

Introduction

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For criminal justice practitioners who deal with drugs and crime day in and day out, the reality of the drugs-crime nexus is indisputable. In a manual designed to help police chiefs and sheriffs control drug abuse, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) stated unequivocally its belief in “a significant though complex” relationship between drug abusers and criminal offenders. Change one group, IACP proposed, and you change the other: “If there is a reduction in the number of people who abuse drugs in your community, there will be a reduction in the commission of certain types of crime in your community.”¹

When IACP released its manual more than a decade ago, researchers already were confirming what practitioners believed and documenting the relationship between drugs and crime.² Public policy and programs were and continue to be developed on the basis of this knowledge.³ But although researchers and practitioners alike knew the relationship existed, the nature of that relationship eluded them then and continues to elude them today.⁴

To shed light on the drugs-crime link requires research, and the first step is to specify the research topics to be covered. Taking the lead, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) brought together academics and other researchers and asked them to answer three questions: What do we know about drugs and crime, what do we not know, and, most important, what do we need to know? Both agencies see

this knowledge not as an end in itself but as a means to accurately define the problem of drugs and crime and promote future research. The agenda for research was developed under NIJ and NIDA sponsorship at a forum held in Washington, D.C., in April 2001. The findings of the Drugs and Crime Research Forum are presented here.

In pursuit of the drugs-crime link

If we are going to make progress toward solving the problem of drugs and crime, we need to shed light on the nature of the drugs-crime link by designing effective responses. Developing a research agenda on drugs and crime means tackling the central issue of the drugs-crime link. Is the link a matter of cause and effect or is it something far more complex?

There is no lack of theories. The direct cause model of the drugs-crime relationship has attracted its share of supporters. It states simply that either drug use leads to crime or crime leads to drug use. The simplicity is appealing. Who would not find it tempting to believe that reducing drug use can lower the crime rate? In fact, some policies and programs have been developed on the basis of the direct cause model or the belief in a significant relationship between drugs and crime. As IACP recognized, the relationship is real enough. And NIJ’s Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring program has demonstrated

year after year that among people apprehended and charged with a crime, a large percentage uses drugs.⁵

However, as sociologist Erich Goode has cautioned, “Even the fact that drugs and crime are frequently found together or *correlated* does not demonstrate their *causal* connection.”⁶ The consensus among researchers who study the issue confirms Goode’s observation. The evidence for the direct cause model is just not there.⁷

We seem more willing today to accept the complexity of the drugs-crime relationship, more open to the notion that “[t]here is considerable uncertainty . . . about the degree to which drug use causes crime or the degree to which criminal involvement causes drug use.”⁸ In a recent review of the literature, sociologists Helene Raskin White and Dennis M. Gorman definitively dismissed the direct cause model. They concluded instead that the drugs-crime link is best explained by the common cause model, in which any association of drugs and crime has a cluster of causes.⁹

Those who subscribe to the common cause model believe that to adequately understand the relationship of drugs to crime requires attention to many issues, social, cultural, chemical, and biological among them. What the model means for policy and practice is that any response to drugs and crime that works in one set of circumstances may not work in another. For researchers, it means the research agenda is vast. Policy and practice can be informed by what we know up to this point, but progress in responding to the drugs-crime problem requires knowing more.

Building on the past: The Drugs and Crime Research Forum

NIDA and the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, NIJ’s predecessor organization, were asked by Congress in 1976 to find out what was known about drugs and crime. The product of the agencies’ collaboration was *Drugs and Crime: A Survey and Analysis of the Literature*. Though not strictly a research agenda, the survey was a first step “to identify where the gaps in our knowledge lie and to direct research to fill those gaps.”¹⁰ It was intended to “set the stage for more focused future research.”¹¹

In 2000, NIJ’s call for the development of a research agenda was another step toward meeting that need. The authors of *Drugs and Crime* noted at the time that “few if any [studies] directly address the drugs-crime nexus issue.”¹² This report on the development of the research agenda will demonstrate that although much has been learned in the intervening years about drugs, drug use, drug abuse, drug markets, and drug law enforcement, much work is needed to shed light on the complexities of the drugs-crime link.

Three papers were commissioned for the research forum. Each addressed the questions of what we know, what we do not know, and what we need to know about the drugs-crime link. Prepared by experts in epidemiology, public policy, social work, and allied disciplines, the papers served as the focal point and framework for discussions by forum participants. (The forum summary, agenda, and a list of the participants are presented in appendixes A, B,

and C.) After the forum adjourned, NIDA created a listserv for participants to continue to exchange their thoughts.

The discussions did not all fit the same mold. Roundtables were generated from one-sentence statements by participants about drugs and crime. What we do *not* know about the drugs-crime relationship was treated at length. The many strands of thought, lines of discussion, and themes came together when Forum participants addressed the final question: What future research is most important, and what research is needed most urgently? Mindful that the next generation of researchers will be tackling the problem of drugs and crime, Forum participants recommended topics for research by their graduate students.

Probing drugs and crime: Three perspectives

“At the Intersection of Public Health and Criminal Justice Research on Drugs and Crime” was commissioned by NIDA from James C. Anthony with Valerie Forman. Anthony asked such questions as—

- Have we made effective and adequate use of recent developments in science and technology to advance the study (and hence the understanding) of the relationship between drugs and crime? Given the vast literature generated during past decades on this subject, have we adequately, appropriately, and effectively integrated research from both the public safety and public health perspectives?
- Are the tensions between the two perspectives greater than our ability to overcome them? Given what we know now and the current tension between researchers in public safety and public health, how can we conceptualize and organize our thinking and research to enhance our knowledge and under-

standing of the relationship in the most productive ways?

- What do we really know about the suspected causal connection between drugs and crime? In looking at drugs and crime, what is the intersection at which public health and public safety meet? How can we achieve the goals of greater understanding and definitive evidence and greater mastery in design and application in policy, programs, and techniques to prevent and reduce harmful health and safety consequences of drug use?
 - What do we need to do to integrate molecular biology, genetics, and neuroscience into discussions of drugs and crime? What do we need to do to place discussions of the drugs-crime nexus in the context of history? How can we clarify the question of causal inference? How can we use the notions of scale and rubrics to help understand the relationship between drugs and crime?
- “Research on Drugs-Crime Linkages: The Next Generation” was commissioned by NIJ from Robert MacCoun, Beau Kilmer, and Peter Reuter. Among the questions asked by MacCoun and his colleagues were—
- Are our conceptualizations of the relationship between drugs and crime adequate to move forward in our understanding of that nexus? How must we conceptualize the relationship to be able to address questions not only of concomitance and statistical correlation, but also of social significance and causality?
 - To the extent that the drugs-crime relationship is causal, to what extent do we understand the nature of the causal influences? How can we use Paul Goldstein’s tripartite taxonomy to build on work already done, and how can we move beyond the taxonomy? How

can we use notions such as Bruce Johnson's conduct norm analysis or Alfred Blumstein's drugs-gun diffusion hypothesis?¹³

- How does the considerable heterogeneity of users, substances, locations, and situations as well as differences in market dynamics affect what we need to have and to do to address the drugs-crime nexus? How do we address the question of causal influences? How will research in the coming decade deal with the heterogeneity of effects across users, substances, cities, neighborhoods, and situations?

"The Drugs-Crime Wars: Past, Present, and Future Directions in Theory, Policy, and Program Interventions" was commissioned by NIJ from Duane C. McBride, Curtis J. VanderWaal, and Yvonne M. Terry-McElrath. In this paper, McBride and his colleagues raised the following questions:

- In the past two or three decades, what progress has been made in our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between drugs and crime? Does knowledge of the statistical relationship help us understand the nature of the relationship? What do we know about the nature of the nexus and what do we need to do now to advance the state of our knowledge? In the past century, how have we used that knowledge to guide public policy? Could we do a better job of linking what we think and what we know about drugs and crime to what we do to address individual and social problems in the realms of public health and public safety? Do we know enough about what has been tried (for example, programs and program evaluations) to know what works?
- How is the idea of social capital important to our understanding of the drugs-crime nexus? What is the significance of

the dynamic tension between drug policy as it shifts and the drugs-crime connection as policy changes? What is the value of interventions and treatment when dealing with drug-using offenders?

What do we need to learn?

It will come as no surprise that the question of what we know about drugs and crime was eclipsed by that of what we do not know and what we have yet to learn. The papers and accompanying discussions yielded an abundance of ideas on research topics for the coming decades. The major themes included the following:

- Drug-related crime.
- Drug enforcement.
- Drug markets.
- Drug offenders.
- Drug policy.
- Treatment and intervention.
- Drug use and abuse.
- Ethnographic studies.
- Health sciences perspectives.
- Minority research.
- Research methods.
- Victimization studies.

Categorized more broadly, the topics proposed for research are the drugs-crime nexus, the social contexts of drug use and crime, and refining study methods and designs.

What explains the drugs-crime nexus?

We know that drugs and crime are related. We also know something about the different ways they might be related, and perhaps something about the ways they may be related in time and space. What we have yet to learn is *how* they are related. In other words, we need to probe the underlying dynamics of the relationship. We do not know, for example, why so many people who commit crime also use

drugs or why some people who use drugs commit crime but others who use drugs do not commit crime. Research in this broad area might take several directions.

Find new ways to conceptualize the drugs-crime nexus. Several years ago, Goldstein proposed a tripartite framework as a way to disentangle the relationship between drugs and crime, specifically violent crime. Violence could be the direct outcome of ingesting drugs, the result of a user's compulsion to obtain drugs or money for drugs, or a product of the disorganization and violence inherent in the social systems in which drugs are manufactured and exchanged.¹⁴ Over the years, this framework has been useful for studying drugs and violent crime but of limited value for studying drugs and other types of crime. Beyond what has been learned from this model, how can researchers conceptualize the way or ways drugs and crime—not just violent crime—are related?

Combine research perspectives. Research on drug use illustrates how different disciplines can combine forces. Social science research is beginning to merge with biological research, particularly genetic research. Questions include the following:

- How can the study of genes, the social environment, and behavior help us better understand the link between drugs and crime?
- Are there physiological propensities for drug using? If so, what is the impact of the user's environment?
- Are alcohol and marijuana complements of or substitutes for other drugs?
- Do different drugs have different effects on groups of people who are genetically different?
- How can we address the ethical concerns of such research?

Give more attention to minorities. A disproportionate number of the people arrested, charged, and in custody for drug and other criminal offending are from minority groups. The reason is unknown but needs to be probed. What can we learn about the involvement of various ethnic and racial groups in the drugs-crime link? What can we learn about gender and the drugs-crime link? Some answers might be found in comparative, multisite studies of drug use and drug markets in different ethnic communities. What is the relationship of gender, age, race, and culture to drug involvement and crime? What is the effect of disparity (in income, for example), prejudice, and discrimination on the distribution of resources used for treatment and prevention? How can we explain racial and ethnic differences in drug use and involvement in crime? Do people view the drugs-crime link differently because of their race, gender, or age?

From these general research areas on racial and ethnic diversity, it is possible to derive many specific topics. What can we find out about the relationship between drugs, crime, and the increase in the number of women of color who are incarcerated? Have changes in the economy affected the involvement of disadvantaged black and Hispanic/Latino males in drugs and crime? If so, how? What is the impact of drug-related incarceration on families and children or on prospects for education and employment in minority communities?

What do we need to know about the social context of drugs and crime?

It is widely believed that drug use adversely affects users. But drug use and crime are affected by and in turn affect forces operating in society at large. Drug users interact with many people: sellers with buyers, buyers with sellers, criminal

offenders with their victims. There is a social context of drug use.

Social patterns in the drug world. There have been many studies of drug users and some studies of drug markets. But what do we need to learn about the social relations and interactions of the people whose lives are affected by drugs?

The commerce of drugs and crime: drug markets. Theories about and the operations and institutional arrangements of drug markets are plentiful, but not enough research has been done to test them. How stable are drug markets, and how do they change over time? For example, has the maturation of the crack cocaine market in some cities affected those cities' crime rates? What is the connection between local market activity and fluctuations in supply and demand at the national level? What influences the relationship between sellers and buyers? How and why do new markets emerge, and what impact do they have on existing markets? How are prices set in local drug markets, and how are wages set?

Patterns of use and abuse. We know something about the demographics of drug use, but what do we know about intergenerational patterns? How do use patterns vary with social or biological differences? How do patterns of alcohol use compare with patterns of use of other drugs? Can drug use help explain juvenile involvement in crime or violence? Are patterns of use of certain drugs, such as club drugs, designer drugs, or inhalants, different from patterns of use of other drugs? What can we find out about how and why people start or stop using drugs?

Criminal offending by drug users. There are some studies of drug offenders, but how much do we know about how or why drug offenders commit crime? Are some people genetically predisposed to drug use? Is there a relationship between drug

use and social status, and if so, how might social status in turn be related to involvement in crime? Beyond using illicit drugs, to what extent are drug users and sellers involved in other crime? Can we realistically estimate how much other crime is committed by drug offenders? What risk do these people pose to their own health and safety?

Victims of drug users and drug use. Drug users are in some ways their own victims, but are there other victims? What do we know about other people with whom drug users relate? How can we define for research and policy purposes what we mean by "victims of drugs"? How do we define victimization in this context? Are there indirect victims, such as families and communities, as well as direct victims?

The public's response to drug use and drug-related crime. Society considers drug-related crime and illicit drug use as affronts and responds accordingly. Enforcement strategies are one example. To what extent are the responses based on a real understanding of these problems? Are the responses making a difference?

Enforcing drug laws. What is the effect of enforcement policies, programs, and practices on drug use, drug dealing, and drug-related crime? What is the relationship between street-level enforcement and street-level drug market activity, particularly violent activity? What impact do drug seizures, drug arrests, and asset forfeiture, among other interdictions, have on drug and drug-related crime? What is the impact of public concern about racial profiling and police corruption on the ability of law enforcement to respond to drugs and crime?

Treating drug use and abuse. With so many different drugs and so many different types of users, what can we say about the efficacy of drug treatment in addressing drugs and crime? What is the

nexus of drug treatment and criminal justice? For example, what are the results of treatment in correctional settings and what do evaluations reveal? Do incentives or disincentives help drug users to succeed in treatment? How do we define success? How important are aftercare programs and family interventions? What is the best way to treat drug users who are dually diagnosed (for example, those who are also mentally ill)? What are the dropout rates for treatment, and what does it matter? What treatments work best with what types of drug use? How do we distinguish users from abusers? What difference does that distinction make for treatment planning?

Intervening to prevent drug use or crime. Although relatively little is known about preventing drug use, the topic receives a great deal of attention. To what extent can media campaigns help prevent drug use? Is the impact of prevention programs the same for all social categories of users or irrespective of type of drug? How can we educate young people about the impact that drugs can have on their lives? Should more attention be paid to problem behavior, norm violations, and rule breaking than to drug prevention?

Public policy. When we think about public policy on drugs, we typically do not think about policy in general but rather about specific aspects, such as interdiction, enforcement, treatment, and prevention. But can we step back and think broadly and measure the impact of drug policy over the past decade, or even the past century? Can we learn from policy simulations that examine past and prospective views of drug use? Can we learn from comparative studies of different countries? What is the impact of different directions in drug policy? What policies have worked or not worked with adult and juvenile drug offenders? Can research examine drugs, crime, and public policy

together? Can we find out from policymakers and practitioners what decisions they need to make and what questions they need to answer about drugs and crime? How can we move drug policy analysis beyond econometrics (supply and demand, for example) and begin to study drug use from the perspective of politics, criminal justice, public health, and social work?

Methods of studying drugs and crime

Research methods are dictated by the questions researchers ask. Some of the questions already explored indicate that certain methodological concerns might need to be addressed.

Attention to measurement and design.

What are the best measures currently available to study drug use and involvement in drug markets and drug treatment? How can they be improved? How can we construct integrated data collection measures? What is the best way to design measures and procedures to evaluate drug control programs? What are the best measures for assessing drug treatment outcomes? What is the role of cost-benefit analysis in drug studies? What can we learn from longitudinal studies about the long-term effects of drug use and abuse? How can we introduce randomization to long-term studies of drug treatment? How can statistical techniques developed by other sciences be adopted by the social sciences? How can we encourage multidisciplinary teams of researchers to work together to study drugs and crime?

Ethnography. There is a long, distinguished tradition of ethnographic research in the field of drug studies. Ethnographic studies, however, are almost by definition limited to a single area or a small group of people. What might we learn by secondary analyses of ethnographic studies?

What might we learn by replicating ethnographic studies in other communities or among other groups of drug users? How useful might it be to link ethnographic studies of community structure with studies of drug users and dealers in their communities? What can we learn from studying communities of sellers and users? Would it be useful to establish prospective, qualitative field sites in various communities as a type of surveillance system to monitor changing drugs and drug-use patterns?

Using available data and studies. How can we make better use of available data to study drugs and crime? Are there obstacles to making better use of available data to learn from them what we can? What can we learn from meta-analyses of previously conducted research studies of drugs and crime?

What is in this report?

Following this introduction are the three papers commissioned for the forum and appendixes containing a summary of the forum proceedings, the agenda, and a list of the names and organizational affiliations of the participants.

Notes

1. International Association of Chiefs of Police, *Reducing Crime by Reducing Drug Abuse: A Manual for Police Chiefs and Sheriffs*, Gaithersburg, MD: International Association of Chiefs of Police, 1989:5.

2. See Tonry, M., and J.Q. Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*, vol. 13 of *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990; and R. Weisheit, ed., *Drugs, Crime and the Criminal Justice System*, Cincinnati: Anderson Publishing, 1990.

3. See, for example, Forcier, M.W., "Substance Abuse, Crime and Prison-Based Treatment," *Sociological Practice Review* 2 (1991): 123–131; Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug*

Control Strategy—2000 Annual Report, Washington, DC: The White House, 2000 (and earlier ONDCP annual reports); and Longshore, D., F. Taxman, S. Turner, A. Harrell, T. Fain, and J. Byrne, "Operation Drug TEST Evaluation," final report submitted to the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, 2000 (grant 97-IJ-CX-0041).

4. Examples of studies that explored the nature of the drugs-crime relationship in that period include Brownstein, H.H., and P.J. Goldstein, "A Typology of Drug Related Homicides," in Weisheit, ed., *Drugs, Crime and the Criminal Justice System*: 171–192; Chaiken, J.M., and M.R. Chaiken, "Drugs and Predatory Crime," in Tonry and Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*: 203–239; Fagan, J., "Intoxication and Aggression," in Tonry and Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*: 241–320; Goldstein, P.J., H.H. Brownstein, P.J. Ryan, and P.A. Bellucci, "Crack and Homicide in New York City, 1988: A Conceptually Based Event Analysis," *Contemporary Drug Problems* 16 (1989): 651–687; and Johnson, B.D., T. Williams, K.A. Dei, and H. Sanabria, "Drug Abuse in the Inner City: Impact on Hard-Drug Users and the Community," in Tonry and Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*: 9–67.

5. Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring, *1999 Annual Report on Drug Use Among Adult and Juvenile Arrestees*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, June 2000 (NCJ 181426).

6. Goode, E., *Between Politics and Reason—The Drug Legalization Debate*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997: 119.

7. See, Brownstein, H.H., "What Does 'Drug-Related' Mean? Reflections on the Problem of Objectification," *The Criminologist* 18 (1993): 1, 5–7; Chaiken and Chaiken, "Drugs and Predatory Crime," in Tonry and Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*: 203–239; Fagan, J., "Intoxication and Aggression," in Tonry and Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*: 241–320; Goode, E., *Between Politics and Reason—The Drug Legalization Debate*; White, H.R., and D.M. Gorman, "Dynamics of the Drug-Crime Relationship," in G. LaFree, ed., *The Nature of Crime: Continuity and Change*, vol. 1 of *Criminal Justice 2000*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, July 2000 (NCJ 182408); and Wilson, J.Q., "Drugs and Crime," in Tonry and Wilson, eds., *Drugs and Crime*: 521–545.

8. Office of Justice Programs, *Office of Justice Programs Fiscal Year 2000 Program Plan: Resources for the Field*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2000: 23 (NCJ 182238).

9. White and Gorman, "Dynamics of the Drug-Crime Relationship," in G. LaFree, ed., *The Nature of Crime: Continuity and Change*: 193.

10. Gandossy, R.P., J.R. Williams, J. Cohen, and H.J. Harwood, *Drugs and Crime: A Survey and Analysis of the Literature*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 1980: xi (NCJ 159074).

11. Ibid.: 122. The survey covered five "crucial areas": patterns of drug use and criminal behavior;

"life cycle" characteristics (age of onset of drug use and crime, for example); "economic issues" (price and supply/demand, for example); treatment; and methods (sampling, for example).

12. Ibid.: 122.

13. These works are discussed in this report.

14. Goldstein, P., "The Drugs/Violence Nexus: A Tripartite Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Drug Issues* 15 (1985): 493–506.