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REDUCING THE PREVALENCE OF COCAINE AND HEROIN DEALING AMONG ADOLESCENTS

MARK A.R. KLEIMAN*

I. INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse causes harm to users and others. That is the justification both for the regulations, taxes, and prohibitions embodied in laws and for the array of programs—enforcement, persuasion, and treatment—directed at reducing drug abuse. The observation that illicit drugs as a group are less widely abused and cause fewer fatalities than do their licit counterparts, alcohol and nicotine, suggests that prohibition and its enforcement are effective to some extent.

But the public effort to control drug abuse creates its own problems, especially in the form of the illicit markets that spring up around the prohibited substances. Good policy design will attempt to minimize the total social damage created by drug abuse, by the illicit markets, and by the drug control effort itself.

One especially deleterious aspect of the illicit-market problem is the widespread engagement in some neighborhoods of teenagers and young adults, especially males, in the retail dealing of cocaine and heroin. This involvement inflicts great damage on them and on their neighbors. Yet one who looked for programs or policies explicitly designed to reduce the prevalence of such activity would look largely in vain.

This Article will consider the possible value of mounting efforts to reduce the prevalence of cocaine and heroin dealing among adolescents, explore the forms such efforts might take, and propose a research program designed to support the development and execution of a dealing-prevention effort. It is far from certain that such efforts, in worthwhile form, can in fact be developed and implemented. The purpose of this Article is to put the question of doing so on the agenda for public discussion rather than to make a conclusive case for one or another answer to that question.

* Professor of Policy Studies, University of California at Los Angeles. The author would like to acknowledge substantial help received from Jonathan Caulkins, who read both an early sketch and a full draft, and who provided many helpful comments and an even more helpful challenge to make explicit why reducing the prevalence of dealing might be socially useful.

II. THE PERSONAL AND SOCIAL COSTS OF ADOLESCENT DEALING

In addition to its effects on drug availability, retail cocaine and heroin dealing activity by adolescents causes enormous collateral damage to the communities within which it takes place and enormous direct damage to those who engage in it. For short-term gains in money, excitement, and prestige, youthful dealers risk imprisonment, death and injury in dealing-related violence, and initiation to drug abuse. Neglect of schoolwork, the failure to acquire legitimate-market work experience, and the acquisition of criminal records and criminal social networks all tend to worsen longer-term life chances. The oft-heard assertion that engaging in drug dealing constitutes a “rational” response by adolescents in poor neighborhoods to unfavorable economic conditions does not seem to be supportable unless one attributes to the participants either absurdly high discount rates or very short time-horizons.

The structure of gains and losses to dealers—immediate, reliable, and obvious rewards, with deferred, probabilistic, and obscure costs—is one likely to produce less-than-rational responses. As Boyum has pointed out, the large cash earnings in the illicit drug trades, balanced by the risks of injury or criminal punishment, mean that virtually every illicit “firm” runs at an accounting profit, even if its principals are taking losses in expected-utility terms, once the risks they are running are factored in.¹ As a consequence, the illicit markets lack the discipline of bankruptcy that prevents licit enterprises from operating at long-run deficits. The same logic applies to individual employees of dealing enterprises: nothing guarantees that the prevailing wages will fully remunerate them for the risks they run. There is, thus, an analogy between drug-taking and illicit drug-dealing; in each case, immediate benefits and deferred costs can easily betray individuals into acting voluntarily in ways not in their long-term interests.

In addition to the costs dealing imposes on dealers, it also imposes costs on those around them. The disorder that frequently accompanies open-air drug markets is an enormous burden for the neighborhood. That fact helps explain the demand from residents of heavily drug-impacted neighborhoods for the police to “do something” about dealing activity.

The most spectacular negative impact of dealing by adolescents is its contribution to deadly violence among them, both directly and through its impact on the acquisition and carrying of firearms. As Professor Polsby points out, the conditions of retail cocaine and heroin dealing in high-crime neighborhoods are

1. DAVID BOYUM, REFLECTIONS ON ECONOMIC THEORY AND DRUG ENFORCEMENT (forthcoming 1997).

such as to make a firearm a necessary tool of the trade.² In addition, the ready money to be made in the illicit drug markets provides the wherewithal for the purchase of expensive guns; the days of zip-guns, or of cheap "Saturday Night Specials," as the preferred weapons of adolescents in poor urban neighborhoods, ended with the advent of the crack trade.³

Once a substantial number of adolescents in a neighborhood are heavily armed, either out of the necessities of the drug trade or merely with drug-derived earnings, others in those same neighborhoods have increased incentive to be wellarmed themselves. The result can be a kind of many-player "arms race."⁴ Competitive escalation in weapons acquisition and carrying will tend to increase the probability that confrontations remote from the drug trade—arising from conflict over possessions, courtship activity, or all the varieties of insults and slights comprehended under the term "dissing" (expression of disrespect)—will lead to deadly violence.

If the appropriate measurements and comparisons could be made, the aggregate damage suffered by heroine and cocaine dealers, especially youthful ones, might be seen to be as great as the aggregate damage suffered by the larger number of cocaine and heroin abusers. That damage is much more concentrated, and falls much more heavily on the poor and on ethnic minorities, than the damage from drug use. In some neighborhoods the prevalence of dealing related damage is extraordinarily high; of black men born in the District of Columbia in 1967, approximately 17% had been arrested for drug distribution before the age of thirty.⁵

All of this damage applies with greatest force to the open retail markets, whether open-air or in specialized "drug houses," selling cocaine (especially in the form of crack) and heroin. The more discreet markets in which marijuana, diverted prescription drugs, and the psychedelics are traded put youthful dealers at much less risk from robbers, competitors, employers, and enforcement authorities. While the suburban high school students who sell marijuana and LSD to one another face significant risks of damage to their life chances, and while persuading some of them not to do so would be useful in reducing the availability of those drugs in suburban high schools, that persuasion effort would not have much impact either on their life expectancies or on their chances of

2. Professor Daniel D. Polsby, Address at the *Valparaiso University Law Review* Conference on Teenage Violence & Drug Use (Nov. 16, 1996).

3. David Kennedy et al., *Youth Violence in Boston: Gun Markets, Serious Youth Offenders, and a Use Reduction Strategy*, 59 *LAW & CONTEMP. PROBS.* 147 (1996).

4. THOMAS C. SCHELLING, *MICROMOTIVES AND MACROBEHAVIOR* 228-29 (1978).

5. PETER REUTER ET AL., *MONEY FROM CRIME: A STUDY OF THE ECONOMICS OF DRUG DEALING IN WASHINGTON, D.C.* 37-38 (1990).

going to prison. Whether it would still be worthwhile to mount such an effort, and how best to do so, are topics for another day.

III. APPROACHES TO REDUCING DEALING PREVALENCE

Purely as a logical matter, there would seem to be three possible approaches to reducing the number of adolescents engaged in cocaine and heroin dealing. One could reduce the opportunities for adolescents in those industries, either by shrinking the total volumes of drugs sold or by inducing dealing entrepreneurs to prefer adults to juveniles as employees. One could improve the alternatives (real or perceived) to dealing. Or one could, even while leaving opportunities and alternatives unchanged, persuade some adolescents not to engage in dealing. Again, there is no *a priori* reason to believe that any of these approaches is feasible, or worth the effort, especially in light of the risk that reducing dealing by one individual or group will create opportunity for others. But we will take them in order, and explore the prospects.

A. Reducing Opportunity

Reduced opportunities for adolescents in the cocaine and heroin trades could result either from smaller markets or from markets with a smaller (relative) role for young people. Both of these options should be considered further.

1. Shrinking the Markets

Two approaches seem to offer hope of shrinking the markets, and especially the open street and drug-house scenes that disproportionately employ juveniles and impose the greatest costs on the dealers and their neighborhoods. The two approaches correspond, roughly, to two segments of the demand side of the drug markets: on the one hand users without established "connections," many of them occasional rather than deeply-committed drug users and many of them suburbanites who drive into inner city areas to "score"; and on the other heavily committed, often addicted, users with good connections, many of them supporting their drug consumption by theft, prostitution, or dealing.

The suburban drive-throughs disproportionately depend on open street markets, whose speed and anonymity appeal to them. Focused market-disruption tactics, aimed at dealers, users, and the physical and social conditions that support efficient retail dealing, have been shown to be capable of driving

a wedge between such users and inner city dealing activity.⁶ This focused crackdown approach is quite different in intent and execution from “street sweeps” of users, dealers, and hangers-on and from the repetitive, undirected use of “buy-and-bust” undercover operations. While sweeps and buy-busts are designed to maximize the number of arrests and convictions, the goal of market disruption is to minimize the number of completed transactions, using as little enforcement capacity as possible in the process. Since much of the harm done by dealing to dealers comes from enforcement, this is an important distinction between market disruption and “sweeps.” This approach will be relevant to preventing juvenile dealing only to the extent the drive-through street markets are important employers of juvenile dealers in a particular area; that extent is likely to vary enormously from place to place, so no general statement can be made about the value of market disruption efforts for this purpose.

Shrinking the volume of drug purchases by more committed users is best accomplished by using some mix of coercion and treatment, directed individually at the large proportion of high-volume users under criminal justice supervision on bail, probation, or parole. Frequent testing and automatic sanctions, supported as needed by treatment services, should be able to shrink substantially the total volume of heroin and cocaine sold.⁷ Again, the relevance of this approach to youthful drug dealing depends on the extent to which juveniles are involved in selling to these steadier customers.

In either case, though, the gain in terms of reduced dealing by juveniles is likely to constitute a relatively small proportion total value of successful efforts, either at market disruption or at shrinking drug consumption by drug-involved offenders. The case for such efforts is much broader than their impact on juveniles. But it could still be true that such efforts are attractive when compared to other approaches to reducing the prevalence of juvenile dealing.

2. Reducing the Role of Juveniles

For any given level of illicit-market activity, the proportion of labor contributed by juveniles may vary. That suggests the other major approach to shrinking opportunity: diminishing the relative importance of teenagers in the dealing labor force. Thoughts about how to shrink the role of juveniles in dealing ought to start with the simple question: Why is that role so great in the

6. See, e.g., DAVID M. KENNEDY, *CLOSING THE MARKET: CONTROLLING THE DRUG TRADE IN TAMPA, FLORIDA* (National Inst. of Justice Program Focus Series, 1993); DAVID M. KENNEDY, *FIGHTING THE DRUG TRADE IN LINK VALLEY* (John F. Kennedy School of Government Case Program C16-90-935.0, 1990).

7. Mark A.R. Kleiman, *Coerced Abstinence: A Neo-Paternalist Drug Policy Initiative*, in *THE NEW PATERNALISM* (Lawrence M. Mead ed., forthcoming 1997).

first place? Why will drug dealers hire people that McDonald's would not touch, often trusting them with cash or valuable drug inventories?

The answer is largely that current laws and enforcement practices have created artificial advantages for juveniles in competing for drug-dealing jobs. Because they are tried and punished as juveniles, they face much smaller risks of punishment than their older neighbors, and are thus presumably willing to take lower wages. Perhaps equally significantly, because they are not at risk of severe imprisonment, juvenile employees of dealing organizations who are arrested are not subject to the pressures their adult counterparts face to "cooperate" with the police in making cases against their associates. Thus, a youthful associate is not only cheaper to hire, he (rarely she) is safer, in terms of the risk of prison. In addition, adolescents may be systematically less afraid of physical risk than adults and thus less deterred by the violence of the street drug trades. This point suggests that reducing the level of violence would tend to shift the age mix of the dealing labor force. Since both the level and the style of enforcement activity can influence the level of violence within the traffic, this factor ought to be taken into account in enforcement planning. The longer the terms imposed on adults, the greater the advantage of hiring juveniles.⁸ Longer adult sentences create this effect in three distinct ways: by increasing the wage gap; by increasing the risk that an adult confederate will inform; and by increasing the consequence of being informed upon.

One attempt to create a countervailing pressure, enhanced sentencing for the use of a minor as an accomplice, is now a feature of federal law and of many state laws as well. But in the federal code especially, the very high base sentences based purely on dealing volume tend to diminish the significance of the "use-a-kid" enhancement. While the "school-zone" enhancement is often charged, because it is so easy to prove, the "use-a-kid" enhancement requires so much additional prosecutorial work, for relatively so little additional time, that it has rarely been employed.

Moving away from a primarily quantity-based sentencing structure and toward one based more on the details of dealing conduct (such as use of violence or employment of minors) is attractive on many grounds, and is probably essential to any serious attempt to shrink the employment opportunities that the illicit markets offer to poor adolescents. But any such move would face opposition from prosecutors, who value both the relative simplicity of proving

8. It may be the case that one effect of the "Rockefeller laws" that increased penalties for retail drug dealing in New York in the mid-1960s was to spur the employment of juveniles in what had previously been a largely adult industry.

quantity rather than conduct and the bargaining leverage created by long mandatory or guideline-based sentences over which prosecutors, rather than judges, have discretion.

B. Improving Alternatives to Dealing

Even if the opportunities provided by dealing were to remain unchanged, the number of adolescents who take up those opportunities would tend to decline if alternatives to dealing—other means to achieve the same ends, or other uses of the same resources, especially time—became, or were perceived as, more attractive than they now are. Dealing provides money, social status and function, excitement, and access to drugs. It also absorbs time, which may appear as a cost if there is something else of value to do with that time or as a benefit if time hangs heavy and needs to be filled to avoid boredom.

One alternative source of money and social status and function is licit work. Insofar as licit jobs, or the careers of which the form parts, are valued, and put at risk in case of arrest and conviction, licit employment also increases the effective cost of dealing activity. Thus, improving licit employment prospects ought, other things equal, to reduce dealing activity.⁹ So should increasing licit wages. There would presumably be some tendency for dealing wages to rise if the illicit labor supply fell, but the net result would still be to make adolescents less competitive with adults for drug-dealing jobs.

Improving job prospects for poor urban teenagers has received considerable attention, both from the viewpoint of encouraging employers to hire them and from the viewpoint of changing the teenagers' mix of skills and attitudes to make them more "employable." Less has been written and done about changing the social status accorded to entry-level employment among those who seek it and those whose opinions they value. One would like to create a situation where teenage boys in drug-impacted neighborhoods would prefer to have their girlfriends see them working at McDonald's to having their girlfriends seeing them dealing rock. But surely the endless repetition of the mantra "dead-end jobs flipping burgers" by those who hope for political action to change job opportunities cannot fail to have some negative impact on the eagerness with which the existing opportunities are grasped. By the same token, it is easy to imagine changes that employers could make—for example, with respect to how their employees are required to dress—that would make the jobs seem less demeaning.

9. *But cf.* REUTER ET AL., *supra* note 5, at 62-77 (displaying evidence that dealing can easily co-exist with even relatively well-paid licit jobs).

All that said, it seems implausible that anything we are likely to do with respect to youth employment will have a major impact on dealing. Perhaps we should regard any such impact as a fortunate side-effect of policies which deserve pursuit for other reasons, rather than as something that could provide a primary justification for such policies.

The same is probably true of making schools more interesting (and safer) places to be. Doing so might reduce somewhat the supply of drug-dealing labor among adolescents, directly by decreasing the drop-out rate and thus the number of adolescents with time on their hands and indirectly by increasing the effective cost of arrest (since arrest is likely to interfere with schooling). But that benefit would be lost somewhere in the rounding error in estimating the total benefit of improving the schools. The impact on youth dealing of changing youth culture in ways that created less demand for display of wealth in the form of clothing and jewelry would be more direct, but ideas about how to do so seem to be quite scarce. (An exception is the much-mocked movement toward school uniforms, which can be enormous money-savers compared to following juvenile fashion trends.) On the other hand, directly competing with drug dealing for the time of potential dealers, especially at peak dealing hours, may offer some real hope. That was one of the ideas behind evening youth sports leagues, an idea that went from being praised for political ends to being vilified for other political ends. It is possible that "midnight basketball" was not a good idea in the first place, or that only very well-designed (and possibly expensive) implementations have any value, but surely it is worth finding out.

C. Persuasion

Considerable effort is expended to prevent potential drug abuse by persuading potential drug users, especially teenagers, not to start using. Both mass media messages and in-school "drug education" efforts are directed at this end, though with mixed results.¹⁰ Yet no comparable effort is directed towards persuading potential dealers in illicit drugs, again especially teenagers, not to start dealing.¹¹

10. See, e.g., J. H. Brown & M. D'Emidio-Caston, *On Becoming At Risk Through Drug Education: How Symbolic Policies and Their Practices Affect Students*, 19 EVALUATION REV. 451 (1995); Phyllis Ellickson & Robert M. Bell, *Drug Prevention in Junior High: A Multi-Site Longitudinal Test*, 24 SCIENCE 1299 (1990); Mary Ann Pentz et al., *A Multicommunity Trial for Primary Prevention of Adolescent Drug Abuse*, 261 JAMA 3259 (1989); J. MICHAEL POLICH ET AL., STRATEGIES FOR CONTROLLING ADOLESCENT DRUG ABUSE (1984); Nancy Tobler et al., *How Effective Is Drug Abuse Resistance Education? A Meta-Analysis of Project DARE Outcome Evaluations*, 9 AM. J. PUB. HEALTH 1394 (1994).

11. "Gang resistance" programs are a partial exception.

No one doubts that behavior depends on attitudes and opinions as well as external circumstances. But application of that truism to policy is curiously uneven. In the area of drug abuse control, change of attitude as a goal and persuasion as a tool have been limited largely to the "demand side" of the market—that is, to actual and potential users. So has service delivery, in the form of drug treatment. By contrast, most of the coercive effort has been directed to dealers, the "supply side." Yet there is no apparent reason to expect that dealers in general are any more deterrable or less persuadable (or for that matter less in need of or capable of benefiting from, and having their behavior improved by services) than users. The neglect of persuasion efforts on the supply side of the illicit markets, and in crime-control policy generally, is quite striking, given the importance of deterrence as a justification for enforcement and punishment and the obvious reality that deterrent effects depend on the beliefs of those whom they are intended to deter.

The absence of anti-dealing persuasion efforts, in the presence of fairly intense anti-drug-abuse persuasion efforts, may help explain what otherwise seems an inexplicable pattern of attitudes: drug dealing is less disapproved of than drug using among some demographic groups in some neighborhoods.¹² Even if our sole concern were for the welfare of the juveniles involved, it would seem odd to restrict drug prevention efforts to the demand side of the drug markets in those neighborhoods where dealing is widespread. Participation in dealing has been shown to be a risk factor for initiation of drug abuse and for progression to more dangerous drugs.¹³ Many young dealers start off not using drugs but eventually begin using drugs after becoming dealers in the illicit drug markets. Given the evidence that personal disapproval of drug use, and perceived disapproval of drug use among peers, constitute important protective factors in drug-taking, it is plausible that low levels of disapproval constitute a risk factor for dealing.

Breaking the link that binds persuasion to the demand side only would allow us to consider what means of persuasion might be useful in changing the attitudes and opinions of actual and potential juvenile participants in drug dealing. Persuasion efforts can be characterized by their targets—the populations on which they are designed to work and the attitudes and opinions sought to be changed—by their messages, and by their means of transmission (mass media, direct communication, indirect communication through reference groups and opinion leaders).

12. TERRY M. WILLIAMS, *THE COCAINE KIDS: THE INSIDE STORY OF A TEENAGE DRUG RING* 10 (1989).

13. RICHARD R. CLAYTON & HARWIN L. VOSS, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES, *YOUNG MEN AND DRUGS IN MANHATTAN: A CASUAL ANALYSIS* 129-56 (1981).

If we examine persuasion efforts directed at reducing drug abuse, we see primarily a mix of mass-media efforts and school-based efforts at direct communication. Less attention has been paid to the possibility of mobilizing adults other than teachers whose views teenagers might care about—their parents, physicians, coaches, clergy, social workers, scout leaders, et cetera—as indirect carriers of appropriately-designed messages, though it may well be the case that informal efforts in this regard are doing much of the real work of drug abuse prevention. Only a little more attention has been given to patterns of opinion leadership among adolescents and the differential importance of changing the minds of opinion leaders and encouraging them to speak out in the desired direction. Indirect communication constitutes much of the content of the “community mobilization” approach that seems to greatly enhance the effectiveness of school-based and media-based approaches.¹⁴ Designing appropriate messages for intermediates to carry, and providing the appropriate training and incentives, represent formidable challenges.

All of these persuasion efforts are characterized by incentive problems among those who organize them and carry them out. While the persuasion effort around product marketing is relatively straightforward to evaluate, with substantial financial rewards for successful practitioners, the anti-drug-abuse persuasion effort is less measurable in its effects and has much weaker links between success and rewards. Much of the effort consists of volunteers, and the financial support comes either from contributions or from the allocation of public funds. This situation gives competitive advantage to targets, means, and especially messages that provide symbolic satisfaction to their organizers and supporters, rather than those that make the greatest positive impact on their intended audiences. Consequently, knowledge of what works in anti-drug persuasion is limited, and has only limited effects on decision-making when it competes with symbolic values; the controversy over the D.A.R.E. program provides one illustration, and the almost complete absence of messages directed at current drug users (rather than potential drug users, or the families and employers of current drug users) provides another. To be sure, the methodological problems of prevention research would be daunting ones even if the motivation to doing it and acting on it were stronger than they are.

Adolescents who might become cocaine and heroin dealers resemble the adults who make drug policy even less than do adolescents who might become problem drug users. The messages optimally designed to appeal to them would therefore in all probability be even further from those which would best please antidrug leaders than is the case for persuasion efforts on the demand side.

14. PHYLLIS L. ELLICKSON & ROBERT M. BELL, PROSPECTS FOR PREVENTING DRUG USE AMONG YOUNG ADOLESCENTS 5-12 (1990).

Thus, one would expect that if anti-dealing persuasion efforts were to be mounted, they would diverge even more sharply from optimality than anti-drug-abuse persuasion efforts.

Conceptually, the design of any persuasion campaign ought to involve the following steps: identifying the target population; learning about their existing behavior, attitudes, and opinions; identifying which sets of attitudes and opinions influence, positively or negatively, undesired behavior patterns; isolating those key attitudes and opinions that could be moved in the desired direction; choosing messages and means of delivery; pilot testing and fine-tuning; implementation; and ongoing monitoring and correction.

For example, it might turn out that juveniles who engage in cocaine and heroin dealing are strongly motivated by money, that their estimates of the amounts of money to be made are significantly inflated, that those estimates could be changed by some mix of messages, and that changing those estimates would change dealing behavior. Or it might turn out that one of these steps does not work (their estimates are correct; their estimates are inflated but hard to deflate; or better information, even if believed, would influence behavior only negligibly) but that working on estimates of risk, or on beliefs about the damage dealing does to neighborhoods, would be more powerful. There are no abstract grounds for judging in advance, and the answers may differ from place to place and time to time. That suggests the need for a research program as a preliminary to a persuasion campaign.¹⁵

One approach that might yield fruit would be an indirect persuasion effort aimed at changing the (non-enforcement) social contingencies around dealing activity by changing the expressed attitudes of those whose good opinion teenage dealers value: adults; peers; and potential dating partners. Again, any such approach would require first an effort to determine whose opinions young dealers care about and then what the current opinions of those groups are and how, and how often and vigorously, they are expressed.

IV. WHY PREVALENCE MATTERS

Retail-level cocaine and heroin dealing are often characterized by large numbers of sellers working part-time, apparently willing to expand their hours if the opportunity to do so arises. This helps explain why the crack trade, for example, has been able to survive, seemingly unimpaired, despite very substantial increases in the arrest and imprisonment of dealers. Under-employed dealers constitute a "reserve army" of dealing labor, so that no labor shortage

15. See *infra* part V.

results when more dealers are imprisoned. The same, presumably, would be true if efforts at persuasion reduced the number of adolescents prepared to work in the illicit drug trade; they would be replaced, and the life of the illicit industry would go on, and the effective availability of the drugs in question would not measurably change. That analysis raises the question of whether any socially useful purpose would be served by such persuasion efforts.

Some of the costs of drug dealing to dealers and others depend only on the total volume of dealing activity and not at all on the number of persons engaging in dealing. The disorder surrounding the street markets would probably be no less if half as many dealers worked twice as many hours each. The same may be true of the violence related directly to the trade: robberies, turf disputes, and "enforcement" actions by dealing organizations against employees. Surely, the impact of dealing on availability and thus on consumption depends on the number of hours worked rather than the number of individuals who work them.

But other costs relate to the *number* of dealers—the prevalence of dealing in the population at risk—rather than the *volume* of activity. A small number of hours of dealing will create sufficient incentive, and provide sufficient cash, to acquire a gun. More hours for an individual may not necessarily lead to additional guns, and in any case one is sufficient. So reducing the number of dealers, even keeping total dealing hours and earnings constant, will tend to reduce the number of guns, and thus the level of deadly violence. Similarly, the number of convictions for dealing is largely a function of the level of dealing activity and the level of enforcement effort, and a relatively small level of dealing activity by any individual will produce a substantial likelihood of a conviction. But much of the damage to future licit opportunities is done by the first felony conviction as an adult; halving the number of persons convicted, leaving the number of convictions unchanged, would lead to less total loss of "human capital." Thus, persuasion efforts directed at those already convicted once might, by creating increased opportunities for novices, have a perverse net effect.¹⁶

V. THE NEED FOR RESEARCH

Given the prevention of drug dealing as a policy goal, a useful first step would be to mount some research into the current attitudes of young people in drug-impacted neighborhoods, and of their neighbors, about dealing and dealers, to supplement the existing journalistic and ethnographic accounts. One source of weakness in existing drug abuse prevention efforts has been the under-investment in what might be thought of as "market research." Given the rapid changes and geographic variations both in youth culture and in the

16. I owe this point to Jonathan Caulkins.

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functioning of the drug markets, such studies need to be done at many sites and repeated frequently. Some of the questions to be addressed might include:

- (1) What is the prevalence of dealing activity observed in a few target neighborhoods? How does it vary by age, birth cohort, and gender? What proportion of those who enter dealing activity remain as casual dealers, move on to more intensive activity, or quit? What proportion of those beginning dealing are naive to the use of the drug they sell? What is their initiation rate to the use of that drug, and what proportion of them progress to heavy use? We can hope to find only tentative and somewhat impressionistic answers to such questions in a preliminary study.
- (2) How is dealing-derived income spent? How much of it is saved or given to others? What is the impact of this income flow on social relationships (e.g., between parents and their dealing-involved children who may be helping with the rent)?
- (3) What are the actual results, and especially risks, of dealing as experienced by a representative population of dealers? What are the conditional probabilities of death, injury, incarceration, and addiction at different levels of dealing activity?
- (4) Whose opinions do dealers and potential dealers value? What do they now believe to be the attitudes of those key reference groups toward dealing activity?
- (5) What are the attitudes of residents of the neighborhoods observed about dealing and dealers? How do they stratify by age, gender, and socioeconomic status? What is the content of the negative attitudes? How are they expressed? What are the correlates of speaking out strongly?
- (6) What are the attitudinal correlates of dealing: both personal attitudes and perceptions of the attitudes of others? To what extent do those attitudes pre-exist dealing activity itself, rather than being the result of engaging in dealing?
- (7) How malleable are the attitudes involved? Are there major gaps between perceptions and verifiable facts that a prevention program could exploit? Examples might include earnings potential, enforcement and injury risk, addiction risk, and actual attitudes of important reference groups such as potential dating partners.

- (8) To what communications channels do actual and potential dealers pay attention? Which might be credible carriers of the relevant messages? With such a research base in hand, one could then proceed to the rest of the development and implementation tasks: design; pilot testing, evaluation, and correction; full-scale roll-out; and ongoing monitoring and modification.

Even with knowledge and resources, it is far from certain that anything very impressive could be done about dealing behavior as long as the level of illicit-market revenues remains as high as it now is. But the prevention of dealing would seem to deserve more attention than it currently receives.