

RESEARCH FINDINGS No. 119

DRUG USE AMONG ARRESTEES

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This report presents a new set of research results on urine testing and self-reported drug use and offending among arrestees (suspected offenders of all types held by police). The research was carried out in sites in South Norwood, Liverpool, Nottingham and Sunderland. Two sites, Nottingham and Sunderland, were also included in the same research two years earlier. This makes it possible to track changes in arrestees' drug use in those places between 1997 and 1999.

KEY POINTS

- ▶ 69% of arrestees tested positive for at least one drug (excluding alcohol). 29% tested positive for opiates (including heroin), and 20% tested positive for cocaine (including crack).
- ▶ Between 1997 and 1999, drug use among arrestees increased. In Nottingham, there was an increase in heroin and crack/cocaine use, while in Sunderland there was a shift from alcohol to illegal drugs.
- ▶ Users of both heroin and crack/cocaine were five times more likely to report committing robbery and four times more likely to report shoplifting than arrestees who did not use these drugs.
- ▶ There was a small subgroup (9%) of especially prolific property offenders with costly drug habits. These arrestees admitted committing an average of at least 20 offences a month over the last year and also using heroin or crack/cocaine. They were responsible for 52% of all offences reported by the full group of arrestees.
- ▶ One-third of all arrestees said that they were dependent on at least one drug (excluding alcohol and tobacco) at the time of the interview. In Nottingham, the proportion dependent on heroin increased from 12% to 23% between 1997 and 1999.
- ▶ Between 1997 and 1999, the availability of crack/cocaine and heroin in Nottingham increased significantly.

The Government's drug strategy has four key targets. In summary, they are:

- to reduce the proportion of young people using drugs, especially heroin and cocaine
- to reduce levels of repeat offending by drug-misusing offenders
- to increase the number of drug users who access treatment
- to reduce young people's access to drugs, especially heroin and cocaine.

The research reported here is part of the NEW-ADAM research programme (see overleaf). Arrestees were interviewed and tested for drug use in four sites. South Norwood, Liverpool and Nottingham were part of the developmental phase of the NEW-ADAM programme (from 1997 to 1999). Sunderland was the first site from the main programme which started in 1999. Preliminary information is provided on each of the Government's four targets, at a point where major initiatives, especially arrest referral, had yet to be implemented.

The NEW-ADAM programme

NEW-ADAM (New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring) is a research programme of interviewing arrestees and testing them for drug use. The findings reported here cover the three final locations (South Norwood in London, Liverpool, Nottingham) in the developmental stage of NEW-ADAM, together with the first site (Sunderland) of the full-scale NEW-ADAM programme. The full programme will cover 16 sites across England and Wales. Fieldwork for these 16 baseline sites will be completed by March 2001, and then repeated over the next two years, to help track the drugs strategy.

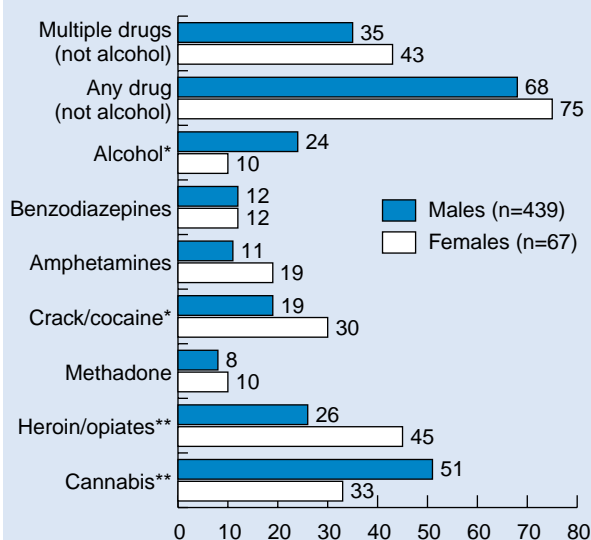
In particular, the NEW-ADAM programme provides monitoring data concerning repeat offending amongst drug-misusing offenders. Repeat offenders have been defined in this research as arrestees who admitted an average of 20 or more offences per month over the last year, and who reported using heroin or crack/cocaine.

DRUG USE

Across the four sites, 69% of all arrestees tested positive for drugs (excluding alcohol), 29% tested positive for opiates and 20% for cocaine. Note that, unlike the self-report data, urinalysis is unable to distinguish between cocaine and crack (or between heroin and opiates). Females were more likely than males to test positive for opiates and for cocaine, while males were more likely to test positive for alcohol and cannabis (Figure 1).

Self-reported drug use levels were broadly in line with those from urine testing: 76% said they had taken at least one illegal drug in the last 12 months and 57% had taken multiple drugs. Roughly a quarter said they had consumed heroin (28%), cocaine (26%) and crack (25%).

Figure 1 Percentage of positive tests



*Significant at p<0.05, ** p<0.01

In the repeat testing sites (see Bennett, 1998), urinalysis showed an overall increase in drug use between 1997 and 1999. In Nottingham, positive tests for opiates increased from 16% to 31%, and for cocaine from 10% to 23%. In Sunderland, positive tests for any illegal drug increased from 49% to 67%, and there was a decrease in positive tests for alcohol from 43% to 24%.

Self-reported drug use matched these results, and suggested the increase in positive cocaine tests actually reflected increasing crack use. In Nottingham, the percentage who said they had taken heroin in the last 12 months increased from 24% to 37%, and crack use increased from 20% to 31%. In Sunderland, self-reported use of any illegal drug within the last 12 months increased from 67% to 78%, while use of alcohol decreased from 95% to 89%.

Overall, there was little change in the average age for starting drug use in either of the repeat sites. The first drug used tended to be tobacco (around age 14), followed by solvents, alcohol and then cannabis (16–17). The first use of heroin generally occurred between the ages of 20–22, while first use of crack was between the ages of 21–24.

EXPENDITURE

Across the four sites, focusing on all arrestees who said they used drugs within the last 12 months, average weekly expenditure on drugs was £129. Arrestees who used both heroin and crack/cocaine spent on average £308 a week.

ILLEGAL INCOME

The main sources of illegal income over the last 12 months were property crime (mentioned by 47%), undeclared earnings (23%) and drug dealing and other drug crimes (19%). The average illegal income over the last 12 months was £5,535. The average illegal income of those who used both heroin and crack/cocaine was five times that of arrestees who had used neither drug (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Average illegal income over last 12 months

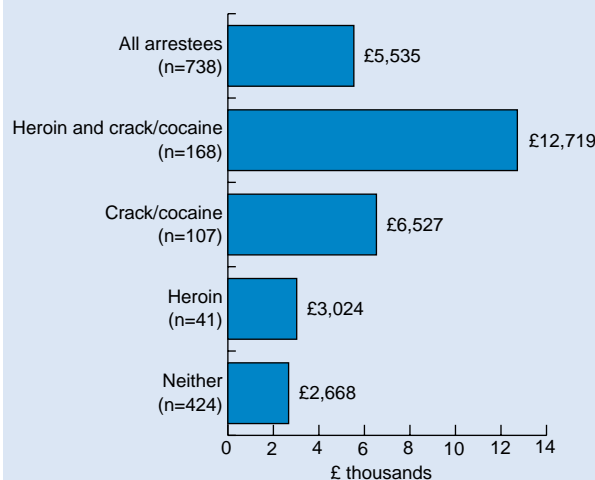
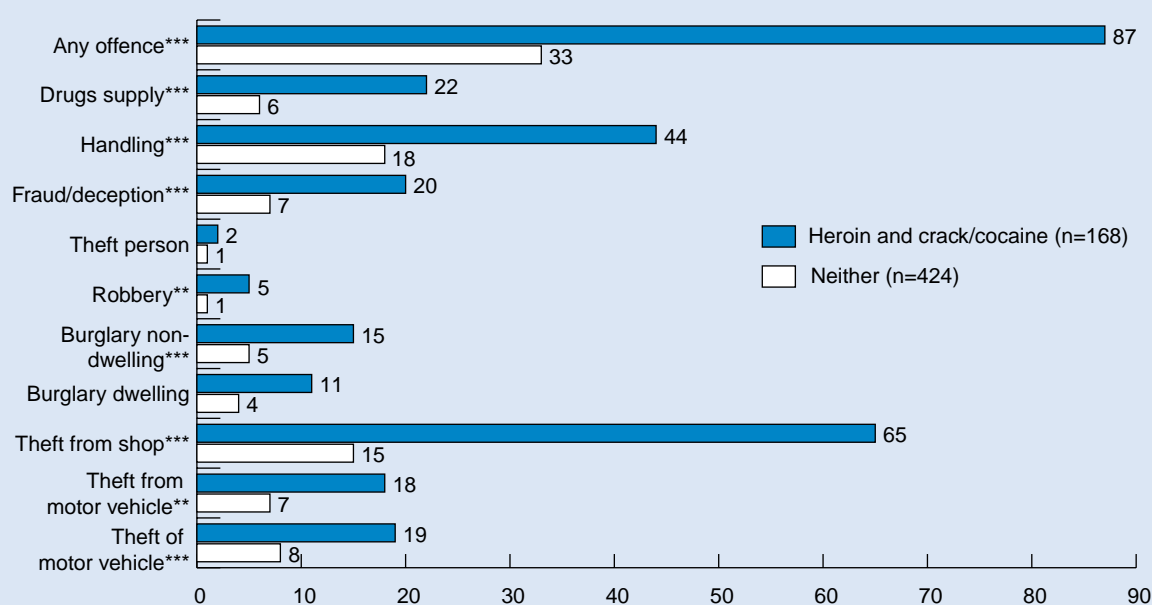


Figure 3 Percentage reporting property offences in last 12 months: users and non-users of heroin and crack/cocaine



Significant at $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.001$

SELF-REPORTED OFFENDING

Acquisitive crime was relatively commonplace: 50% of all arrestees said they had committed at least one property crime over the last 12 months. The most common kinds were theft from a shop (reported by 28%) and handling stolen goods (27%). Supplying drugs and theft of a motor vehicle were both reported by 12% of arrestees.

NEW-ADAM sheds fresh light on the whole issue of drugs and crime by showing that users of both heroin and crack/cocaine were much more likely than non-users to report virtually all types of property offences (Figure 3).

In relation to the Government's Key Performance Indicator on repeat offending among drug misusing offenders, 9% of arrestees admitted committing an average of at least 20 offences a month over the last year and using heroin or crack/cocaine. This group of high-rate offenders was responsible for 34% of all illegal income and 52% of all offences.

DRUG DEPENDENCE

One-third of all arrestees (33%) said they were dependent on at least one drug (excluding alcohol and tobacco) at the time of the interview. The highest rates of dependence for prohibited drugs were heroin (19%) and cannabis (10%). The dependence rate for tobacco was particularly high at 65%; the rate for alcohol was 8%.

In Nottingham, the proportion of arrestees who claimed dependence on heroin doubled between 1997 and 1999, from 12% to 23%. Conversely, there were also reductions in the proportion dependent on alcohol, from 14% to 6% in Nottingham, and from 19% to 10% in Sunderland.

INJECTING

23% of arrestees said they had injected an illegal drug at some time in their lives. The drugs which had been injected were:

- heroin (18% of all arrestees)
- amphetamines (12%)
- cocaine (11%)
- other drugs (6%).

The 90 arrestees who had injected heroin in the last 30 days had, on average, injected on 20 days. Of all arrestees, 6% said they had shared a needle at some time in their lives and 4% had done so in the last year.

The proportion of arrestees who had injected any drugs in the previous 12 months increased from 14% to 24% in Nottingham. There was also a (non-significant) increase in Sunderland (from 9% to 14%). Heroin injecting in Nottingham doubled, from 8% of arrestees to 16%. Again, there was a corresponding, but non-significant, increase in heroin injecting in Sunderland, from 4% to 7%.

TREATMENT

29% of all arrestees said they currently needed treatment for drug misuse. One-third of these (9% of all arrestees) were currently receiving treatment, leaving 20% with an unmet need for treatment.

AVAILABILITY OF DRUGS

At the time of the survey, more than 80% of arrestees said they were able to obtain crack/cocaine (82%) or heroin (85%) in their local neighbourhood. The average number of dealers known to arrestees was 12 for crack/cocaine and 15 for heroin.

Table 1 Nottingham – changes in availability

	1997	1999
Crack/cocaine	n=58	n=34
Usually buy in neighbourhood*	50%	81%
Average number of people they buy from	10.3	13.4
Heroin	n=50	n=35
Usually buy in neighbourhood*	60%	83%
Average number of people they buy from	13.8	18.5

*Significant at $p < 0.05$

In Nottingham, there were significant increases in the percentage of both crack/cocaine users and heroin users who were able to buy drugs in their neighbourhood (Table 1). There were also (non-significant) increases in the average number of different people from whom arrestees bought their drugs.

CONCLUSIONS

The NEW-ADAM study gives a unique insight into progress on the Government's drugs strategy. However, the research reported here was carried out during 1997–99 when major initiatives such as arrest referral had yet to be implemented. It is still challenging that, among this offender population, which is very different from the general population, drug misuse patterns have worsened in the last few years. Thus, in the two 'change over time' sites, there was a move from alcohol to illegal drugs in Sunderland, and increased heroin and crack/cocaine use in Nottingham. However, these and other data should be treated with some caution for several reasons. For some of the findings, there was considerable variation between the results from the four sites. Furthermore, the NEW-ADAM programme of testing and interviewing arrestees is still being implemented; Sunderland is the first of the main programme. In future, further reports, covering up to 16 sites, will provide more extensive information across England and Wales.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

740 arrestees were interviewed in four sites: South Norwood (August 1998), Liverpool (September 1998), Nottingham (January 1999) and Sunderland (July 1999). All but two were between 17–59 years. 13% were female, 47% were aged between 17–24, and 13% were non-white. Offenders of all types were eligible, except those held for drunkenness and breath test purposes. 506 of the interviewed sample (68%) also provided urine specimens for drug testing. Reasons for not providing a specimen included refusals (34% of those who failed to provide), agreed but unsuccessful (30%) and other/unknown reasons (37%). Among those who provided a urine specimen, 67 (13%) were female and 49 (10%) were non-white. About half (48%) were aged between 17–24. Interviews had also been carried out in Nottingham and Sunderland two years earlier, at the same time of year in each site:

		Interviewees		Interviewees providing urine specimens	
		No.	No.	Percentage of interviewees	
Nottingham	1997	209	132	63%	
	1999	204	132	65%	
Sunderland	1997	271	210	77%	
	1999	182	169	93%	

REFERENCE

Bennett, T, (1998). *Drug Testing Arrestees*. Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate Research Findings No. 70. London: Home Office.

The research was funded by the Home Office which manages a programme of drugs research in partnership with the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit and other Government departments. For a more detailed report, see Trevor Bennett (2000) *Drugs and crime: the results of the second developmental stage of the NEW-ADAM programme*, Home Office Research Study 205. Copies are available from the Communications Development Unit (address below).

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