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by

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Drugs and Crime in Anchorage, Alaska: A Note

There is a great deal of evidence that there are “...phenomenally high rates of illegal drug use in the arrested populations...” (MacKenzie and Uchida, 1994:4). Indeed data from the 2003 Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program in Anchorage (see Zhang, et al., 2004) estimates that 66 percent of male arrestees booked into the Anchorage Correctional Complex tested positive for any drug (cocaine, marijuana, opiates, methamphetamine, or PCP). The purpose of this research note is to unpack that figure and examine the rate of drug use by type of drug and offense charged¹.

The research note presents a table from data collected using the ADAM protocol to interview recently arrested men and women (interviewed within 48 hours of arrest) who were booked into the Anchorage Correctional Complex during two week intervals in each of the second and third quarters of 2003². During those two quarterly data collection periods a total of 259 arrestees agreed to be interviewed and provide urine samples that were subsequently tested for the presence of drugs. The analysis is restricted to examining the instance of marijuana or cocaine because these are the predominant drugs detected among the Anchorage arrestee population and other drugs were detected so infrequently³ as to render analysis of the relation between other drugs and crimes meaningless.

While the ADAM data are particularly robust, it is important to note that conclusions drawn from analysis of these data are technically restricted to a particular population—adult arrestees who agreed to fully participate in the ADAM interview and provide a urine sample for testing. Therefore, these findings do not necessarily provide insights into the relation between charged criminal offenses and drug use for other populations (e.g., uncooperative arrestees⁴, juvenile arrestees, or drug/crime correlates for drugs other than marijuana and cocaine).

The table below presents the number and percent of arrestees booked into the Anchorage Correctional Complex who tested positive for either marijuana or cocaine by charged offense. The charged offenses are grouped as either violent, property, or other offenses⁵. The most striking findings are:

¹ The 2003 Annualized report (Zhang, et al., 2004) provides annualized estimates of positive drug test rates by offense category but fails to provide a substantial description of the offense categories.

² Though quarterly data collection occurred during the five year period between 1998 and 2003 it was only during the second and third quarterly 2003 data collection efforts that charged offenses were taken from remand sheets. Prior periods used a different register for charge information which was determined to provide misleading data. Further, ADAM data collection was suspended after the third quarter because NIJ terminated the ADAM program

³ Other drugs tested for include: opiates, 15 arrestees; PCP, 0 arrestees; methamphetamine, 3 arrestees; benzodiazepines, 18 arrestees; Darvon, 2 arrestees; methadone, 4 arrestees; barbiturates, 3 arrestees; amphetamine, 7 arrestees.

⁴ Comparisons of cooperative and non-responsive arrestees in Anchorage suggests that there are no significant demographic or charge differences—see Myrskog and Langworthy (2005).

⁵ Though the subcategories of violence, property, and other offenses are explicated in the table, the numbers of entries in many cells are too few to produce reliable estimates.

- the high incidence of marijuana use in the arrestee population (44 percent of arrestees tested positive for marijuana);
- the consistency in rates of marijuana detection across categories of charges (approximately 45 percent of offenders across all offense types tested positive for marijuana); and,
- the variability in rates of cocaine detection across charge categories (ranging from 20 percent positive for violent offenses to 43 percent positive for property offenses).

**Percent of Arrestees Testing Positive for Marijuana or Cocaine
by Type of Offense, Anchorage, Alaska, 2003**

	Number tested	Marijuana			Cocaine		
		Negative	Positive		Negative	Positive	
		N	N	Percent	N	N	Percent
Violent offenses, total	86	49	37	43.0 %	69	17	19.8 %
Domestic violence	25	14	11	44.0	19	6	24.0
Robbery	4	1	3	75.0	1	3	75.0
Other person	18	14	4	22.2	18	0	0.0
Felony assault	27	14	13	48.1	21	6	22.2
Misdemeanor assault	12	6	6	50.0	10	2	16.7
Property offenses, total	72	40	32	44.4 %	41	31	43.1 %
Burglary	5	1	4	80.0	4	1	20.0
Auto theft	19	11	8	42.1	13	6	31.6
Other property	12	9	3	25.0	10	2	16.7
Shoplifting	8	6	2	25.0	5	3	37.5
Felony theft	20	9	11	55.0	6	14	70.0
Misdemeanor theft	8	4	4	50.0	3	5	62.5
Other offenses, total	221	120	101	45.7 %	160	61	27.6 %
Failure to appear	32	15	17	53.1	23	9	28.1
Contempt of court	16	9	7	43.8	13	3	18.8
Driving—suspended license	31	13	18	58.1	23	8	25.8
DWI	43	27	16	37.2	33	10	23.3
Drug	15	6	9	60.0	9	6	40.0
Public order	17	13	4	23.5	15	2	11.8
Administrative	67	37	30	44.8	44	23	34.3
Total charges	379	209	170	44.9 %	270	109	28.8 %
Total individuals	259	145	114	44.0 %	187	72	27.8 %

Note: These data were compiled from the ADAM project during the second and third quarters of 2003. Charge information was taken from remand sheets and urine samples were tested for presence of marijuana or cocaine. Data were collected and compiled by the University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center through grants from the National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

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