

National Institute of Justice

Award Title: Race and Drug Arrests: Specific Deterrence and Collateral Consequences

Award Description:

This project satisfies requirements as stated in the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) FY 2011 W.E.B. Du Bois Fellowship Program Solicitation. The purpose of this research is to examine the consequences of drug arrest on the likelihood of future drug offending and the strengths of bonds to key institutions of social control later in life. The research will also examine whether the consequences of a drug arrest vary by race. The War on Drugs, begun in the 1980's, popularized a set of policies and practices that dramatically increased the number of Americans arrested for drug crimes. These tactics have affected Americans of every race/ethnicity; however, minorities have been dramatically affected. Much thought has been given to developing explanations of these racial disparities, but relatively little empirical research tests these explanations. Likewise, very little research has examined the consequences of a drug arrest on the likelihood of future drug offending and the quality of bonds to institutions of social control (e.g., education, employment, marriage). Given the racial disparities in drug arrests and minorities' tenuous bonds to key institutions of social control, it becomes important to examine whether the consequences of a drug arrest varies by race. This research will examine these issues.

These questions will be examined using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY97) (1997-2008). It is a longitudinal data set interviewing a sample of 8,984 nationally representative youth living in the U.S. since 1997. There have been 12 waves of data collection for youth ages 12-28 years old. The data oversampled on African Americans and Hispanics (N=2,000) and includes self reported measures of involvement in drug distribution, drug use and other measures of criminal activity in each wave of the data collection. Key data measures that will be used in this study include arrest on a drug charge, total number of self reported drug offenses committed in each wave of data, school dropout, employment status at each wave and marriage status at each wave.

This research will use several data analysis techniques. Stratified propensity score matching (by age) will be used to create two comparable groups of arrested drug offenders and non-arrested drug offenders. Race, gender, ethnicity (Hispanic vs. non-Hispanic), a peer delinquency scale, gang membership at wave 1, number of non-drug crimes committed at wave 1 and 2, the number of 'hard' drugs used by wave 2, number of drug sales, number of cigarette smoking days in the past 30 days and whether or not the respondent reported using marijuana before wave 1 will all be used to predict the log-odds of a drug arrest. Logit models will be used to analyze the impact of race and prior drug offending on subsequent drug arrests. These data combined with the use of generalized hierarchical linear models (HGLM) allow for the assessment of within-individual change (e.g., the effect of drug sanctions on future offending) and between individual differences in change (e.g., race differences in future offending). The researcher will provide to NIJ an electronic copy of the data set(s) created to conduct the above data analysis.

This research has important implications for drug control policy, public discourse on race/ethnicity and crime, and criminological theory. This research will address the policy importance of drug offending, both as a social problem and a burden on law enforcement and the criminal justice system. This research can speak to the importance of collateral consequences of drug arrests with respect to employment, education, and marriage.

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