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## FINAL REPORT

### CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG DISTRIBUTION, AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY (1 R01 DA06615-02)

to the National Institute on Drug Abuse

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This Final Report Consists of:

- Vol. A. Abstract, Highlights, Executive Summary, and List of Publications (Appendix A)
- Vol. B. Eleven publications whose senior authors are Belenko, Dunlap, and Fagan.
- Vol. C. Ten publications whose senior authors are Golub, Johnson, Lewis, and Mieczkowski  
plus six unpublished reports and working papers.

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**ABSTRACT OF FINAL REPORT**  
**CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG**  
**DISTRIBUTION, AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY**

Bruce D. Johnson, Andrew Golub, and Jeffrey Fagan  
National Development and Research Institutes and Rutgers School of Criminal Justice

This research analyzed the impact of crack cocaine upon careers of crack abusers and sellers. Over 1,000 current users of crack, heroin, and cocaine powder were recruited from the streets of northern Manhattan, from jail and prisons, from among arrested but released persons, from those on probation or parole, and from selected drug treatment programs. Key findings are provided in the Executive Summary and project publications listed in Appendix A.

**MAJOR FINDINGS**

- . Virtually all crack users had previously been monthly or more regular users of marijuana, cocaine, and often heroin prior to crack initiation. Crack was not more "instantly addicting" than other drugs. The vast majority of users were daily consumers of crack and often other drugs.
- . Crack sales became the most frequently committed crime and economically valuable drug for sellers. Violence was not linked to crack use but to frequency of selling cocaine and group selling. Women appear to be very similar to their male counterparts when performing the same/similar roles in the cocaine economy. Broader social forces limit economic options/activities of the underclass to crack/drug sales and nondrug crime.
- . The *Crack Era* in New York had an incubation phase (1980-1983), expansion phase (1984-86), plateau phase (1987-89), and appears to be in a decline phase in the early 1990s. Marijuana, but not alcohol, appeared to be a central gateway to hard drug use.
- . Punitive "get tough" policies were routinely imposed on crack sellers/abusers--who were arrested in record numbers in the 1980s. Such responses swept crack sellers/abusers into the criminal justice system, but such resources were not well allocated to the most serious offenders. Criminal justice sanctions may temporarily interrupt careers, but recidivism was not related to severity of punishment.

The findings from this research have important implications for national and state policy as summarized briefly here: Reduce reliance on punitive sanctions. Provide drug treatment for crack and heroin abusers. Begin to address the major social inequalities in American society.

## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FINAL REPORT**

### **CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG DISTRIBUTION, AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY**

Bruce D. Johnson, Andrew Golub, and Jeffrey Fagan  
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This research was designed to analyze the impact of crack cocaine upon the careers of persons who became crack abusers and sellers, document their involvements in violence and criminality, delineate changes in drug eras and drug use/abuse careers, and assess whether criminal justice sanctions affect abuser careers in drug use, drug sales, and nondrug criminality.

Over 1,000 current (in past 30 days) users of crack, heroin, and cocaine powder were recruited from the streets of northern Manhattan, from jail and prisons, from among arrested but released persons, from those on probation or parole, and from selected drug treatment programs. Subjects completed a two-hour interview about their initiation to, frequency of, and careers in crack, other drugs, drug selling, and nondrug crimes. The typical subject was at least (if not more) disaffiliated (e.g. less marriage, less education, greater unemployment) than several comparison groups of arrestees.

The following summary of key findings are delineated in more length in the Executive Summary, and in detail in one book, 20 publications, six working papers, and several presentations and working papers specified in Appendix A.

#### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

- . Crack is cocaine freebase prepared for direct retail sale and consumption. Virtually all crack users had previously initiated and been monthly or more regular users of other drugs--typically marijuana, cocaine, and often heroin--prior to crack initiation, most also had extensive histories of prior drug abuse, drug selling, and nondrug criminality. Crack was not more "instantly addicting" than cocaine powder, heroin, or marijuana.
- . The vast majority of crack users were daily consumers of crack; the largest proportion consumed crack four or more times a day and reported using over \$1,000 per month. Their use of noncrack drugs is often equal to, or greater than, those whose drug use is limited to heroin injection, cocaine snorting, or marijuana consumption.
- . Crack sales, effectively a "new crime" category, emerged suddenly in 1984 and by 1988 became the most frequently committed crime and economically valuable drug for sellers, regardless of their prior drug histories and criminal careers.
- . Crack abusers have generally higher frequencies and cash incomes from nondrug crimes (robbery, burglary, theft, etc.) than do cocaine snorters and marijuana users, but not higher than heroin injectors.
- . Major differences in violence were not evident by drug use patterns. Rather, the frequency of selling cocaine products (either cocaine powder or crack) correlated most strongly with high rates of violence. Persons who sold in groups had higher rates of violence than those who sold by themselves.
- . Among female crack users, sellers reported about two crack sales per day, and occasionally sold cocaine powder, heroin, or marijuana. Higher frequencies and incomes from crack/drug selling were inversely related to prostitution and legal employment. Women appear to be very similar to their male counterparts when performing the same/similar roles in the cocaine economy.

- . The Heroin Era and Cocaine Snorting Eras had a major influence upon initiation to and continued involvements with crack. The *Crack Era* in New York had an incubation phase in 1980-1983, the expansion phase occurred in 1984-86, and the plateau phase occurred 1987-89.
- . The Crack Era may be in a decline phase in the early 1990s, as lower proportions of youths under age 21 appear to be initiating or using crack or cocaine. Those who began during 1984-89 (the Crack Era cohort), however, will likely persist in their use of cocaine or crack in the near future.
- . Alcohol did not appear to serve as a central gateway to further substance use for all of the serious cocaine and heroin users. But marijuana has become such a gateway to hard drug use.
- . A person's birth cohort functioned as an approximate indicator of initiation to serious drug(s) used during a specific drug era and hence as a marker of a generational lifestyle in drug use.
- . Broad social forces limit economic options/activities of the underclass to crack/drug sales and nondrug crime. Crack selling generally attracted persons with less human capital; sellers were largely recruited from a universe of nonworkers who otherwise would not be in the labor force or would be engaged in nondrug crimes.
- . Punitive "get tough" policies were routinely imposed on crack sellers/abusers--who were arrested in record numbers, processed with remarkable efficiency by the courts, imprisoned in jails, bootcamps, or prisons, or placed on probation or parole; they occasionally received treatment during incarceration or in the community.
- . While these responses swept crack sellers/abusers into the criminal justice system, such resources were not allocated to the most serious offenders. The most severe sentences were not reserved for defendants with the most serious charges nor the longest criminal records.
- . While criminal justice sanctions may temporarily interrupt careers, recidivism was not related to severity of punishment. The marginal reduction in rearrest rates for those imprisoned compared to probationers or those not sanctioned at all suggests little utility in the widespread use of incarceration as a crime control measure for crack and drug offenders.

## POLICY OPTIONS

The findings from this research have important implications for national and state policy as summarized briefly here.

- . Reduce reliance on punitive sanctions.
- . Provide drug treatment for crack and heroin abusers.
- . Begin to address the major social inequalities in American society.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
**OF FINAL REPORT**

**CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG DISTRIBUTION,  
AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY**  
**(1 R01 DA06615-02)**

to the National Institute on Drug Abuse

Bruce D. Johnson, Principal Investigator  
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National Development and Research Institutes and  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

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January 12, 1994

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Points of view and opinions do not necessarily reflect the official position of the U.S. Government nor National Development and Research Institutes, Inc. (formerly Narcotic and Drug Research, Inc.), Rutgers University, or the New York City Criminal Justice Agency.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the many contributions to this research made by Steven Belenko, Ko-lin Chin, Eloise Dunlap, Carla Lewis, Christopher Maxwell, and other project staff identified in Appendix B. The support of project officers Mario De La Rosa and Bernard Gropper is greatly appreciated.

**CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG  
DISTRIBUTION, AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINAL REPORT**

**Introduction**

The Final Report of the Careers In Crack, Drug Use, Drug Distribution, And Nondrug Criminality project consists of this Executive Summary, one book, 20 published articles, and several presentations and unpublished reports produced during this research. This Executive Summary is intentionally kept short and is written to be of interest to policy makers who will rarely have time to obtain or read the scientific papers appended. This summary also does not attempt to summarize individual publications; rather it is organized according to major themes of greatest policy relevance. The Executive Summary provides extensive citation to relevant project documents; each specific product contains extensive citations to other non-project literature.

**Project History**

In January 1987, Drs. Fagan and Johnson submitted an application to the National Institute of Justice, which was subsequently funded in October 1987 (with supplemental funding provided in 1988), to study, "Changing Patterns of Drug Abuse and Criminality Among Crack Cocaine Users" (henceforth referred to as the *Crack-Crime* project).<sup>1</sup> Data collection occurred mainly between August 1988 and September 1989. In late 1989, Johnson (Principal Investigator) and Fagan (Co-Investigator) submitted an application to the National Institute on Drug Abuse which was funded in March 1991, "Careers In Crack, Drug Use, Drug Distribution, And Nondrug Criminality" (henceforth the *Careers In Crack* project). The latter project was entirely a secondary analysis of data from the Crack-Crime project. Although two projects were funded by two different agencies, this Executive Summary and Final Report includes products from both projects because they had the same theoretical/intellectual foundations, methodology, and key staff. The project spans a six-year period (October 1987 to December 1993). Appendix A lists all completed and emergent products. All publications and unpublished papers nearing publication are included in this Final Report package). Approximately six products (currently unpublished but in-review) will be published in 1994-95. Appendix B acknowledges the various contributions to these projects made by different staff members.

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<sup>1</sup>See final report by Fagan et al. 1990.

## The Crack Problem

When crack was labeled as such by the *New York Times*,<sup>2</sup> a new wave of hysteria about drug abuse was ushered in. During 1986, more articles about crack were published about one drug than ever before, all forecasting a dire prognosis for the future of crack users.<sup>3</sup> In New York City, thousands of persons selling crack suddenly appeared on the streets, and in most neighborhoods of the city. Through anecdotal information, crack was linked to violence, many forms of crime, escalation in drug abuse, child abuse and neglect, prostitution, and other related urban ills.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, public pressure mounted on politicians to stop crack sellers and crack abusers.

No one, however, had any solid evidence or information about crack or its impact upon individuals. Almost all information came from police cases and anecdotal information collected by reporters. In 1986, few careful epidemiological or ethnographic studies were collecting data on crack and crack abusers. Moreover, almost no one was studying crack sellers.<sup>5</sup>

A seemingly endless supply of (nearly) absurd assertions were being made, were widely believed,<sup>6</sup> but could neither be supported nor rejected due to the absence of appropriate scientific data. Crack was believed to be instantly addictive and thus was much worse than heroin or cocaine powder. It converted "drug innocent" persons into compulsive crack smokers. Crack use was thought to lead to robbery and violent crime. Women became prostitutes to support their crack use. Juveniles were being enticed into crack sales and addiction. Persons were becoming fabulously wealthy selling crack. Persons dropped full-time jobs to become crack sellers. Crack gangs were controlling neighborhoods of the city.

The Crack-Crime and Careers In Crack research projects were designed to provide information about such assertions, and provide a more systematic analysis of how crack impacted upon lives, both those who abused crack and those who avoided crack but used or abused similar drugs (specifically heroin and cocaine powder).

## The Career Concept in Drug Abuse and Criminality

Although the concept of careers has a long tradition in social science research, this research was strongly influenced by the (then) newly released National Academy of Sciences report.<sup>7</sup> This report conceptualized *criminal careers* as: longitudinal sequences of involvement(s) with various types

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<sup>2</sup>Brody 1985; Belenko 1993:30-31.

<sup>3</sup>Belenko 1993; Reinerman and Levine 1989.

<sup>4</sup>Belenko 1993; Belenko, Nickerson, Rubenstein 1990; Reinerman and Levine 1989.

<sup>5</sup>This was also true in 1989, Holden 1989. Major scientific studies on crack began to appear in the 1990s: *Contemporary Drug Problems* 1989, 1990; Ratner 1992; Hser and Anglin 1993; Inciardi, Lockwood, Pottieger 1993.

<sup>6</sup>Belenko 1993; Belenko, Nickerson, Rubenstein 1990.

<sup>7</sup>Blumstein et al. 1986.

of behaviors that violate penal law (especially those referred to below as nondrug crimes.<sup>8</sup>) In a parallel fashion, an individual may have a *drug career* involving longitudinal sequences in drug use and abuse, or have a *drug distribution career* in drug sales or related distribution roles.<sup>9</sup> Four key dimensions help understand behaviors: a) initiation to the activity, b) seriousness of offenses committed, drugs used, and personal or social consequences of use, c) frequency of offending or use, and d) career length. The careers of drug sellers and abusers can be described according to these dimensions. Likewise, the drug use, drug distribution, and nondrug criminal careers of crack abusers can be contrasted with heroin abusers, and cocaine snorters to ascertain whether they have similar or different initiation patterns, seriousness, frequencies, or shorter (longer) careers.

Another central construct guiding this research is that a specific drug may become very popular at a given period of history (called a *drug era*--see p. 9 below), during which large numbers of persons initiate its use within a few years and become regular users/abusers. Persons initiating and becoming regular users during that drug era may have different drug careers (e.g. use patterns and frequencies) and criminal histories than persons who begin its use several years later. This study found that the Crack Era was decisively effected by the prior Heroin Era and Cocaine Snorting Era.

### **Impact of Criminal and Other Sanctions on Drug and Criminal Careers**

Since the 1960s, the government's primary response to drug use and abuse has involved criminal justice sanctions including the imposition of sentences to probation, jail, or prison. As several project papers document,<sup>10</sup> societal response to crack was swift, quite certain, very punitive, and involved many thousands of cocaine abusers and sellers. The central question, however, is whether the criminal justice system was able to distinguish severity of use among users and sellers, and whether or not different punishments reduced recidivism or effected subject's careers in drug abuse, drug sales, and nondrug criminality.

### **SPECIFIC AIMS**

This research was designed to accomplish four general aims:

- A. Develop appropriate methodologies to locate, recruit, and conduct interviews with crack abusers and comparison groups of heroin abusers, cocaine snorters, marijuana users, and nondrug users.
- B. Describe the demographic characteristics, drug use and distribution histories, and nondrug criminality of crack abusers and comparison groups.

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<sup>8</sup>This includes criminal offenses such as robbery, burglary, larceny, assault, rape, prostitution, etc.--but excludes drug-related crimes such as sales or possession of various illicit drugs or the possession of drug-taking paraphernalia.

<sup>9</sup>Several types of non-selling roles in drug distribution networks are defined in Johnson et al. 1985:61-72; Johnson, Hamid, Sanabria 1991.

<sup>10</sup>Belenko, Fagan, Chin 1991; Belenko 1993; Fagan 1994b; Johnson et al. 1990.



C. Document the impact of crack use and abuse upon careers of drug use, drug distribution, and nondrug criminality, with a special emphasis upon criminal violence.

D. Document societal response to crack abusers in New York City, and document the impact of various criminal justice sanctions on criminal and drug use careers of crack and other drug abusers.

## METHODOLOGY<sup>11</sup>

Crack abusers, like heroin abusers and cocaine snorters, especially those who use monthly or a more frequent basis, have proven hard to locate and recruit using standard household interviewing techniques. Thus, project staff refined street recruitment strategies developed in prior research<sup>12</sup> with heroin and cocaine abusers. While it may be possible to operationally define a *phenomena* of interest (e.g. crack abuse is the regular use of crack in the past 30 days), locating and recruiting *persons* who engage in the defining behavior is difficult. Moreover, several different defining behaviors were to be sampled (e.g. crack abuse, heroin abuse, cocaine snorting, marijuana use, etc.) and the same subject could easily engage in all such behaviors. Staff needed to recruit from an ill-defined population.<sup>13</sup> The project strategy enabled recruiting subjects from a variety of institutional settings with multiple starting points, varying the times for interview, and setting quotas to ensure heterogeneity (by sex, ethnicity, drug abuse patterns, criminal behaviors, and degree of supervision).

During almost three-quarters of a year, staff engaged in an artistic blending process to prepare an interview schedule which reflected the theoretical and analytic plans of the investigators, but was worded clearly for the target population.<sup>14</sup> Ex-addict and "straight" interviewers were trained and carefully supervised, and field sites were organized to provide psychological safety to interviewees and physical safety to interviewers. While recruiting subjects, interviewers had to blend into different neighborhoods, locate likely subjects, ask a few screening questions, and when appropriate, bring the person to an interview site. The interview schedule took an average of 1-2 hours to complete, requiring the interviewer to maintain the subject's interest during many repetitive questions. Subjects were paid \$25 for their cooperation and time. Many subjects were encouraged to subsequently refer friends for interviews (chain-referrals and snowball sampling with different starting points).

Subjects (N=1,003) were recruited from several settings where large numbers of crack and other drug abusers were typically found:<sup>15</sup> 1) streets of Harlem and Northern Manhattan (n=408), 2) arrested but released persons (n=132), 3) jail inmates (n=101), 4) probationer and parolees (n=78), 5) prison inmates (n=135), and 6) drug treatment clients (n=149). These groups represented

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<sup>11</sup>This section is drawn from two project reports: Lewis et al. 1992; Dunlap et al. 1990. Also see Williams et al. 1992 about how project staff maintained personal safety in dangerous places and neighborhoods while studying some of society's most deviant persons. Also see Manwar, Dunlap, Johnson 1993.

<sup>12</sup>Johnson et al. 1985; Sanchez and Johnson 1986.

<sup>13</sup>Lewis et al. 1992.

<sup>14</sup>Dunlap et al. 1990.

<sup>15</sup>Lewis et al. 1992.

different gradations of intervention efforts by society to impact upon the careers of drug abusers and criminals ranging from none (group 1) to the most severe (group 5) interventions. Two-thirds of the subjects were males, 64 percent were black, 29 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent white, 81 percent were high school dropouts, 65 percent were never married, 75 percent were unemployed, and only 16 percent claimed full time jobs.

The sample of drug abusers interviewed was not a representative sample of a known or definable population. The demographic characteristics of these subjects, however, were compared with and found to be quite similar to other known populations (arrestees, DUF subjects). If anything, these subjects were at least (if not more) disaffiliated (e.g. less marriage, less education, greater unemployment) as several comparison groups from the criminal justice system. Clearly the project was able to interview hundreds of persons who were among the most frequent users of crack and other hard drugs, and whose behaviors reflected the wide heterogeneity in careers of drug use/abuse, drug distribution, and nondrug criminality.<sup>16</sup>

The two-hour interview schedule obtained detailed data about demographic characteristics, age at initiation and first regular involvements, frequencies for each year 1984-89, most recent involvements, contacts with criminal justice and treatment systems, group selling, gang membership, participation in violence, income and expenditures before and after crack initiation, and a variety of other information.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS ABOUT CRACK ABUSERS AND OTHER DRUG USERS**

The results of this research address several central policy questions:

### **What is crack?**

Crack is cocaine freebase prepared for direct retail sale and consumption. Crack is a New York City term which has been adopted by the media. The term "rock" is commonly used in Miami, Los Angeles, and other major metropolitan areas. Crack can only be smoked (by heating the chunks in a pipe and inhaling the fumes), it cannot be snorted or injected like cocaine hydrochloride (powder). The consumer does not have to "prepare," "cook," or "base" cocaine powder into freebase, but rather buys the freebase already prepared. Several project publications<sup>17</sup> provide extensive documentation about crack and its social history in New York City and America.

### **Who became crack users?**

By the project's design, the vast majority (75 percent) of the Careers in Crack subjects reported ever trying crack. Virtually all crack initiates had previously initiated and been monthly or more regular users of other drugs--typically marijuana, cocaine, and often heroin--prior to crack

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<sup>16</sup>Lewis et al. 1992; Fagan and Chin 1990, 1991.

<sup>17</sup>Johnson, Hamid, Sanabria 1992:58-59; Fagan and Chin 1990, 1991:387, 1989:579-581; Johnson et al. 1990:16. Belenko 1993 devotes chapter 4 to describing crack and its effect on users.

use.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, a majority of crack abusers had extensive histories of prior drug abuse, drug selling, and nondrug criminality prior to crack initiation.<sup>19</sup> Respondents were older (average of 26.5 years) at initiation of crack use, compared to their initiation to cocaine or heroin (about age 19). Very few crack users (about 1 percent) reported that crack was the first illicit drug they had ever tried;<sup>20</sup> thus, almost no previously "drug naive" persons began their drug careers with crack.

#### **Was crack initiation different than initiation to other drugs?**

No significant differences among those involved in crack, cocaine powder, or other drugs were found in the location, motivation, or method of introduction to their new drug.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, initiates to crack did not differ significantly from initiates to cocaine powder or other drugs, especially when other factors were held constant (e.g. socioeconomic background, arrest histories, and attributes of arrest charges.)<sup>22</sup> Crack was not more "instantly addicting" than cocaine powder, heroin, or marijuana.<sup>23</sup>

#### **How often do crack users consume crack?**

By design, 65 percent of these subjects reported using crack ten or more times in their lifetime (the operational criteria for classifying someone as a crack user in this study). Half of all subjects had used crack over 100 times, and 14 percent reported using it over 1,000 times.<sup>24</sup> Among persons reporting over 100 uses of crack, over 80 percent were daily users of crack.<sup>25</sup> Except for heroin injectors who reported using crack less than 100 times, the vast majority of crack users were daily consumers of crack; the largest proportion of these used it four or more times a day and reported using over \$1,000 per month.<sup>26</sup> Such high daily levels of crack consumption and high dollar amounts consumed clearly justifies the term "crack abusers." Among crack abusers, their crack consumption greatly exceeds the cost and frequency of the other drugs they also use.<sup>27</sup> Their use of crack was much greater (both in frequency and dollar amount) than the amounts of heroin consumed by heroin users, or the cocaine powder consumed by cocaine snorters.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Fagan and Chin 1991; Golub and Johnson 1994b.

<sup>19</sup>Fagan and Chin 1991.

<sup>20</sup>Golub and Johnson 1994b.

<sup>21</sup>Fagan and Chin 1991:327

<sup>22</sup>Fagan and Chin 1989:605.

<sup>23</sup>Fagan and Chin 1991:327.

<sup>24</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:120; also see Johnson, Elmoghazy, Dunlap 1990 for more detailed data on crack use levels.

<sup>25</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:123,135.

<sup>26</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:136.

<sup>27</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:129.

<sup>28</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:135-6.

**How does the drug use of crack abusers compare with other drug users?**

Crack abusers are using most drugs at high frequencies and cost. Their use of noncrack drugs is often equal to or greater than, those whose drug use is limited to heroin injection, cocaine snorting, marijuana consumption.<sup>29</sup> One important exception exists: Heroin users inject heroin at much higher levels than persons who are primarily crack abusers or cocaine snorters. But even among heroin users, a split has occurred. About half remain committed heroin injectors and occasionally use crack (but less than 100 times). Another half of the heroin injectors appear to be more active as crack consumers and to have somewhat diminished heroin use patterns.<sup>30</sup>

**Are crack abusers more involved in drug distribution than other drug users?**

Crack abusers are significantly different from other drug users subgroups and generally have the highest proportions involved in, and receiving high incomes from drug sales. By 1988, crack had become the most frequently sold and lucrative drug in the street drug market.<sup>31</sup> Crack abusers sell more frequently and obtain higher incomes from crack sales than other user groups. Nevertheless, substantial proportions of heroin users, cocaine snorters, and marijuana users, engage in crack sales and earn higher incomes from selling crack than from their sales of other drugs. Crack sales generate higher cash incomes than the sale of heroin, cocaine powder, marijuana, or the commission of nondrug crimes.<sup>32</sup> Crack sales, effectively a "new crime" category, emerged suddenly in 1984 and by 1988 had become the most frequently committed crime and economically valuable drug for sellers, regardless of their prior drug histories and criminal careers.<sup>33</sup>

**Are crack abusers more involved in nondrug criminality than other drug users?**

Crack abusers have generally higher frequencies and cash income from nondrug crimes (robbery, burglary, theft, etc.) than do cocaine snorters and marijuana users. But crack abusers and heroin injectors have similar frequencies of and incomes from such crimes.<sup>34</sup> Overall, the advent of crack did not appear to have substantially increased offenders' rates of committing most forms of nondrug criminality,<sup>35</sup> with one significant exception. Women who engaged in prostitution prior to crack use, tended to substantially increase their frequency of prostitution.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:129.

<sup>30</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:123.

<sup>31</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:129; Fagan 1992.

<sup>32</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:129.

<sup>33</sup>Johnson et al. 1990:40.

<sup>34</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:129.

<sup>35</sup>Fagan 1992:131-137.

<sup>36</sup>Chin and Fagan 1990b; Maxwell and Fagan 1994ab; Fagan 1994a.

### **What were the links between crack use and violence?**

Two major themes emerged. First, processes of self and social-selection were very important. Persons without histories of violence (robberies and assaults) before they began crack use rarely initiated such behaviors after they became regular crack users. On the other hand, persons with histories of violence before crack were likely to continue such behaviors after crack initiation<sup>37</sup>--they were also likely to become involved in crack sales and distribution roles. By 1988, crack abusers and noncrack drug users were equally unlikely to commit aggravated assault and rape. Crack abusers were only somewhat more likely to report committing robbery than other drug abusers.<sup>38</sup> Overall, major important differences in violent crimes were not evident according to the person's drug use pattern.

### **What were the links between crack/drug sales and violence?**

Involvement in drug selling and distribution roles was more conclusively associated with various measures of violence (robbery of persons, businesses, shootings, stabbings, fighting, injuring someone, being injured by others). Nonsellers of any drug had much lower levels of violence than persons with some selling experience.<sup>39</sup> Among sellers, two key factors were systematically associated with the highest rates of violence. The frequency of selling cocaine products (either cocaine powder or crack) correlated most strongly with high rates of violence. Likewise, persons who reported selling in groups had higher levels of violence than those who sold by themselves.<sup>40</sup> Evidently, participation in a well-organized drug-selling group was strongly associated with involvement in violence in a variety of circumstances and contexts for both men and women.<sup>41</sup> Drug selling (especially cocaine products) was etiologically related to violence, but only because violence was intrinsic to drug selling. It is more likely that drug selling provides a context that facilitates violence because it is a mechanism for enforcing power given the illegal nature of drug selling and the absence of other forms of legal recourse or social control.<sup>42</sup>

### **How has crack affected women?**

The advent of crack shifted the hard drug scene. Females constituted about a quarter of the heroin users and injectors. This proportion increased to a third or more among cocaine and crack users.<sup>43</sup> Drug incomes and expenses dominated the economic lives of women in this crack economy.

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<sup>37</sup>Johnson et al. 1990:35; Fagan and Chin 1990.

<sup>38</sup>Johnson et al. 1994:139.

<sup>39</sup>Fagan and Chin 1990:30-1; Fagan 1994a:199.

<sup>40</sup>Fagan and Chin 1990:27; Fagan 1994a:199.

<sup>41</sup>Fagan and Chin 1990:30; Fagan 1994a:199.

<sup>42</sup>Fagan and Chin 1990:36.

<sup>43</sup>Fagan 1994a:198.

Women were extensively involved in both drug selling and nondrug crimes as part of diverse income generating strategies.<sup>44</sup> Most women did not have legal work, although several reported welfare and transfer payments. Prostitution, property crimes, and assaults increased with the frequency of crack and cocaine use.<sup>45</sup>

The roles that women performed in the crack business shifted somewhat. Among female subjects (N=311), about a third reported more than 50 drug sales during the prior three years. About half of these sellers functioned as independent freelance sellers, while the others participated within groups of sellers.<sup>46</sup> Such female crack sellers reported about two crack sales per day, and occasionally sold cocaine powder, heroin, or marijuana. Higher frequencies and incomes from crack and drug selling were inversely related to prostitution and legal employment.<sup>47</sup> Some women constructed careers in illegal work (especially as independent sellers) that insulated them from exploitation that characterized heavy cocaine and crack use. Although prostitution was a common role for many women, some women achieved high incomes from selling and their diverse roles in the cocaine economy.<sup>48</sup> Although gender differences remained evident, male-female differences were relatively unimportant (and often not statistically significant) when other factors measuring participation in drug use, drug sales, and nondrug criminality were held constant.<sup>49</sup> In short, women appear to be very similar to their male counterparts when performing the same/similar roles in the cocaine economy.

## DRUG ERAS AND CAREERS IN DRUGS AND CRIME

Individual careers with drug use and sales have been substantially impacted and even defined by the various drug eras which have occurred since 1960. A *drug era* is a time bound, socio-historical period in which a new drug or innovative mode of use is introduced and adopted by large numbers of persons and its use becomes institutionalized within a segment of the population.<sup>50</sup> The Heroin Era and Cocaine Snorting Eras had a major influence upon initiation to and continued involvements with crack.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Fagan 1994a:179.

<sup>45</sup>Fagan 1994a:179. Also see Ratner 1992; Inciardi, Lockwood, Pottieger 1993.

<sup>46</sup>Fagan 1994a:198; Johnson, Hamid, Sanabria 1991.

<sup>47</sup>Fagan 1994a:179.

<sup>48</sup>Fagan 1994a:179.

<sup>49</sup>Fagan and Chin 1990, 1991; Golub, Johnson, Hossain 1993.

<sup>50</sup>Johnson 1991:24; Johnson and Manwar 1991; Golub and Johnson, 1992b, 1993c, 1994b.

<sup>51</sup>The important marijuana era (1965-1979) also had a major impact on individual careers. For a short period (1981-84) cocaine freebasing was popular in New York City, but was effectively a forerunner to the crack era described below (Johnson et al. 1990; Hamid 1992a, 1994).

The *Heroin Era* in New York City occurred primarily from 1965 to 1973.<sup>52</sup> Many adolescents, especially in low income neighborhoods, initiated heroin use, became regular and intravenous users of heroin (they often mixed heroin with cocaine powder and injected it as a "speedball"). After 1974, very few youths initiated heroin use. A substantial proportion of those who initiated heroin use during the Heroin Era persisted as primary heroin abusers during the subsequent 20 years and form the current core of heroin abusers in New York City in the 1990s.<sup>53</sup> Heroin sales by heroin abusers became commonplace during this era and the following two decades.<sup>54</sup> Many heroin abusers gathered at shooting galleries, where they bought/rented needles, shared drugs and syringes with others, and socialized.<sup>55</sup>

The *Cocaine Snorting Era* occurred primarily between 1975-1984 in New York City.<sup>56</sup> Large numbers of persons initiated and became regular cocaine snorters during this period.<sup>57</sup> Only after 1985 was some evidence of a decline in cocaine use and initiation recorded in the general population.<sup>58</sup> Especially in inner-city New York, large numbers of low income youths initiated cocaine snorting, but avoided intravenous use of cocaine (and heroin).<sup>59</sup> Many marijuana sellers and cocaine snorters began selling and helping distribute cocaine through loose networks of suppliers and distributors.<sup>60</sup> Cocaine snorting was a common-place activity at parties in apartments, homes, bars, and afterhours clubs.<sup>61</sup> Around 1985, many New York inner-city cocaine users, however, shifted to or added crack.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Johnson et al. 1985, 1990; Johnson 1991; Johnson and Manwar 1991; Johnson and Muffler 1992; Golub and Johnson 1994ab.

<sup>53</sup>Persons born 1948-1955 and who reached age 18 in 1965-73 were the primary group of heroin abusers among the crack-crime subjects (Golub and Johnson 1994b). Among arrestees interviewed by the Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) program in Manhattan during 1987-92, arrestees born 1950-54 had the highest proportion of opiate positive (35 percent), self reporting any lifetime heroin use (59 percent), and reporting any intravenous heroin use (46 percent). DUF-Manhattan arrestees born 15 years later (1965-69) were a third less likely to be opiate positive (14 percent), or to self-report lifetime heroin use (21 percent) or injection use (10 percent)--Johnson, Golub, Hossain 1993.

<sup>54</sup>Johnson et al. 1985; Johnson, Golub, Hossain 1994 suggest that a modest decline in detected heroin use among DUF-Manhattan subjects was due primarily to reduced proportions of arrestees coming from the Heroin Era cohort (persons who used heroin born in the 1950s and before).

<sup>55</sup>Johnson et al. 1985; Des Jarlais et al. 1988.

<sup>56</sup>Sanchez and Johnson 1986; Johnson et al. 1990; Johnson 1991; Johnson and Manwar 1991; Johnson and Muffler 1992; Williams 1978; Williams and Kornblum 1985; Hamid 1992a, 1994.

<sup>57</sup>Morales 1989; Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman 1992; SAMHSA 1993; Waldorf, Reinerman, Murphy 1991.

<sup>58</sup>Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman 1993; SAMHSA 1993; Waldorf, Reinerman, Murphy 1991.

<sup>59</sup>Hamid 1992a; Williams 1978; Williams and Kornblum 1985; Bourgois 1989.

<sup>60</sup>Adler 1985; Williams 1989; Hamid 1992ab, 1994.

<sup>61</sup>Hamid 1992ab, 1994; Williams 1978; Johnson et al. 1990.

<sup>62</sup>Golub and Johnson 1994b; Johnson et al. 1990; Johnson 1991; Johnson and Manwar 1991; Johnson and Muffler 1992; Johnson, Golub, Hossain 1993, 1994.

## THE CRACK ERA

A major contribution of the Careers in Crack research has been to extensively document the nature of the *Crack Era*,<sup>63</sup> and examine how involvement in prior drug eras impacted upon individual careers in drug abuse and criminality.

**The incubation phase.** During 1980-1983, large numbers of cocaine snorters sought various ways to obtain pure cocaine, usually by changing suppliers. But a few persons, usually cocaine sellers, explored freebasing and smoking. Initially these sellers had little success in persuading customers to try cocaine smoking.<sup>64</sup> Among subjects who were crack users at their crack-crime interview in 1988-89, a minority had begun freebasing by 1982, a quarter injected cocaine (usually with heroin as a speedball), and 17 percent had begun cocaine snorting by 1982.<sup>65</sup> During each quarter 1980-1982, less than one percent<sup>66</sup> reported initiating crack (or freebase sold at retail), a figure that was above one percent in 1983.

**The expansion phase.** Probably for reasons having to do with the difficulties experienced by sellers in making profits while freebasing cocaine,<sup>67</sup> New York sellers began placing pre-prepared freebase in perfume 'vials' for retail sale. The purchaser only needed to place the chunks of freebase in a pipe, heat it, and inhale the fumes. Among persons who were crack users at interview in 1988-9, above two percent per quarter initiated crack in 1984, about five percent initiated per quarter in 1985, and about seven percent per quarter in 1986. While less than a tenth had initiated crack prior to 1984, two-fifths had done so by the end of 1985, and two-thirds had done so by the end of 1986.<sup>68</sup> The modal and median date of crack initiation was July 1986.<sup>69</sup> Persons who had freebased by 1982 had initiated crack by July 1985, and 1982 cocaine snorters initiated crack about January 1986.<sup>70</sup> In many ways, drug abuse intensified during the crack era when heroin and cocaine abusers added crack to existing patterns of use from prior eras.<sup>71</sup>

**The plateau phase.** Almost all existing drug users who would initiate crack use had done so by mid-1987,<sup>72</sup> but most of these continued to be very active daily crack users; a sizable proportion

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<sup>63</sup>Golub and Johnson 1993c provides a model which incorporates key concepts from epidemiology and criminal career models (Blumstein et al. 1986).

<sup>64</sup>Hamid 1992a, 1994; Williams 1978.

<sup>65</sup>Golub and Johnson 1992a.

<sup>66</sup>Of those subjects who had begun crack use at their interview in 1988-89.

<sup>67</sup>Hamid 1992a, 1994; Williams 1989; Johnson, Hamid Sanabria 1991.

<sup>68</sup>Johnson, Lewis, and Golub 1992:368; Golub and Johnson 1994ab. Because interviews were conducted in 1988-89, these data are right censored; several more persons may have initiated crack in 1989-93 but cannot be estimated by these data.

<sup>69</sup>Johnson, Lewis, and Golub 1992; Golub and Johnson 1992a.

<sup>70</sup>Golub and Johnson 1992b, 1994b.

<sup>71</sup>Johnson et al. 1990, 1994; Fagan 1992.

<sup>72</sup>Golub and Johnson 1992b, 1994b. Also see note 68.



were also sellers.<sup>73</sup> More recent analyses of DUF-Manhattan data suggest that youths continued to initiate and become current cocaine and crack users until the end of 1989.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, arrestees born in 1968 and who reached age 18 in 1986 (at the peak year for initiation) were the most likely (78 percent) to be cocaine positive at arrest among all the birth years. In short, the mature years of the Crack Era lasted from 1986-89.

**The decline phase.** Among DUF-Manhattan youthful (under age 21) arrestees, a remarkable shift away from cocaine has been occurring. Among such youthful arrestees, cocaine detected by urinalysis declined from 69 percent in 1987 to 51 percent in 1989, to 25 percent in 1991, and to 17 percent in the first quarter of 1993.<sup>75</sup> Detailed analysis showed particularly sharp declines in cocaine detected in the fourth quarter of 1989 and second quarter of 1990. Among arrestees born 1975 and after, ten percent or less are detected as cocaine positive at arrest.<sup>76</sup> This suggests a spectacular decline in the proportion of youths (reaching age 18 in the 1990s) becoming habitual users of cocaine or crack; this is particularly evident among those who commit crime and sustain arrests.

Unfortunately, arrestees born in 1967-71 and who reached age 18 during 1985-89 continue to have very high proportions (about 60 percent) cocaine positive at arrest.<sup>77</sup> This suggests that the Crack Era cohort will likely persist in their use of cocaine or crack in the near future, possibly even beyond the year 2000.

#### **Changing pathways to hard drugs and crack.**

Of key importance in drug abuse prevention and control are the developmental pathways from nondrug use as a youth, through the use of alcohol and marijuana, and leading to the possibility of hard drug use. Almost all previous research has examined such pathways among youths in the general population. Rarely have the drug pathways of serious drug abusers, such as crack abusers, been examined. Unlike prior research, alcohol did not appear to serve as a central gateway to further substance use for all of the serious cocaine and heroin users in the crack-crime study; many claimed to be alcohol abstainers despite daily heroin or crack use.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, marijuana remained a key gateway substance for nearly all subjects who became abusers of hard drugs.<sup>79</sup>

Prior research has not documented the pathways to crack (since few studies obtain a sufficient sample of crack users).<sup>80</sup> This project used a Markov model to identify three primary pathways to

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<sup>73</sup>Johnson et al. 1994; Johnson, Elmoghazy, Dunlap 1990; Fagan 1992.

<sup>74</sup>Golub and Johnson 1993b.

<sup>75</sup>Golub and Johnson 1993b.

<sup>76</sup>Golub and Johnson 1993b.

<sup>77</sup>Golub and Johnson 1993b. If persons arrested in the 1980s desisted from cocaine use in the 1990s and avoided arrest, such persons would probably not be included among DUF-Manhattan arrestees. Perhaps only those in this Crack Era cohort who remained daily cocaine abusers were likely to be arrested.

<sup>78</sup>Golub and Johnson 1994a.

<sup>79</sup>Golub and Johnson 1994a.

<sup>80</sup>This paragraph based upon Golub and Johnson 1994b.

crack: 1) a direct pathway from alcohol or marijuana to crack without intermediate use of cocaine powder or intravenous drug use; 2) a pathway involving cocaine snorting; 3) a pathway involving both cocaine snorting and intravenous (mainly heroin) drug use. A strong association was found between the most common pathways and birth cohort. A clear majority of persons born in the 1950s and earlier had followed the injection pathway; they had participated in the Heroin Era and likely continued heroin abuse until crack arrived in the mid-1980s.

Persons born 1958-1962, came of age during the Cocaine Snorting Era. These subjects primarily followed the cocaine snorting pathway and a substantially lower proportion had injected drugs. The most recent birth cohort born 1968-1972 came of age during the Crack Era. While a majority (52 percent) of these had followed the snorting pathway to crack, 37 percent had gone from alcohol/marijuana to crack without first initiating to cocaine snorting; only ten percent had used an intravenous pathway.

In several other analyses, the person's birth cohort functioned as an approximate indicator of initiation to serious drug use during a specific drug era and hence as a marker of a generational lifestyle in drug use. The birth cohort was more strongly associated with a variety of other factors than was age, ethnicity, gender, education, and family structure.<sup>81</sup> The full implications of drug era analysis remain to be addressed in other data sets and research efforts in the future.

### **Broader Social Forces Limit Economic Options/Activities of the Underclass to Crack/Drug Sales and Nondrug Crime.**

Given the selection criteria for recruiting subjects for the Careers in Crack project,<sup>82</sup> it was not surprising that the vast majority of crack abusers participating in this research were members of the "underclass," regardless of how this controversial concept may be defined.<sup>83</sup> Many crack sellers came from households where three generations or more have been on welfare or lived below the poverty line (excluding their illegal income) for their entire lives.<sup>84</sup> Many reported various periods of homelessness, and few had ever had their own place to live. Indeed, careful reviews of the scientific literature suggested that many macro-level social forces (e.g. decline in steady low-wage manufacturing jobs, the rise of high technology jobs, higher rent levels, destruction/displacement of low-income housing, rise in homelessness, expansion of ghettos composed of low income minorities, etc.)<sup>85</sup> have had massive cumulative impacts upon the lives and conditions of almost all inner-city

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<sup>81</sup>Golub, Johnson, Hossain 1993.

<sup>82</sup>The screening criteria would effectively have missed working and middle class crack users who generally "conceal" their use from other conventional persons and consume in private places. See Dunlap, Johnson, Manwar 1994 for description of a female crack seller serving such a select clientele.

<sup>83</sup>See Harrell and Peterson 1992.

<sup>84</sup>Dunlap and Johnson 1992. Also see Dunlap 1992, 1993 document the complex and intertwined problems confronting one inner-city household.

<sup>85</sup>Johnson et al. 1990; Dunlap and Johnson 1992.

families and households, but especially those where alcohol and drug abuse have been commonplace across generations.<sup>86</sup>

The life histories of adult (ages 22-50) crack abusers often did not include even one year of legal employment since age 18. If or when they reported legal work, subjects typically reported occasional odd jobs, and working for low wages prior to their entry into the drug selling economy.<sup>87</sup> Participation in nondrug crime (e.g. robbery, burglary, theft, prostitution) did not pay nearly as well as crack and drug selling.<sup>88</sup> While some evidence suggests that involvements in drug selling and nondrug crimes resulted in less legal labor and income, crack abusers with more education were more likely to work (even if selling drugs).<sup>89</sup> Crack selling generally attracts persons with less human capital; sellers were largely recruited from a universe of nonworkers who otherwise would not be in the labor force or would be engaged in nondrug crimes.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions in the inner-city, involvements in crack sales/use had a double edge. Many inner-city residents were already seriously impoverished by their family background, lack of human capital, chronic unemployment, absence of legal income, and they expended large proportions of their small incomes on the use/abuse of alcohol or heroin.<sup>91</sup> With the, dramatic expansion of the crack market in 1985-88, however, thousands of serious drug abusers became crack sellers, greatly increased their incomes, earned several times as much money as they did if employed, or when committing nondrug crimes.<sup>92</sup> Yet, careers of drug abuse intensified during the Crack Era as users added daily (and multiple-times-a-day) consumption of crack to existing patterns of (and did not significantly reduce their) use/abuse of cocaine powder or heroin.<sup>93</sup> Almost all their extra money was expended on crack and other drugs. Over a year or two, most crack users quickly came to consume more crack than they sold, leaving them worse off and more impoverished than before the Crack Era.<sup>94</sup> Such crack and heroin drug abusers now constitute a very sizable proportion of, and constitute the most impoverished segment, of the underclass in New York City.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Dunlap and Johnson 1992; Dunlap 1992, 1993; Wallace 1991, 1992.

<sup>87</sup>Fagan 1992:131.

<sup>88</sup>Fagan 1992:128.

<sup>89</sup>Fagan 1992:129.

<sup>90</sup>Fagan 1992:129.

<sup>91</sup>Johnson et al. 1985, 1990.

<sup>92</sup>Fagan 1992:120.

<sup>93</sup>Fagan 1992:129.

<sup>94</sup>Johnson et al. 1990; Dunlap and Johnson 1992. The ethnographic evidence is even more compelling about the rapid impoverishment of crack abusers. Also see Dunlap 1992, 1993; Hamid 1992ab, 1994; Ratner 1992; Williams 1991; Inciardi, Lockwood, Pottieger 1993.

<sup>95</sup>See articles in Harrell and Peterson 1992, especially Kasarda 1992.

**Punitive "get tough" policies were routinely imposed on crack sellers/abusers in the late 1980s.**

The social history of public and governmental response to crack, crack sellers, and crack users has been systematically documented.<sup>96</sup> Although "rock" cocaine was evident in Los Angeles and Miami before 1985, it did not attract national attention like the *New York Times* article that labeled it as "crack."<sup>97</sup> A media blitz against crack exploded in 1986, as *Time* and *Newsweek* magazine published five cover stories; over 1000 articles on crack appeared in national news media.<sup>98</sup> All major networks had feature documentaries on crack; the "48 Hours on Crack Street" (CBS) became the most watched documentary in television history.<sup>99</sup> All news articles and TV news shows were urgent and highly sensationalistic. In 1987 such programming became less urgent. The anti-crack hysteria resumed with the presidential election of 1988, culminating with President Bush showing a crack vial at the release of his national drug policy (9/5/89) on national TV.<sup>100</sup> More balanced coverage resumed in 1990-93.

**Legislature.** The political and governmental response was relatively swift. The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act expanded funding for anti-drug efforts, primarily into policing and corrections; only 14 percent was spent for treatment and prevention.<sup>101</sup> The White House Conference for a Drug-free America set new standards for overblown rhetoric. The 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act created a cabinet-level position to coordinate the nation's drug policy, and again most funding was expended for law enforcement. It also decreased the amount of crack possessed to merit a 5-25-year-prison sentence and authorized the death penalty for drug-related murders.<sup>102</sup> On November 1988, New York State made it a felony to possess 500 mg or more of crack (about 5-6 vials) whereas previous statutes required possession of 30 or more vials. The National Drug Control Strategy painted crack as having the most deleterious, severest consequences.<sup>103</sup> Similar "tough" legislation against crack was passed in many states. Equally important, the federal and State governments began paying substantially more for criminal justice activities.

**Police.** New York City Police Department had already implemented special anti-drug squads (Special Narcotics Units and Operation Pressure Point in 1983-4); it reorganized and implemented Tactical Narcotics Teams (TNT) in Spring 1986. This elite team made numerous "buy and bust" arrests which led to a huge increase (felony arrests increased by two-thirds between 1986 and 1989) in

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<sup>96</sup>Belenko 1993; Reinerman and Levine 1989.

<sup>97</sup>Brody 1985; Belenko 1993.

<sup>98</sup>Reinerman and Levine 1989.

<sup>99</sup>Belenko 1993:25.

<sup>100</sup>Belenko 1993:26.

<sup>101</sup>Belenko 1993:14.

<sup>102</sup>Belenko 1993:15-17.

<sup>103</sup>Belenko 1993:17-19.

drug arrests of high quality. Crack arrests rose as a percent of all felony arrests from 17 percent in 1987 to 46 percent in 1989. Crack-related felony arrests were the second most common felony charge (after robbery).<sup>104</sup>

**Courts.** In New York City, the courts organized special Narcotics-Parts to speed the processing of drug cases, particularly crack cases. Many persons arrested on Felony B crack sale or possession charges were allowed to plead guilty to a misdemeanor (near or shortly after arraignment) rather than face a mandatory prison sentence; such defendants were usually jailed or sent to bootcamps.<sup>105</sup>

**Corrections.** Persons convicted for drug crimes and drug abusers convicted for nondrug crimes now occupy most of the jail and prison cells in New York and other states. The number of jail and prison inmates doubled in the 1980s, with most of the additional slots being filled by those convicted of drug crimes. Moreover, the average sentence length for drug crimes has increased faster than for other conviction offenses.<sup>106</sup>

Overall, the system became "tougher" and more punitive at every stage of the criminal justice system. Despite continued complaints about system "overload" and "breakdown" by criminal justice practitioners during 1986-89, crack abusers and sellers were arrested in large numbers, processed with remarkable efficiency by the courts, imprisoned in jails, bootcamps, or prisons, or placed on probation or parole; they occasionally received treatment during incarceration or in the community.

**The response swept crack sellers/abusers into the criminal justice system, but such resources were not well allocated to the most serious offenders.**

Although criminal justice resources doubled during the last half of the 1980s, these resources were not well targeted. Crack-involved offenders with the greatest criminal severity or culpability ~~were~~ were not especially likely to receive prison sentences.<sup>107</sup> Because of legislation mandating minimum sentences for crack sales and possession, first time offenders arrested on crack sale/possession charges were nearly as likely to be imprisoned as those with prior felony convictions.<sup>108</sup>

A sample of persons arrested for crack-related charges in August through October 1986 (near the peak of the crack era) was compared with a sample of persons arrested on cocaine (powder) charges in 1983 and 1984. Crack cases had more severe dispositions at every stage of case processing. Crack offenders had higher probabilities of high bail, pretrial detention, felony indictment, and jail sentence in the lower (criminal) courts. Being charged with a crack-related

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<sup>104</sup>Belenko 1993:117-119.

<sup>105</sup>Belenko 1993:124-125.

<sup>106</sup>Belenko 1993:122-124.

<sup>107</sup>Belenko 1993; Belenko, Fagan, Chin 1991; Fagan 1994b.

<sup>108</sup>Belenko, Fagan, Chin 1991; Belenko 1993:129-146.

offense was a relatively strong determinant of case decisions compared to traditional factors such as prior criminal records.<sup>109</sup> By 1988, crack cases were handled somewhat more leniently and treated quite similar to cocaine powder cases.<sup>110</sup>

Nevertheless, despite "tough" laws, enforcement, and case processing, only a fraction of persons initially arrested for Felony B sale or possession were imprisoned.<sup>111</sup> Dismissals occurred in 12 percent of the cases. Felony drug sale charges had the highest bail amounts set and pretrial detention rates.<sup>112</sup> Many crack defendants could not make bail so were detained pretrial; most pled guilty to lesser charges before indictment and were sentenced to "time served."<sup>113</sup>

Conviction rates (83 percent) were slightly higher for felony sale (mainly of crack) than for other charges (about 75 percent). About a third of those convicted were incarcerated.<sup>114</sup> Those convicted on misdemeanor charges were the most likely to be jailed (probably because they were sentenced to time already served). Among the incarcerated, the average sentence was 11.4 months, but defendants charged with drug sales were not punished more severely than other defendants. Most felony offenders were sentenced to three-year prison terms, with little variation for sale or possession.<sup>115</sup> Neither the offense nor offender characteristics combined with the charges to influence sentencing outcomes. Prior arrest/incarceration record was only a weak factor influencing sentencing outcomes.<sup>116</sup>

Overall, nearly all persons arrested on crack-related charges were treated almost the same, so that crack arrestees with no prior record received about the same "going rate" as other crack arrestees with prior convictions and incarcerations.<sup>117</sup> The most severe sentences were not reserved for defendants with the most serious charges nor longest record. The sentencing of drug offenders appeared to be a (nearly statistically) random process.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>109</sup>Belenko, Fagan, Chin 1991:55.

<sup>110</sup>Belenko 1993:146-7.

<sup>111</sup>Fagan and Chin 1989; Belenko, Fagan, Chin 1991; Belenko 1993.

<sup>112</sup>Belenko, Nickerson, Rubenstein 1990 show that criminal court judges ranked crack selling as equivalent in seriousness to violent crime, and more serious than felony property or drug possession offenses.

<sup>113</sup>Fagan 1994b; Belenko 1993.

<sup>114</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>115</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>116</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>117</sup>Fagan and Chin 1989; Belenko 1993.

<sup>118</sup>Fagan 1994b. Prosecutors may have systematic guidelines for sentencing recommendations or plea offers but these may not statistically predict sentence severity and length. Johnson and Muffer 1992:132-3 argue that most social control systems effectively recruit a "near random" set of clients from among a larger pool of underclass persons.

**While criminal justice sanctions may temporarily interrupt careers, recidivism was not related to severity of punishment.**

Recidivism measures were calculated for convicted drug users with one year of street time (the majority). The specific deterrent effects of more serious sanctions were not necessarily greater than less serious punishments, and they varied by rearrest charge.<sup>119</sup> Of all sanctions, persons sentenced to probation had the lowest rearrest rates, followed by those sentenced to prison (over a year)--even after controlling for age, minority status, prior time served and prior arrest rates.<sup>120</sup> The most common "tough" sanction was a jail sentence (less than one year). But persons receiving such jail sentences had among the highest rearrest rates--which were not different than rearrest rates among persons whose cases had been dismissed, or those fined/continued (e.g. had no "punishment" imposed).<sup>121</sup>

In short, rearrest rates for drug selling and possession were comparable regardless of whether the case was dismissed or the respondent imprisoned. Yet, prior arrests were strongly associated with rearrest rates, independent of sanction severity. In short, drug crimes (and probably drug careers) appear to be intractable, persistent behaviors that are insensitive to the severity of the criminal sanction.<sup>122</sup> The marginal reduction in rearrest rates for those imprisoned compared to probationers or those not sanctioned at all suggests little utility in the widespread use of incarceration as a crime control measure for crack and drug offenders.<sup>123</sup>

## **POLICY OPTIONS**

The findings from the Careers in Crack project have important implications for national and state policy. In large measure, these are spelled out in project and other publications. The following summarizes only a few of the implications.

### **Reduce reliance on punitive sanctions.**

While a rhetoric of being "tough" and "punitive" towards crack abusers and sellers appears to be "good" (perhaps essential) for politicians seeking election or for news media seeking readers or viewers, the social costs of implementing such policies have been very high.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>120</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>121</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>122</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>123</sup>Fagan 1994b.

<sup>124</sup>Beienko 1993; Johnson et al. 1990.

Punitive policies have been enacted quite effectively by the criminal justice system when additional resources were provided. Large numbers and proportions of crack sellers/abusers and other drug abusers have been arrested, jailed, or imprisoned.<sup>125</sup>

The most expensive sanctions (jail and prison) are not reserved for offenders with the most serious criminal histories; many first-time offenders serve sentences as long as those with prior records. Improved selection processes and differential sanctioning by the courts and legislatures could reduce incarceration costs.<sup>126</sup>

Arrest and incarceration only interrupt drug abuse and criminal careers for about a year; they do not reduce or deter high rate criminality by offenders after release from custody.<sup>127</sup> Such sanctions do not substantially change offender careers in drug abuse, sales, or nondrug criminality. Indeed, a sizable literature documents the failure of existing crime control programs to significantly affect the prevalence and frequency of serious crime.<sup>128</sup> Current policies have effectively transformed jails and prisons into (involuntary) welfare hotels for selected persons from the criminal underclass.

The criminal justice system could significantly improve its ability to identify cocaine-heroin abusers at arrest,<sup>129</sup> and refer many more to drug treatment. Indeed, coercing offenders who would otherwise avoid drug treatment into appropriate programs could be one of the most important functions that the criminal justice system could provide.<sup>130</sup> Such drug treatment should be available and required in all jails, prisons, bootcamps, or when offenders are on probation or parole.<sup>131</sup>

#### **Provide drug treatment for crack and heroin abusers.**

Extensive research evidence is directly opposite to popular political beliefs. Incarceration does much worse and drug treatment does much better than is widely believed in reducing the criminality of users of cocaine or heroin when they are at liberty.<sup>132</sup>

When cocaine and heroin users enter and remain in drug treatment for over 30 days, criminality is substantially reduced while they are attending drug treatment. Time in drug treatment is a major factor reducing post-treatment cocaine/heroin use and criminality.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Belenko 1993; Johnson et al. 1990.

<sup>126</sup>Chaiken and Chaiken 1985; Chaiken and Johnson 1988; Wexler, Lipton, Johnson 1988.

<sup>127</sup>Mieczkowski et al. 1992:344.

<sup>128</sup>Gordon et al. 1992.

<sup>129</sup>Johnson, Golub, Hossain 1993 and Golub, Johnson, Hossain 1993 have developed a Serious Drug Abuser Scale which could be employed to accurately estimate the probability of an individual being a cocaine-heroin abuser at arrest--without needing urine tests.

<sup>130</sup>Johnson, Golub, Hossain 1993.

<sup>131</sup>Johnson, Golub, Hossain 1993.

<sup>132</sup>Mieczkowski et al. 1992:344.

<sup>133</sup>Mieczkowski et al. 1992:346.



Coerced treatment can produce beneficial changes equal to changes achieved by the most willing individual. Criminal justice pressure can initiate and sustain an offender's participation in a process that can be lengthy, requiring long term and repeated episodes of treatment by competent personnel with sufficient resources.<sup>134</sup>

**Begin to address the major social inequalities in American society.**

Drug abuse and crime are not criminal justice system problems,<sup>135</sup> but rather a consequence of the many serious inequalities in American society.<sup>136</sup> Creating steady, moderate paying jobs within inner-city communities would begin to reverse the decline of the 1960 to the 1980s. Creating low income housing, strengthening families, providing guaranteed health care, moving most residents above poverty, and linking inner-city high schools to employment opportunities would seriously undermine the conditions that effectively "force" inner-city young adults into drug abuse and sales.<sup>137</sup> It is not too soon to begin!! Such efforts are long overdue!!

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<sup>134</sup>Mieczkowski et al. 1992:346.

<sup>135</sup>Gordon et al. 1992:361.

<sup>136</sup>Johnson et al. 1990; Dunlap and Johnson 1992.

<sup>137</sup>Dunlap and Johnson 1992; Johnson et al. 1990.

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**CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG SALES, AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY**

Bruce D. Johnson and Jeffrey Fagan  
Principal Investigators

**APPENDIX A**

**LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS INCLUDED IN FINAL REPORT**

The numbers in brackets [ ] at the end of a citation refer to a "reprint" number for which specific publications can be requested from Bruce Johnson. (Ordered alphabetically and in reverse chronological order.)

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**CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG SALES, AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY**

**PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS AND UNPUBLISHED PROJECT REPORTS**

Only those presentations/reports marked by asterix (\*) are reproduced in Final Report documentation.

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Golub, Andrew & Bruce D. Johnson.

\*1993b. A recent decline in cocaine use among youthful arrestees in Manhattan (1987-1993). Presented at the American Society of Criminology, New Orleans. (being reviewed).

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**APPENDIX B**

**STAFF WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS RESEARCH**

**CAREERS IN CRACK, DRUG USE, DRUG DISTRIBUTION, AND NONDRUG CRIMINALITY  
(NIDA: 1 R01 DA06615-02) 1991-93**

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**CHANGING PATTERNS OF DRUG ABUSE AND CRIMINALITY AMONG CRACK ABUSERS  
(NJ: 87-IJ-CX-0064) 1987-89**

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