

Individuals Incarcerated for Drug Offenses

Introduction

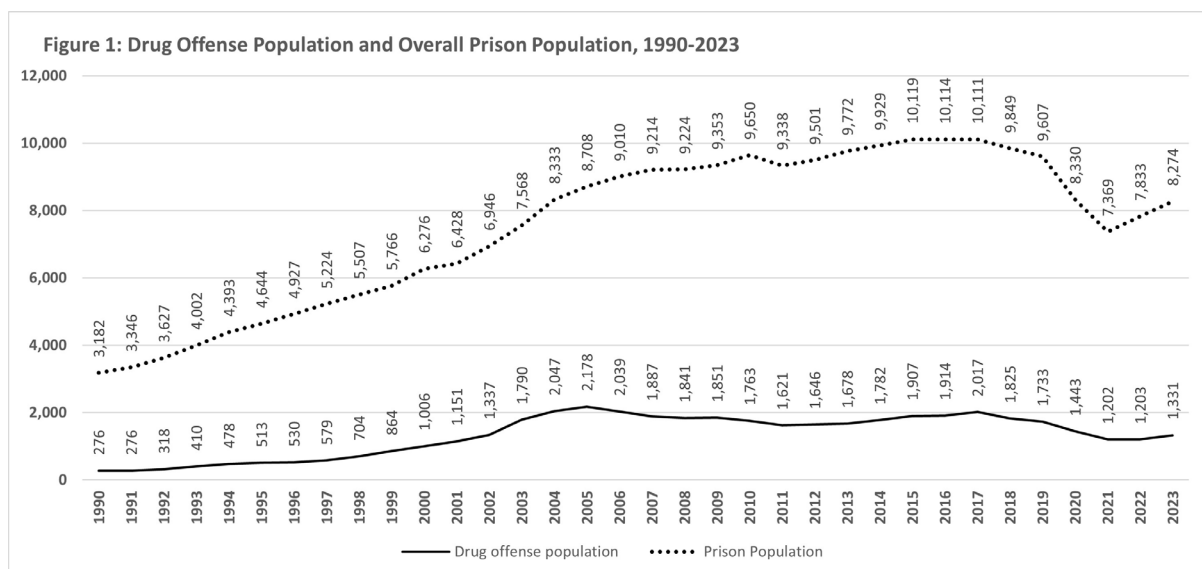
On July 1, 1990, 276 individuals were incarcerated in Minnesota state correctional facilities with a governing offense involving the sale, manufacture, possession, or possession with intent to distribute drugs. This was nine percent of the overall prison population. On July 1, 2005, individuals sentenced for drug crimes accounted for 25 percent of Minnesota's adult incarcerated population. The number and percentage of individuals with a governing drug offense has declined since 2005, and on July 1, 2023, the 1,331 individuals with governing drug offenses accounted for 16 percent of the overall prison population.

While the prison population grew at an average annual rate of seven percent from fiscal year (FY) 1990 through 2005, the number of individuals sentenced for drug offenses increased at an average rate of 15 percent. The drug-offense sentenced population grew most rapidly between FY1998 and FY2005. During this period, their number increased by nearly 1,500, and the average annual growth rate was 18 percent. A little more than half of the growth occurring between FY2001 and FY2005 was due to the growing number of individuals convicted for methamphetamine offenses.

Demographics

As shown in Table 1 ("Profile of Individuals Incarcerated for Drug Offenses"; page 2), methamphetamine is the governing offense for 77 percent of drug offense population incarcerated on July 1, 2023, followed by heroin (8 percent) and cocaine (5 percent). The Table 1 population is overwhelmingly male (83 percent), but there are some variations by drug type. Nearly all those incarcerated for marijuana (96 percent) and cocaine (95 percent) are male compared to 81 percent of those incarcerated for methamphetamine. The average age of the incarcerated drug-offense population is 40 years.

One of the most dramatic findings shown in Table 1 is the variation in the percentage of minorities by drug type. Minorities account for 100 percent of the those incarcerated for an offense involving crack and 86 percent of those whose offense involved cocaine. In contrast, just 29 percent of those whose offense involved methamphetamine are minorities.



Offense and Sentencing

The majority of the drug-offense population (75 percent) are serving a sentence from outside the seven-county metropolitan area, due in part to the large percentage (79 percent) with methamphetamine offenses from Greater Minnesota. All of those incarcerated for manufacturing drugs were manufacturing methamphetamine.

Overall, 40 percent of the Table 1 population were convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense. Those whose offense involved crack or cocaine were most likely to be convicted of a first-degree offense. Only 19 percent of those incarcerated for a marijuana-related offense were convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense.

Those with the longest average sentence length are those incarcerated for crack (82 months), followed by cocaine (81 months). Those incarcerated for an offense involving marijuana are serving the shortest sentences on average (41 months). Overall, the average sentence length of the drug offense population is 72 months.

Incarceration Histories

As shown in Table 1, sixty-four percent of the drug population incarcerated on July 1, 2023 had been incarcerated as an adult in a Minnesota correctional facility prior to the present incarceration. There is some variation by drug type; 80 percent of individuals incarcerated for an offense involving crack had a previous incarceration, while for marijuana the figure was 44 percent. The average age at first incarceration was approximately 30 years old. Little variation was observed in the average age at first incarceration among the most prevalent drug types.

Table 1: Profile of Individuals Incarcerated for Drug Offenses

Demographic Characteristics	Meth	Crack	Cocaine	Marijuana	Heroin	Other ¹	Total
Percent	77.4	0.4	5.5	2.0	8.0	6.7	100.0
Number	1030	5	73	27	107	89	1331
Percent male	80.9	80.0	94.5	96.3	86.0	87.6	82.8
Percent minority ²	29.3	100.0	86.3	40.7	64.5	57.3	37.6
Average age in years	40.5	45.4	37.3	36.8	37.3	35.7	39.7
Current Offense Characteristics							
Metro-area county of commitment (%)	20.8	100.0	56.2	33.3	36.4	27.0	24.9
Drug activity (%)							
Possession	65.2	40.0	49.3	74.1	44.9	50.6	61.8
Sale/possess with intent to distribute	31.9	40.0	49.3	25.9	54.2	48.3	35.7
Manufacture	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4
Other	2.3	20.0	1.4	0.0	0.9	1.1	2.1
Percent 1st degree	41.5	80.0	45.2	18.5	43.0	25.8	40.4
Average sentence length in months	72.7	82.4	80.7	41.2	77.5	56.8	71.9
Criminal History Characteristics							
Average # of prior felony convictions ³	5.1	4.8	3.8	3.6	4.6	4.3	4.9
Percent with prior felony conviction	88.2	100.0	83.6	92.6	87.9	83.1	87.7
Average age at first felony conviction	25.3	25.1	23.4	22.9	22.8	23.1	24.8
Average # of prior incarcerations ⁴	1.6	1.2	1.2	0.8	1.3	1.0	1.5
Percent previously incarcerated	65.9	80.0	58.9	44.4	61.7	56.2	64.2
Average age at first incarceration	30.9	30.6	28.5	29.1	28.1	29.2	30.4

¹Includes amphetamines, other narcotics, and instances where the drug was not entered in the DOC database.

²Includes African American, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic persons.

³Includes juvenile offenses; excludes current conviction offenses.

⁴Prior incarceration figures include only Minnesota adult state prison commitments; excludes current incarceration