

PATHWAYS
PERSONNEL

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A Note from the Coordinating Center

We continue our mission to share our study findings in this issue by featuring the work of a former Pathways interviewer and graduate student at Temple University, Michelle Little. Using data from the baseline interview, Michelle considers factors related to drug dealing in the inner city. We hope that you are intrigued by this work and encourage you to share reactions with us.

Data Collection At A Glance

- 1,355 valid subject baseline interviews (90% with a collateral informant)
- 1,262 6-month interviews completed
- 1,264 12-month interviews completed
- 1,229 18-month interviews completed
- 1,227 24-month interviews completed
- 1,231 30-month interviews completed
- 1,162 36-month interviews completed
- 401 48-month interviews completed
- 30 of the original 1,355 subjects have dropped out of the study (2%)
- 26 subjects have died since the beginning of the study (2%)
- Subject retention rates for each time point interview (6 thru 36 months) are averaging 93%
- As of the 24-month interview, 84% of the subjects have complete data. That is, they had not missed any of the previous time point interviews.
- Yearly collateral reports are present for about 85% of subjects.
- We have conducted over 14,350 interviews across all types (subject, collateral and release)

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ties provided through work and school, and, finally, their willingness to accept the risks associated with this activity (e.g. violence, injury, legal sanctions). The question is how these factors all together might influence drug dealing activity.

Economic and social benefits

The primary lure of illicit drug selling is the potential for income that is typically unattainable for youth in impoverished neighborhoods^(4,5,6). A secondary gain is acceptance and/or admiration from the peer group^(7,8,9). As a result, the authors hypothesized that neighborhood and family risk factors are likely to be related to drug selling opportunities. Specifically, certain neighborhoods - those with high physical and social disorder, low job opportunity, and high peer deviance - would provide ready access to both illicit drugs customers. Also, a home environment with parental drug use and lack of supervision would make this activity all that much easier.

Psychological Factors

It also seems reasonable that the payoffs from drug dealing are most appealing to some youth more than others. Youth who are either less confident in their ability to compete in conventional school or work settings or have little attachment to these conventional paths would seem more likely to get ahead by dealing drugs. Past research has indicated that drug dealers are less likely to be attending or performing well in school, and less likely to report academic or vocational goals^(10,11). The impact of the participant's attitudes toward the law (legal cynicism) are also considered important.

Even if the above risk factors are present, though, youths may forego drug selling if they are unwilling to accept the associated risks.



The authors suggest that, at its core, the acceptance or rejection of this risk is a reflection of developmental differences in maturity; less mature adolescents are less likely to weigh risk reasonably. Four features of maturity are expected to be particularly important: temperance (the ability to control one's impulses), future orientation (thinking through the long-term consequences of one's decisions or actions), autonomy (one's sense of self-reliance) and, finally, resistance to peer influence. These features of maturity affect the youth's propensity to sell drugs in different ways, however. High levels of temperance and future orientation might buffer the adolescent from involvement in drug selling. Autonomy and resistance to peer influence, by contrast, may be an asset for a youth engaged in drug selling, as both are characteristics associated with being a good salesperson. An autonomous individual would recognize the benefits of protecting his/her sales territory and a person who does not follow the will of his/her peers may possess the leadership and management skills necessary to maintain the business of drug selling.

With these theories as a guiding framework, the baseline interview data from 605 of the male juvenile offenders in the Pathways study were analyzed for the factors related to drug dealing. The sample was predominantly minor-

ity (86%) and from disadvantaged backgrounds. Parents of nearly one half (48%) of the sample had not received a high school diploma. 73% of the sample had an arrest prior to the study index arrest and 17% had a drug-related offense at the index arrest or at a prior arrest.

Results

As might be expected in a sample of serious adolescent offenders, self reports of drug-selling activity were more than twice that reported in community samples of urban youth^(6,12,13). Nearly half (48.6%) of the 605 males in the sample reported selling drugs in the past year and they were equally likely to sell marijuana (36%) as they were to sell other drugs (35%). Most youth (37%) reported selling both marijuana and other types of drugs, and about one-fifth sold drugs on at least a weekly basis.

The drug-sellers in this sample reported clear monetary benefits from drug sales. Their self-reported average income from illicit activity was 38 times their licit income, and they spent much longer periods of time engaged in this activity than they did in licit jobs (4 times as many months in drug sales than legal work activities). In



addition, as expected, poor neighborhood conditions, lack of job opportunity, high levels of peer delinquency, parental drug use, and lack of parental supervision were all significantly associated with drug dealing.

While drug dealing is clearly linked to opportunity to engage in this activity, it is not predicted by opportunity alone. Even in high-opportunity environments, youth with high commitment to the conventional roles of work and school are less likely to deal drugs or, if they do sell drugs, do so less often. Surprisingly, attitudes toward the law and perceived social payoff of being a drug-dealer were not significant predictors of drug-dealing.

Neither autonomy nor future orientation was significantly associated with drug selling. However, temperance and resistance to peer influence did distinguish youth involved in drug selling activity in terms of frequency and drug type. As the authors predicted, adolescents' with better impulse control engaged in less marijuana dealing, and, also as expected, those who were more resistant to peer influence engaged in more non-marijuana dealing. Evidently, those who sell marijuana versus those who sell other types of drugs have qualitatively different psychological profiles, and these differences need to be further researched.

Implications

These results demonstrate that drug selling is influenced by both social and developmental factors. Opportunity doesn't act uniformly; adolescents with certain psychological characteristics are more susceptible to the opportunities presented. Although it is important to confirm these findings by looking at the influence of these factors across time and to consider other groups of offenders, this work has several policy implications. First, it emphasizes the need for community-based educational and voca-

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tions programs so that at-risk youth are given the tools to pursue conventional forms of employment. In addition, the results indicate that interventions designed to reduce drug-selling should consider psychological as well as contextual factors that may influence this activity.

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The coordinating center is looking for an analyst!





We are looking for a person well qualified in data analysis to fill a faculty/research associate position. This person would be part of an interdisciplinary research team with representatives from several universities, and would work closely with collaborators on joint projects. A Masters degree in a related field and experience/training in quantitative methodology is required; a doctorate degree is preferred. Expertise in longitudinal modeling techniques, multilevel modeling and/or categorical data analysis, as well as data management expertise are highly desired. Please call the Coordinating Center for more information.

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SUBSTANCE USE IN THE PATHWAYS SAMPLE (Chassin, Vargas, Losoya & Naranjo, 2004)						
PATHWAYS LIFETIME SUBSTANCE USE vs. A NATIONAL 10 th GRADE SAMPLE (%)						
MALES			FEMALES			
	Pathways		Normative	Pathways		Normative
Marijuana	85		44	87		36
Alcohol	80		70	82		71
Cocaine	22		6	29		5
Ecstasy	15		10	23		7
Hallucinogens	24		12	28		9
<i>*Data for the normative sample come from the Monitoring The Future Study</i>						
PERCENTAGE OF THE PATHWAYS SAMPLE MEETING DIAGNOSTIC THRESHOLD FOR A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER IN THE PAST YEAR (BASED ON DSM IIR CRITERIA)						
MALES		African-American		Hispanic	Non-Hispanic Caucasian	
		Drug	27	33	39	
		Alcohol	9	20	24	
FEMALES		African-American		Hispanic	Non-Hispanic Caucasian	
		Drug	14	33	39	
		Alcohol	4	20	24	
<i>*In community samples, generally 5-10% in this age range meet diagnostic threshold</i>						



Summer Issue

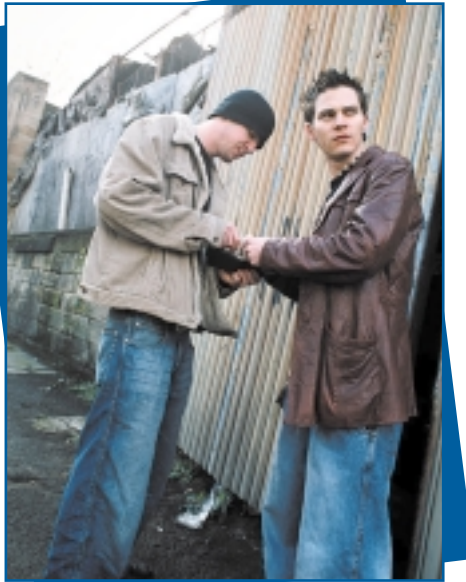
Volume 8

Adolescent Drug Dealing in the Inner City: The Roles of Opportunity, Conventional Commitments and Maturity ⁽¹⁾

In the United States, juvenile arrests for drug crimes increased from 5% to 11% of all juvenile court cases between 1990 and 1998 ⁽²⁾. This increase was especially high during the period between 1993-1998, when adolescents’ self-reported drug use declined, suggesting that the rise in adolescent drug-related arrests during this time were the result of participation in drug selling, rather than drug using ⁽³⁾. Yet, to date, there has been only a limited effort put toward understanding the psychological and contextual factors that affect adolescents’ decisions to sell drugs. Using the Pathways interview data from the Philadelphia site, this paper sheds some light on which youth from disadvantaged neighborhoods participate in drug dealing and the factors that influence this activity.

Borrowing from theories to explain adult participation in instrumental crime (that is, crimes that lead to monetary or personal gain for the participant), the authors suggest that the relationship between drug selling opportunity and drug-selling frequency might not be one-to-one. That is, not everyone who has the opportunity to sell drugs actually engages in this activity. The authors posit that drug-selling activity by juveniles is linked to their expectation of social as well as economic benefits, their lack of commitment to more conventional opportuni-

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Research on Pathways to Desistance



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