

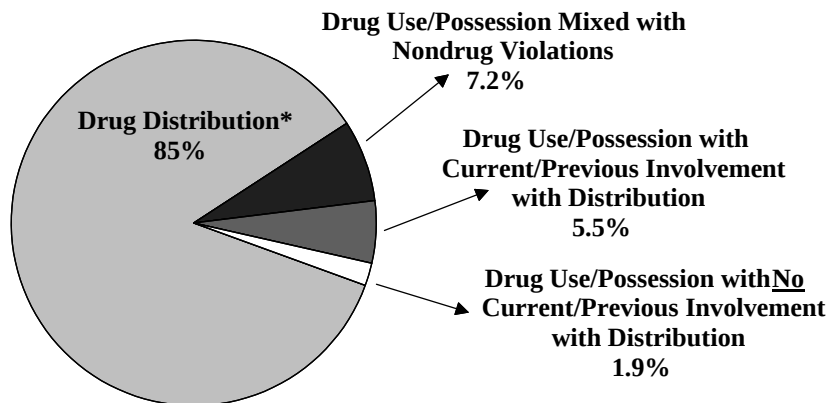
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Very Few Adult Drug Law Violators in Prison Solely for Use or Possession

Most of the adult offenders in prison in 1997 for drug-law violations (85% of 274,324 prisoners) were incarcerated for charges clearly stemming from drug distribution,* according to a recent analysis of data from the *Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities, 1997*. Nearly half of the remaining 15% who were in prison for a drug use/possession violation had concurrent convictions for nondrug violations. Only 1.9% of drug offenders were incarcerated for drug use/possession without any indication of possible involvement in distribution† or a nondrug violation. Thus, “depending on how strict a definition one preferred, one might argue that anywhere from 5,380 to 41,047 people were in prison in the United States in 1997 solely for their drug use, representing 1.9% to 15% of all drug-law prisoners and 0.5% to 3.6% of all prison inmates” (p. 14).

Reason for Prison Incarceration Among U.S. Adult Drug-Law Violators, 1997 (N=274,324)



*Drug distribution was defined as 1) a current conviction for drug trafficking, possession with intent to distribute, or conspiracy to distribute drugs; 2) a functional drug distribution role in connection with the current drug offense; 3) more than peripheral participation in the distribution activities of an organized drug group in the year before arrest; 4) involvement with drug quantities in excess of 50 retail units; and/or 5) a conviction of drug distribution and then a subsequent conviction of simple drug possession while on parole or probation for the original distribution offense.

†Involvement with distribution included possession convictions that stemmed from a plea bargain to reduced charges, being arrested with types of drugs that they do not report using, and having a prior history of drug trafficking.

NOTE: Percentages do not sum to 100% because some drug-law violators were uncategorizable due to missing or conflicting data.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Caulkins J.P., Sevigny E.L. “How Many People Does the U.S. Imprison for Drug Use, and Who Are They?” *Contemporary Drug Problems* 32(3):405-428, 2005. For more information, contact Jonathan Caulkins at caulkins@cmu.edu.

CESAR Looking to Hire Principal Investigator-Level Researcher

CESAR is seeking to hire a PI-level researcher with a proven funding track record. If you are interested in working in a supportive and stimulating, university-based team environment, please send a letter of interest and a resume to Dr. Eric Wish at CESAR, 4321 Hartwick Rd, Ste 501, College Park, MD 20740; 301-405-9787 (fax); cesar@cesar.umd.edu.

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