatives to reincarceration for violations.
- Anticipated characteristics of the offender of tomorrow and how to supervise such a person.
- Effectiveness of adult best practices on juveniles.
- Public attitude toward addiction (public being more forgiving and favorable toward treatment than is the criminal justice system).
- Secondary data analysis.
- Impact of social science research budget cuts.
- Reinstatement of ADAM program in order to draw public attention to the drugs–crime nexus.
- Input from addicts and their families.
- Imperfection of the bifurcation between juvenile and adult justice systems.

- Model to assist law enforcement in quick decisionmaking process (for example, using secondary data to find a quick answer to guide action or sharing information across agencies to predict what types of crimes may be coming).
- Key components of effective programs.
- Cost-benefit studies of various interventions and programs.
- Educating the public about addiction and the link between drugs and crime.
- Cause of recent reductions in crime.
- Impact of race, sex, and geographic location in assessment, sentencing, treatment, and placement; also, different needs of different populations.
- Various State laws and policies and their effects on the drugs–crime nexus (for example, effects in states that have decriminalized marijuana or States that have sufficient treatment beds by statute).
- Biological influences on the drugs–crime nexus.
- Long-term effects on children raised in methamphetamine contexts.
- “Teachable moments” in addiction (for example, the addict’s timing or system accessibility).
- Development of a risk/needs assessment that combines criminogenic, substance abuse, and mental health factors; produces a composite score that drives resource allocation; and is predictive.
- Impact of international drug distribution on local markets and related crimes.
- Intermediate measures of “success” other than recidivism.
- Effective in-custody treatment programs.
- Identifying which plea bargain options in drug cases produce the greatest potential to decrease recidivism.
- Matching of individuals to treatment and sanctions.
- Development of programs and outcome measures that complement current knowledge about the science of addiction.

Finally, the top five topics or clusters were determined to be the following:

Best Practices

For various populations (such as adults, juveniles, men, and women), workshop participants would like to see NIJ compile and promulgate best practices on the following topics:

- Prevention approaches for drug-involved CJ populations and for communities.
- Early intervention.
- In-custody treatment programs.
- Plea bargain options that produce the greatest potential to decrease recidivism.
- Identifying which inexpensive treatment interventions or prevention activities work to reduce crime for which individuals under which conditions.
- Matching individuals to appropriate treatments or sanctions.

Key Elements of Effective Programs

Participants would like NIJ to conduct research that determines which elements of effective programs are essential and which could be dropped to save money.

Effects of State Laws and Policies

Participants would like NIJ to examine the various State laws and policies regarding drugs and alcohol and consider how those laws and policies affect the drugs–crime nexus.

Most Effective Assessment Tools

Participants would like NIJ to develop a risk/needs assessment that combines criminogenic, substance abuse, and mental health factors; produces a composite score that drives resource allocation; and is predictive.

Cost-Benefit Studies

Participants would like NIJ to conduct cost-benefit studies of various interventions and programs.

VI. Conclusion

Dr. Feucht observed that in the last year NIJ has renewed its emphasis on cost-benefit analysis in the projects, programs, and research it funds. In addition, NIJ continues to discuss how best to disseminate findings to different audiences.

Other NIJ staff then provided an update on a few NIJ events and activities. NIJ is managing the multisite national drug court evaluation. Data collection begins in January 2005. The project may help researchers discover what aspects of drug courts work best.

NIJ is conducting an impact and cost-benefit evaluation of 15 sites as part of the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative. In addition, NIJ is participating in a Federal consortium on drugs and offenders, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The consortium has discussed definitions and measures used by the different agencies, and its report should be available on the Web in early 2005.

Dr. Cuzzo invited participants to make any closing comments. Highlights are as follows:

- It was useful to hear so many different perspectives and meet people from various backgrounds and locations.
- Pharmaceuticals may become ever more useful as drug abuse treatment tools.
- Police may be surprised to learn how much happens to someone once the person is arrested.
- The emphasis on cost-effectiveness is prudent.
- There is much common ground between people working in community prevention and people working in criminal justice. They are all part of a system, even if it does not always seem that way.

Dr. Cuzzo thanked the participants for their suggestions toward the development of NIJ's research agenda.

Appendix: Participants and Observers

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