



# Department of Justice



## Office of Justice Programs

IMMEDIATE RELEASE AT 10 A.M. EDT  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2015  
[HTTP://WWW.BJS.GOV/](http://www.bjs.gov/)

BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS  
Contact: Kara McCarthy (202) 307-1241  
After hours: (202) 598-9320

### **MORE THAN HALF OF DRUG OFFENDERS IN FEDERAL PRISON WERE SERVING SENTENCES FOR POWDER OR CRACK COCAINE**

WASHINGTON – More than half (54 percent) of drug offenders in federal custody at yearend 2012 were serving sentences for powder or crack cocaine, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported in a study released today. Methamphetamine offenders (24 percent) accounted for the next largest share of drug offenders, followed by marijuana (12 percent) and heroin (6 percent) offenders.

Those convicted of crimes involving other drugs (including LSD, some prescriptions and MDMA or ecstasy) made up an additional 3 percent of drug offenders in federal prison.

Three-quarters (76 percent) of drug offenders in federal prison were either non-Hispanic black (39 percent) or Hispanic (37 percent), while nearly a quarter (22 percent) were non-Hispanic white.

The race of federally sentenced drug offenders varied greatly by drug type. The majority of crack cocaine offenders (88 percent) were black, while more than half of powder cocaine offenders (54 percent) were Hispanic and about a third (32 percent) were black. More than half of marijuana offenders (59 percent) were Hispanic. Nearly half of methamphetamine offenders (48 percent) were white and 45 percent were Hispanic.

About a quarter (24 percent) of all drug offenders in federal prison were noncitizens. An estimated 1 in 3 powder cocaine (34 percent), marijuana (35 percent) and methamphetamine offenders (31 percent) were noncitizens. However, almost all crack cocaine offenders (97 percent) were U.S. citizens.

The majority of drug offenders in federal prison were male (92 percent) and age 30 or older (79 percent).

More than a third (35 percent) of drug offenders in federal prison had no prior imprisonment and minimal criminal histories, placing them in the lowest U.S. Sentencing Commission (USSC) criminal history category (Category I). Less than a quarter (22 percent) of federal drug offenders were in the highest criminal history category (Category VI), which indicates an extensive criminal history.

(MORE)

Across all drug types, crack cocaine offenders were most likely to have extensive criminal histories (40 percent), to have used a weapon (32 percent) and to have received longer prison terms (an average of more than 14 years). Powder cocaine (41 percent) and marijuana (36 percent) offenders were most likely to be in Category I, with no criminal history at sentencing.

Nearly 1 in 4 drug offenders in federal prison who were sentenced after 1998 used a weapon in their most recent offense. The majority of these offenders received a sentence enhancement, accounting for 18 percent of the total drug offender population.

Crack cocaine offenders were the most likely to receive a mandatory minimum sentence for use of a weapon or to have sentences adjusted for weapon use, followed by methamphetamine offenders. Marijuana offenders were the least likely to have weapon enhancements.

The average prison sentence for federal drug offenders was more than 11 years. Marijuana offenders had the shortest average sentence (more than 7 years), which was nearly half that of crack cocaine offenders. The majority (62 percent) of crack cocaine offenders were sentenced to more than 10 years in prison.

The report, *Drug Offenders in Federal Prison: Estimates of Characteristics Based on Linked Data* (NCJ 248648), was written by Sam Taxy, Julie Samuels and William Adam of Urban Institute for BJS. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

###

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at <http://www.ojp.gov>.