



U.S. Department of Justice

National Institute of Justice

121089

Office of the Director

Washington, D.C. 20531

REMARKS

BY

THE HONORABLE JAMES K. STEWART, DIRECTOR

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE

BEFORE

THE 96TH IACP ANNUAL CONFERENCE
PANEL DISCUSSION ON CRACK COCAINE

NCJRS

JAN 4 1990

ACQUISITIONS

2:00 P.M.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1989

LOUISVILLE COMMONWEALTH CONVENTION CENTER

ROOM 201-202

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

NOTE: Because Director Stewart often speaks from notes, the address as delivered may vary from the prepared text. However, he stands behind these remarks, as printed.

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I welcome the opportunity to be part of this important panel and to share with you some research initiatives that can help in the search for solutions to domestic priority Number One -- controlling illicit drug use and mitigating its devastating effect on neighborhoods and communities.

Crack, in particular -- virtually unavailable and unknown prior to 1984 -- has spread like a virus, appearing at surprising rates across the United States and has led to violence, fear, death, and destruction in large cities and in many suburban and rural areas, as well.

Many police departments trying to cope with victims and fear feel under siege trying to protect their communities. There is tremendous pressure on police to "do something," and police have responded. Police leaders recognize that "doing something" is not the same as "doing anything." Police want and communities need thoughtful, creative approaches that make the best use of our resources.

In presenting the new national drug control strategy to the country in September, President Bush emphasized that the dimensions of the problem require all parts of our society to pull together, clarify what works and what doesn't, and commit the resources and energies needed to do the job. Police are in the vanguard of experimenting with a whole array of strategies, including working productively with other community organizations, to confront and contain the deadly commerce of crack cocaine on our streets.

We know the challenge. But what weapons and tactics should we select to prevail? The National Institute of Justice is where you can look for help and information -- testing and evaluating alternative policies. In fact, 60 percent of NIJ's modest research funds are directed at drug control.

One of the key obstacles is getting intelligence about drug use -- who's doing what, and where they're doing it -- information that can measure interventions and seizures.

Getting hard information has been our biggest challenge. Research has brought us a tool for measuring drug use and the ability to present a quarterly profile on drugs. NIJ's Drug Use Forecasting program, or DUF as we call it, is an objective measure of recent drug use by criminal suspects. DUF uses voluntary, scientific urinalysis, rather than self reports.

DUF test results provide a baseline for measuring drug interventions. For example, the seizure of two tons of cocaine ought to significantly reduce the cocaine level in arrestees. But if coke stays the same over the next three to four months, we know it had little effect. Instead of patting ourselves on the back for the two tons, we may have to roll up our sleeves and seize 20 tons. And then, if the urine positives drop 30 to 60 percent, we know we're really making some progress.

Twenty-two major cities have joined the DUF program, making it a vital network of information that brings into sharper focus the implications of drug use for a host of community concerns -- including future crime, public health and child abuse and neglect. We expect to have a total of 25 sites on line by the end of this year.

Let me briefly explain how the program works. DUF data are collected in each city's central booking facility. Every three months, trained local staff spend ten consecutive evenings obtaining voluntary and anonymous urine specimens and interviews from a new sample of about 200 men who have been arrested. Some cities also obtain smaller samples of female arrestees and juvenile detainees.

Although DUF is voluntary, the response rates are high. Over 90 percent agree to be interviewed. And 80 percent provide a urine specimen. Urine specimens are analyzed by EMIT testing for ten drugs: cocaine, opiates, marijuana, PCP, methadone, Valium, methaqualone, Darvon, barbiturates, and amphetamines. Positive results for amphetamines are confirmed by gas chromatography to eliminate the presence over-the-counter drugs.

Within three months of data collection, NIJ sends each city a machine-readable data file that is, in effect, a unique city profile. How can the DUF profile help you? First, it gives you accurate data on trends and patterns in the use of specific drugs such as cocaine and heroin.

DUF data can also serve as a "leading indicator" of changes in crime rates and other drug-related community problems.

A separate research study now in progress compared trends in arrestee drug use with other indicators of drug use and associated problems in Washington, D.C. The preliminary findings indicate that the arrestee test results improved the ability to predict changes in levels of crime, drug-related overdose death, drug-related emergency room episodes, and child abuse by as much as one year in advance. The test results added forecasting capability over and beyond what examining trends in the community indicators alone provided. And they are an important tool in helping localities in their budget planning process.

What else are we learning through DUF?

Cocaine was found in all cities, while PCP was limited primarily to Washington, D.C. and St. Louis. Amphetamines were limited primarily to San Diego and Portland, Oregon. Opiates (heroin) are found primarily in female arrestees in Washington, D.C., Portland, Oregon, and San Antonio.

Both long and short term trends show dramatic increases in cocaine use including cocaine powder and crack. In most cities, the rise in cocaine has been accompanied by a reduction in the use of other drugs by arrestees. For example, in New Orleans, cocaine use rose from under 40 percent to just under 60 percent in just a year. During the same period, PCP has declined and was found in less than 10 percent of arrestees.

In Manhattan, cocaine use doubled between 1984 and 1986 and has since remained between 65 percent and 85 percent. At the same time, use of opiates, marijuana, and PCP have fallen to their lowest levels.

In San Diego, the rise in cocaine use has not brought about a decline in amphetamines. Use of both these stimulants has risen since 1987, contributing to the city's high rate of drug use among arrestees.

In Washington, D.C., cocaine use has tripled since 1984. Opiates and PCP have declined to their lowest levels since urine testing has been in effect.

I want to emphasize that these are minimal estimates of drug use, because we designed the sample to limit the number of persons charged with sale or possession of drugs. We wanted to be sure that we obtained an accurate picture of the kind of offenses that drug users are being charged with.

NIJ is also developing another new information tool that can help police move against drug dealers and users at the point of purchase. The enormous drug profits of dealers and cartels are fueled by the thousands of small exchanges of dollars for drugs. If we can do a better job of interrupting sales in a systematic way, we can make real inroads.

Soon we will pilot test a system called Drug Market Analysis, or DMA. Five police departments and research groups have been selected in a competitive round, and they will undertake a comprehensive operations and research endeavor.

DMA will computerize all information about drug trafficking, to track the locations of crack hot spots and other drug markets throughout a city or a metro area. Mapping and computer printouts will permit police to locate these hotspots and markets more easily. Police will initiate a variety of strategies, and researchers will evaluate the effects. They also would be able to track when and where displacement occurs, and how long it takes to occur, in different areas. At least one DMA site covers an entire metro area, so we can see displacement across political boundaries.

Each police agency in the area would then know very quickly when and where a new drug problem emerged in its area. An individual police officer on the beat may pick it up right away, but the computer will pick it up aeons faster than the police as an institution would.

A number of police agencies are trying a variety of tactics to make it harder for drug sellers and buyers to do business. In Oakland, California, a special team of six officers and a sergeant did six months of high-intensity enforcement against drug sellers in 20-square-block areas. They used search warrants, surveillance, high-visibility patrolling, buy/busts, stopping and questioning, frisking, the works. The effort produced a high level of arrests for about three and one-half months, a drop-off for about two and one-half months, and then an increase in the sixth month.

In Birmingham, the program involved reverse stings -- to make the crack users accountable for their actions. Police put an officer in the street as a drug dealer, had a videotape running, and made arrests. Our analysis isn't quite done yet, but I should tell you that Alabama has a law that makes solicitation of a purchase a felony. The police don't have to sell drugs to make an arrest; the suspect simply has to ask to buy some. It's similar to the way many places handle prostitution.

The Police Foundation is evaluating these two strategies and will measure their impact in terms of quality of life within neighborhoods and the impact on both the drug dealer and user.

In New York City, crack cocaine has been widely available since 1986. Selling for \$5 to \$20 per rock, street drug traffickers have built thriving businesses. Law enforcement action -- Operation Pressure Point -- against some of the more blatant dealers has caused some retailing to be conducted indoors, from abandoned buildings or apartments. Fortifications have been built by the sellers, making enforcement difficult.

To combat the crack traffickers, the New York Police Department has established the Tactical Narcotics Team -- or TNT. Teams of 117 officers converge on a small area of the city, saturate the area, do buy/busts, and get rid of the drug traffickers. Then people from other city agencies move in, to clean up the area, and to get landlords and businesses to fix up their properties. They try to complete the job in a 90-day period through a cooperative and coordinated approach to quality-of-life issues by police, citizens, and other agencies. Then they move on.

TNT has been operating for the last year or so in Queens, and on Manhattan's Lower East Side. It starts in South Brooklyn in November, and we're funding the Vera Institute of Justice to evaluate it there. They're selecting three neighborhoods -- two to get the treatment, and one to serve as a control.

One thing we want to see in New York is how long the effect lasts after the 90 days. When does the problem re-emerge? When should the police go back in to reinforce the cleanup? How many officers need to be sent back in -- two, fifteen, seventy?

These are important questions that need to be answered. Over the next two years, we should be able to know what works.

One last area I want to mention is the gang problem. Large-scale interstate crack distribution by gangs has been one of the more sensational developments of the 1980s. The California-based Crips and Bloods are said to be "franchising" their operations throughout the country. The Jamaican Shower Posse and other gangs are also moving drugs up and down the Miami-New York corridor.

Some formerly peaceful small towns have, indeed, become havens for unwholesome drug traffickers; mayhem and murder have occasionally accompanied these intrusions by traffickers.

The National Institute of Justice is currently funding Professor Jerome Skolnick of UC Berkeley to examine the spread of crack to Kansas City and Seattle by gang members. The "Crips" and "Bloods" have apparently spread to these cities from Los Angeles and we are interested in determining why and how these gangs have moved to different locations.

Professor Skolnick is conducting interviews of law enforcement officers and administrators and gang members who have been imprisoned. His results will give us information about the characteristics of gang-involved drug markets, the methods of interdiction by police, and will give us an idea of what deters these gangs from drug trafficking. A report will be issued next spring.

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In sum, the latest Gallup Poll shows that Americans now rank drugs as the most important problem facing the Nation. We now have a national consensus that drug use is harmful, ending the moral confusion of the past that contributed to the problems we face today.

Today, we recognize that no single agency or institution can rid our communities of drugs. Enhanced local enforcement is a critical bridge between efforts to halt supplies and the education and treatment components that are basic to our national strategy. The National Institute of Justice will continue to work in partnership with police leaders and organizations to make law enforcement as effective as possible in the fight against drugs.

Thank you.