

# Drug Offenders in Prison

## Introduction

On July 1, 1990, 276 inmates were incarcerated in Minnesota state correctional facilities with a governing offense involving the sale, manufacture, possession, or possession with intent to distribute drugs. This was nine percent of the overall prison population. On July 1, 2005, drug offenders accounted for 25 percent of Minnesota’s adult inmate population. The number of drug offenders has declined fairly steadily since 2005, and on July 1, 2013, the 1,633 incarcerated drug offenders accounted for 17 percent of the overall prison population.

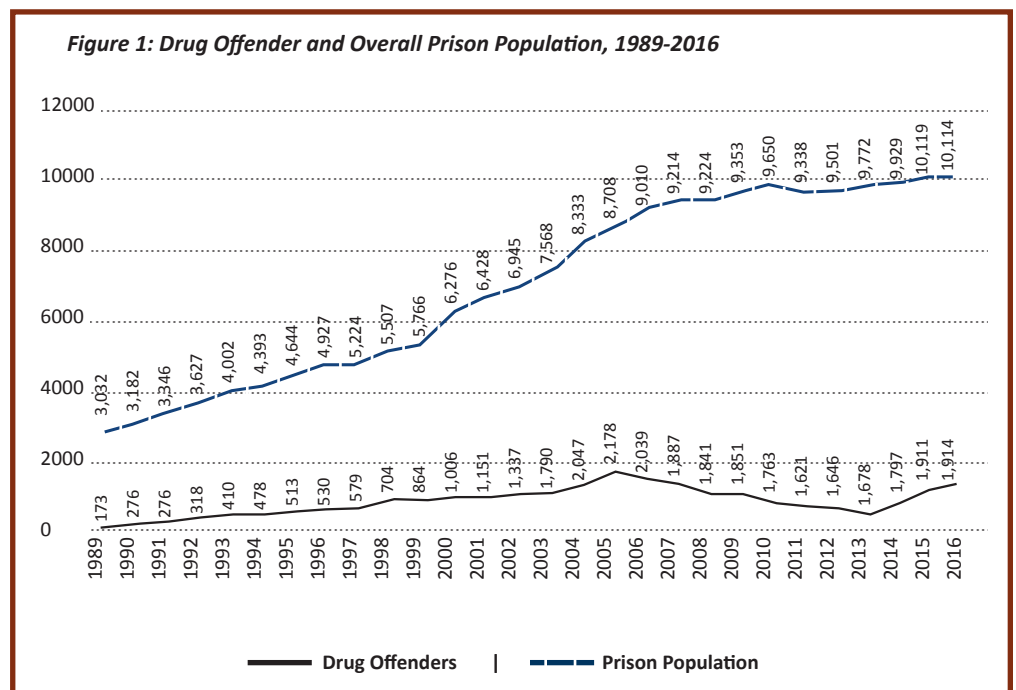
While the prison population grew at an average annual rate of seven percent from fiscal year (FY) 1990 through 2005, the number of drug offenders increased at an average rate of 15 percent. The drug offender population grew most rapidly between FY1998 and FY2005. During this time period, the number of drug offenders increased by nearly 1,500, and the average annual growth rate was 18 percent. A little more than half of the growth occurring between FY2001 and FY2005 was due to the growing number of methamphetamine offenders. Since peaking in 2005, the drug offender population decreased by an average of more than three percent annually; comparatively, the overall prison population increased by an average of more than one percent annually.

## Demographics

As shown in Table 1 (page 2), methamphetamine is the governing offense for 50 percent of drug offenders followed by cocaine (17%) and crack (16%). Drug offenders are overwhelmingly male (86%), but there are some variations by drug type. Nearly all offenders incarcerated for marijuana (98%), cocaine (94%) and crack (90%) are male compared to 78 percent of offenders incarcerated for amphetamines and 82 percent of offenders incarcerated for other drugs. The average age of all drug offenders is 36 years; the average age of offenders incarcerated for amphetamines or marijuana is the youngest at 34 years.

One of the most dramatic findings shown in Table 1 (page 2) is the variation in the percentage of minority offenders by drug type. Minorities account for 91 percent of the offenders incarcerated for an offense involving crack and 76 percent of those whose offense involved cocaine. In contrast, just 30 percent of those whose offense involved methamphetamine are minorities.

**Figure 1: Drug Offender and Overall Prison Population, 1989-2016**



## Offense and Sentencing

The majority of drug offenders (58%) are serving a sentence from outside the metropolitan area, due in part to the large percentage (66%) of offenders from Greater Minnesota whose offense involved methamphetamine. In contrast, 42 percent of cocaine offenders are serving a sentence from a county outside the metropolitan area. All of the offenders incarcerated for manufacturing drugs were manufacturing methamphetamine.

## Incarceration Histories

Shown in Table 1, the incarceration histories of drug offenders incarcerated on July 1, 2013, vary slightly by drug type. Overall, 49 percent of all drug offenders had been incarcerated as an adult in a Minnesota correctional facility prior to the present incarceration. Offenders incarcerated for an offense involving crack, however, were slightly more likely than other drug offenders to be previously incarcerated. Among crack offenders, 58 percent had been incarcerated previously in a Minnesota correctional facility. Offenders convicted of a marijuana-related offense were least likely to have been previously incarcerated (38%). The average age at first incarceration was approximately 30 years old. Little variation was observed in the average age at first incarceration among the most prevalent drug types.

**Table 1: Profile of the Drug Offender Population**

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Meth</b>	<b>Crack</b>	<b>Cocaine</b>	<b>Marijuana</b>	<b>Amphetamine</b>	<b>Other<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
Percent	49.8	15.7	17.1	3.1	1.4	12.9	100.0
Number	814	256	279	50	23	211	1,633
Percent male	83.3	89.8	93.5	98.0	78.3	82.5	86.3
Percent minority <sup>2</sup>	29.7	91.4	75.6	44.0	17.4	54.0	50.6
Average age in years	36.3	36.6	36.9	34.0	33.7	34.9	36.2
<b>Current Offense Characteristics</b>							
Metro-area county of commitment (%)	33.7	55.9	58.1	30.0	4.3	44.1	42.1
Drug activity (%)							
Manufacture	5.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.6
Possession	53.1	39.5	47.7	38.0	52.2	44.5	48.4
Sale/possess with intent to distribute	41.2	60.5	52.0	62.0	47.8	52.1	48.2
Other	0.5	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	3.3	0.7
Percent 1st degree	32.4	23.4	52.0	6.0	17.4	14.2	31.0
Average sentence length in months	64.5	63.8	75.6	24.9	49.4	43.3	62.1
<b>Criminal History Characteristics</b>							
Average # of prior felony convictions <sup>3</sup>	3.5	3.8	3.1	2.9	4.5	3.1	3.4
Percent with prior felony conviction <sup>3</sup>	77.1	89.1	74.9	70.0	82.6	70.6	77.6
Average age at first felony conviction <sup>3</sup>	25.0	22.7	24.8	24.4	20.5	24.3	24.4
Average # of prior incarcerations <sup>4,5</sup>	0.9	1.1	0.8	0.6	1.0	0.7	0.9
Percent previously incarcerated <sup>4,5</sup>	51.1	58.2	43.7	38.0	56.5	39.8	49.2
Average age at first incarceration <sup>4</sup>	30.6	29.6	30.7	30.1	26.9	30.6	30.4

<sup>1</sup> Includes heroin, opium, barbiturates, synthetic narcotics, hallucinogens, & simulated substances

<sup>2</sup> Includes African American, American Indian, Asian, & Hispanic offenders

<sup>3</sup> Based on data collected by Minnesota correctional facility caseworkers and entered into DOC database at the time an offender is admitted to prison. Includes juvenile offenses; excludes current conviction offenses

<sup>4</sup> Includes only Minnesota adult state prison commitments

<sup>5</sup> Excludes current incarceration

## Offense and Sentencing Continued

Overall, 31 percent of drug offenders were convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense. Those whose offense involved cocaine were most likely to be convicted of a first-degree offense (52%) followed by those whose offense involved methamphetamine (32%) or crack (23%). Only six percent of the offenders incarcerated for a marijuana-related offense were convicted of first-degree controlled substance.

Average sentence lengths correspond in large part with the percentage of each drug type convicted of a first-degree offense. Offenders with the longest average sentence length are those incarcerated for cocaine (75.6 months), methamphetamine (64.5 months), and crack (63.8 months). As noted previously, these are the three drug types most likely to have been convicted of a first-degree controlled substance offense. Those incarcerated for an offense involving marijuana, the drug type least likely to be convicted of a first-degree offense, are serving the shortest sentences on average (24.9 months). Overall, the average sentence length of all drug offenders is 62 months.