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## Problems Of Drug Dependence 1979

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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE  
Office of Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration

# **Problems of Drug Dependence, 1979**

**Proceedings of the 41st Annual Scientific Meeting, The  
Committee on Problems of Drug Dependence, Inc.**

**Editor: Louis S. Harris, Ph.D.**

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## The Impact of Heroin Addiction Upon Criminality

Ball, J.C.; Rosen, L.; Friedman, E.G.; Nurco, D.N.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is rather general agreement among criminologists that an increase in criminality commonly occurs following the onset of heroin addiction in the United States (Chein et al. 1964; O'Donnell, 1966 and 1969; Ball and Snarr, 1969; Nash, 1973; McGlothlin, Anglin and Wilson, 1978). Despite this overall consensus, however, the dynamics of the relationship between opiate addiction and crime continues to be a matter of controversy. Among the questions which remain unresolved, two seem especially crucial: (1) What are the frequency and types of crimes committed by heroin addicts? (2) What impact do post-onset periods of heroin addiction or periods of abstinence have upon criminality?

### A NEW MEASURE OF CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR

In the present paper, a new measure of criminal behavior is described and employed in an on-going research project. The new measure has been termed Crime-Days Per Year At Risk. A crime-day is a 24 hour period in which an individual commits one or more crimes. The number of crime-days per year at risk refers to the number of days per year that an individual has committed crimes, from 0 to 365. Years at risk refers to time when the subject was not incarcerated; risk is time "on the street".

This new measure, crime-days per year at risk, is found to have unique analytical power as it permits the calculation of uniform crime rates by years at risk and it is not confounded by multiple crimes committed on a given day. Furthermore, the term crime-days per year at risk appears to be an effective procedure for explaining and understanding the extent of persistent criminal behavior because it relates the number of crimes committed by individuals to a common frame of reference -- times per year. The discovery of the average crime-days per year concept was

made by the senior author while analyzing detailed life history data pertaining to heroin addicts as part of an on-going follow-up study in Baltimore.

#### THE SAMPLE OF ADDICTS

This paper is based on interview data obtained from 243 Baltimore opiate addicts (most were heroin addicts). The 243 male addicts were a stratified random sample drawn from 4,069 persons listed by the Baltimore Police Department between 1952 and 1971 as known addicts. Analysis of cohort and race differences has been undertaken elsewhere (Nurco and DuPont, 1977).

Although comprehensive institutional data was collected with respect to the addict sample, the main source of data for the present analysis was obtained through personal interviews. Each of the 243 addicts was interviewed during 1973 or 1974 by specially trained interviewers who were familiar with the Baltimore addict subculture. The interview lasted some three hours and the questions were focused upon six topics: drug use, criminal behavior, work, living arrangements, drug selling and other sources of income. The validity of the interview data was found to be satisfactory in a separate study (Bonito, Nurco and Shaffer, 1976).

#### ADDICTION STATUS AND CRIMINALITY SINCE ONSET

After the number of crime-days since the onset of regular opiate use had been coded for each subject, it was possible to classify both his addiction status and criminality during his years at risk. Thus, the following data was coded for each subject: (1) total crime-days while addicted, (2) total crime-days off opiates while "on the street", (3) crimeless days while addicted and (4) crimeless days while off regular opiate use. These four statuses were mutually exclusive.

For the entire sample, the most frequent addiction-crime status during their entire risk years was that of being addicted and committing crimes on a daily basis; this occurred during 41.7 percent of the risk period (Table 1). Next most common was being off regular opiates and not committing daily crimes; this occurred for 34.5 percent of the risk period. The remainder of the risk period was accounted for by addicted time when crimes were not committed (19.9 percent) and abstinent time when crimes were committed (3.9 percent of days).



TABLE 1 Total Time at Risk by Addiction Status and Criminality for 237 Addicts

<u>Status While At Risk</u>	<u>Days in Each Status</u>	<u>Percent of Days in Each Status</u>
1. Crime-Days on Opiates	432,947	41.7
2. Crime-Days off Opiates	40,791	3.9
3. Crimeless Days on Opiates	206,082	19.9
4. Crimeless Days off Opiates	358,304	34.5
Total Days at Risk:	1,038,124	100.0

The total amount of time that this Baltimore male sample spent addicted to opiate drugs since onset of regular opiate use was 61.6 percent of their risk years. Since their average years at risk was 11.3, they were addicted to opiates almost two-thirds of the time and abstinent somewhat over a third of the time. Two further points are pertinent about their addiction or abstinence status. First, with regard to the abstinence from regular opiate use classification, this status included periods of occasional use of opiates as well as periods of frequent use of non-opiate drugs. Second, it is significant that 85 percent of the sample had such abstinence periods.

#### NUMBER OF CRIMES COMMITTED BY THE 243 ADDICTS

The total number of crime-days during the risk years for the 243 addicts is tabulated in Table 2. The range in crime-days within the sample was from 0 to 9,450. That is, from no crimes committed by six addicts to 9,450 crime-days accumulated by one addict during his risk years.

The total number of crime-days amassed by these 243 addicts during their years at risk was 473,738. This total may be regarded as an underestimate of the total number of crimes committed, as multiple crimes during a crime-day were common. It is also pertinent to note in this context that most of the crimes reported were for theft and that drug use or possession was not classified as a crime. The mean number of crime-days per addict during their years at risk was 1,998.9.

TABLE 2 Total Crime Days for 243 Addicts

<u>Crime Days</u>	<u>Number of Addicts</u>	<u>Percent of Addicts</u>
0 (None)	6	2.5
1-99	20	8.2
100-499	31	12.8
500-999	31	12.8
1,000-1,999	54	22.2
2,000-2,999	46	18.9
3,000-3,999	27	11.1
4,000-4,999	12	4.9
5,000-5,999	10	4.1
6,000-9,450	6	2.5
Total	243	100.0

Total crime-days since onset of addiction: 473,738

In order to control for years at risk, crime-days were computed for each person by years at risk (Table 3). This measure - Crime-Days Per Year At Risk - indicates the average number of crime-days per year during the risk years for each of the 243 addicts. The mean number of Crime-Days Per Year At Risk for the sample was 178.5. Thus, the total amount of time that these addicts spent engaged in daily criminal behavior since their onset of addiction was almost half of their risk years. To be exact, they committed crimes during 45.6 percent of their days at risk.

TABLE 3 Crime-Days Per Year at Risk for 243 Addicts

<u>Crime-Days Per Year at Risk</u>	<u>Number of Addicts</u>	<u>Percent of Addicts</u>
No Crime-Days	6	2.5
Less than 1 per yr.	11	4.5
1-49	35	14.4
50-99	26	10.7
100-149	31	12.8
150-199	32	13.2
200-249	25	10.3
250-299	26	10.7
300-349	28	11.5
350-365	23	9.5
Total	243	100.0

#### THE IMPACT OF ADDICTION UPON CRIMINAL CAREERS

Each of the 243 addicts was classified as to the common criminal career which he had followed since onset of regular opiate use (Table 4). The extent of criminality among all nine career types was affected by their addiction status. Thus, there was an overall six-fold increase in the number of crime-days per year during addiction as contrasted with the crime rate when abstinent.

Although the extent of criminality within this addict sample was notably increased when the subjects were addicted to opiate drugs, the non-addicted crime rate was still quite high. Thus, two of the career types had more than 100 crime-days per year while not addicted to opiates.

TABLE 4 Crime-Days Per Year At Risk By Addiction Status

Crime Career Type	Number of Addicts	Crime-Days Per Year at Risk	Crime-Days Per Year at Risk:	
			addicted	abstinent
1. Theft-daily	41	330.3	347.7	109.7
2. Sale of Drugs-daily	13	328.0	353.2	88.3
3. Other Crimes-daily	7	319.4	341.4	151.0
4. Weekly Theft	58	189.6	280.9	23.3
5. Weekly Sale of Drugs	18	181.1	284.0	27.6
6. Weekly, other crimes	7	201.9	297.0	70.1
7. Infrequent Theft	57	72.4	140.7	7.4
8. Infrequent Sales	14	102.4	260.9	10.5
9. Infrequent, other crimes	22	46.8	108.2	2.3
No Crime	6	---	---	---
Total:	243	178.5	248.0	40.8

#### INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

In this study of male heroin addicts in Baltimore, it has been found that most of the subjects were deeply enmeshed in criminal careers on a daily basis over a period of many years. Secondly, it has been found that the vast majority of these crimes were committed while the subjects were addicted to opiates. Conversely, the rate of criminal activity was greatly reduced when these subjects were abstinent.



With respect to criminality, it was found that each of the 243 addicts committed an average of 1,999 crimes (i.e. had 1,999 crime-days) and that together this sample was responsible for committing at least 473,738 offenses. (These figures do not include drug use or drug possession offenses). On an annual basis, this sample of male addicts committed 178 crimes per year since their onset of regular opiate use.

The association of this high level of criminal behavior with active addiction to opiates was striking. Thus, the rate of criminal offenses committed increased six times during their addiction periods as contrasted with their abstinence periods. With respect to years at risk, 91.4 percent of their crime-days were also days during which the subjects were addicted; conversely, only 8.6 percent of their crime-days were abstinent days.

These research findings concerning the impact of addiction upon criminality are consistent with those of various other studies. (Sutter, 1966; Ball and Snarr, 1969; Preble and Casey, 1969; DeLeon et al. 1972; Inciardi and Chambers, 1972; Nash, 1973). At the same time, employment of a new measure of criminality (crime-days per year at risk) provides a more meaningful and statistically valid procedure for analyzing the crime-drug relationship than has previously been available. For it is now feasible to compare rates of criminality and relate these differential rates to various aspects of drug addiction.

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