Supporting the habit: income generation activities of frequent crack users compared with frequent users of other hard drugs

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Abstract

US Federal sentencing guidelines punish possession of crack cocaine very differently from powder cocaine, based partially upon the assumption that crack users engage more frequently in criminal behavior to pay for their habit. This article analyzed frequent users (those who have used at least 15 of the last 30 days) of crack with subgroups of less frequent hard drug users in terms of various income generation activities reported during the past 30 days. The sample consists of 602 African–Americans who were current (in past 30 days) users or sellers of cocaine powder, crack, and heroin. They were carefully recruited from randomly selected blocks in the Central Harlem area of New York City and interviewed extensively in 1998–1999. Their IGAs were classified into six categories. Compared with not-frequent (less than 15 days) hard drug users, frequent crack and multiple hard drug users were equally likely to be involved in drug distribution activities, but were significantly less likely to have full-time jobs, part-time jobs, aid to families with dependent children or welfare support. They had much higher odds ratios for non-drug related illegal (theft mainly) income generation activities and sex work among women. Often, gender and birth cohort variables had higher odds ratios with specific income generation activities than the frequent use of the primary drug(s). This evidence suggests that very frequent crack users have been stigmatized by, are largely excluded from, and perform very marginal economic roles in the legal economic system (jobs and welfare), the illegal economic system, and even in the hard drug distribution system. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ireland Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

The possession, sale and distribution of crack cocaine is often more harshly punished than that of other hard drugs, such as powder cocaine and heroin, because it is often argued that usage of crack involves more criminal behavior to generate income than usage of other hard drugs. In particular, the US Congress enacted legislation (Anti-Drug Abuse Act, 1986) that set the threshold level for crack possession to be 100 times smaller than that of powder cocaine possession (5 g of crack compared to 500 g of cocaine powder) in order to trigger harsh mandatory sentencing laws. In this article, data from a community sample of hard drug users and sellers in Harlem, New York is analyzed to test the extent to which the income generation activities of frequent crack users are in fact different from less frequent hard drug users. This article is focused upon respondent’s self-reports of current participation in various types of income generation activity and not about the amounts actually earned. Also, the data do not include measures of violent criminality.

The illegality of hard drugs makes heroin, cocaine powder, and crack expensive to purchase. These substances also create patterns of compulsive and/or addic-
tive use that further lead regular users to expend large amounts of money and/or time to obtain them. For example, in a study of heroin users in the pre-crack era (1980–1982), Johnson et al. (1985) showed that frequent heroin abusers consumed drugs on average about 24 days in the past 30 days, and spent almost $11,000 a year on drugs (about $7600 on heroin, $2000 on cocaine powder, and $1400 on other substances). Other researchers suggest that, at the height of the crack epidemic in the late 1980s, frequent crack users spent even more than this amount (Johnson et al., 1994). Mieczkowski (1990) found crack users spending $350 a week (about $18,000 a year) on crack.

Furthermore, while these drugs may be used occasionally by people at many social levels, the most severe pockets of compulsive use appear to occur in inner-city minority neighborhoods, where many residents are economically deprived and where legal formal avenues of income generation, other than welfare transfer payments, are much less available. The advent of crack cocaine in the mid-1980s seemed to exacerbate these conditions, especially because of crack’s potential for compulsive consumption (Hatsukami and Fischman, 1996). By the late 1980s, inner-city neighborhoods became centers of crack sales and crack usage, with use and sales exceeding that of all other hard drugs (Johnson et al., 1990; Hamid, 1992a; Hamid, 1992b; Johnson et al., 1994).

Researchers (Rhodes et al., 1997) have argued that frequent crack use creates an even greater need for immediate disposable cash income than the use of other hard drugs and initial studies found that the easiest way to make this money was by selling drugs (MacCoun and Reuter, 1992; Fagan, 1992). Later ethnographic studies, however, suggested that the selling career of a crack user-sellers was often shortened by arrest and street-level competition (Dunlap et al., 1997). Increased income often led to increased crack use until the debilitating effects of compulsive use made its abusers unable to obtain not only legal formal employment, but also regular employment in drug sales (Hamid, 1992a,b). By the late 1990s, the stigmatized image became so powerful that so-called ‘crackheads’ were looked down upon as unreliable sellers; they were consigned to only the lowest positions in the crack distribution hierarchy (Furst et al., 1999). This stigma also appeared to have a powerful effect on reducing participation rates of younger age cohorts (born 1970 and later) in crack smoking (Golub and Johnson, 1994, 1997, 1999; Johnson et al., 2000a; Davis and Johnson, 2000).

As in the drug economy, frequent crack users are more incapacitated by their habit. They should be expected to have lower levels of participation in other IGAs requiring regular investment of time and energy, such as formal work, and unreliable in complying with the requirements necessary to maintain welfare benefits. Instead, they might need to rely on more ‘informal’ sources of income that require less reliability, such as odd jobs, greater reliance on informal transfers (money given by friends), and illegal income generation outside of drug sales (Cross and Johnson, 2000).

Shifts have also apparently occurred in criminal activity. Baumer et al. (1998) used a cross-city longitudinal analysis to test the effect of crack cocaine involvement with changes in the burglary and robbery rates over time. They found that, while cities with high levels of crack involvement had increasing robbery rates, they experienced declines in burglary rates. This supported their argument that crack use leads to a need for quick money that cannot be provided by the high skill and patience required for burglary. The implication is that frequent crack users less often resort to burglary and rely more upon thefts and minor property crime as a way to raise funds to support their crack consumption. Crack users appear to make various trade-offs in a variety of income generation activity – whether legal or illegal – as documented below.

The central question of this research project is whether a significant difference exists in various types of IGA between frequent crack users and less habitual hard drug users. In particular, are frequent crack users most likely to rely on informal employment, informal transfer payments, and non-drug related illegal incomes? Also, are gender and age cohort differences as important as drug user patterns?

2. Methodology and sample

In this study, a community sample of drug users and sellers from Central Harlem in New York City is analyzed to investigate the variety of strategies used to generate income. The data comes from a NIDA-funded research project titled ‘Estimating Current Hard Drug Users and Operatives.’ The main objective of this study was to estimate the size and characteristics of hard drug using and selling populations in defined geographic areas. To qualify for inclusion in this study persons had to have used and/or sold heroin, crack, or cocaine powder in the past 30 days. Thus, no analyses with these data can compare hard drug users/sellers with the larger population of persons in the same community who avoid use or sale of these substances (as nonusers were not recruited for this study).

Data collection was guided by a multi-stage sampling strategy. Using detailed geocoded data from the New York Police Department concerning drug-related allegations (made by citizens and undercover officers), Central Harlem was divided into 45 Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). PSUs were formed to consist of about 2500 individuals each (Davis et al. 2001). Drug-related
allegations were mapped onto census blocks by professional mapping specialists, then allegation rates per 1000 households were computed for each PSU. This resulted in 11 PSUs with high drug allegation rates (averaging 71 complaints/1000), 13 PSUs with medium levels of allegations (averaging 32/1000), and 21 PSUs with low levels (13/1000). Three PSUs were randomly selected from each strata. This first-stage sampling procedure assured that the sample obtained would represent a variety of blocks and of hard drug users and sellers, and not just those in core drug sales areas.

Each sampled PSU was assigned to experienced interviewers. Staff proceeded to recruit respondents in each area who would be the initial subjects or ‘seeds’ for a chain referral sampling process (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Braunstein, 1993; Watters and Biernacki, 1989), modified by aspects of respondent-driven sampling (Hekathorn, 1997) and other sampling strategies. These strategies attempted to achieve a near census listing of hard drug users and sellers in each sampled PSU. The interviewers steered respondents to recruit as new subjects those who were less likely to be otherwise accessible to the researchers. This had two functions. First, it broadened the sample to include as many hidden users or sellers as possible – people who would not otherwise be available for interviews because they have limited social links, stay at home, or take special efforts to avoid attention (such as major dealers). Second, the steering of recruitment helped offset a source of bias in snowball sampling, which is that initial respondents tend to recruit the easiest people (friends, family, etc.) in order to obtain the incentive provided for each person they recruit, possibly distorting the sample composition. Of course, respondents could refuse to approach a given nominee if he or she felt it would be too inappropriate or dangerous (Davis et al., 2001; Davis and Johnson, 2000 for a more extended discussion of the sampling method and sample characteristics). The informed consent process included a urine test before conducting the interview. Liberty et al. (2001) document very high concordance between respondent’s self-reports of drug use and urine test results – although urinalysis cannot differentiate between crack and cocaine powder. This sample of hard drug users and operatives was carefully designed to overcome the limitations of both ethnographic and survey research. As such, this sample is one of the best scientific efforts to recruit a very ‘hard-to-reach’ population of hard drug users and operatives in an inner-city community.

The sample included 657 individuals. Due to the demographics of the Harlem community, the vast majority of these were African American. In order to focus upon an ethnically homogeneous pool of hard drug users, only the 602 African-American subjects are included in the analyses below. Of these, 351 (58%) were male and 251 (42%) were female. Based on previous research by Golub and Johnson (1994), Golub and Johnson (1997) and Golub and Johnson (1999) that found important generational differences in hard drug patterns, the sample was divided into three cohorts based on birth year. A ‘pre-crack’ generation (N = 282) was made up of respondents born prior to 1960 (although most of this age group also became crack users). A ‘crack generation’ (N = 259) was made up of those born between 1960 and 1969. A ‘post-crack’ generation (N = 59) included those born after 1969 – primarily in the 1970s (Golub and Johnson, 1999). The choice of primary drug(s) of use is not explained by aging, but are due to long-standing differences among inner-city birth cohorts in their preferred drugs (Golub and Johnson, 1999).

The central hypothesis to be tested is whether frequent crack users have different income generation activities than frequent users of cocaine powder or heroin, or than less frequent hard drug users. While the causal direction between types/frequency of drug use and income generation activities cannot be determined with these cross-sectional data, most subjects used two or more drug(s) and also engaged in several types of income generation activities in the past month. The analysis is designed to document how frequent drug use patterns (as the independent variable) impacts upon the specific types of current income generation activity (as dependent variables) of these subjects, even when controlling for gender and generational effects (as control variables).

Based on the previous discussion, frequent crack users were hypothesized to be less likely than other hard drug users to have either formal legal jobs or maintain formal transfer payments. Frequent crack users were hypothesized to have higher levels of informal transfer payments and illegal non-drug income sources. As reviewed above, the literature is mixed about whether frequent crack users should have higher or lower levels of illegal drug sales than other hard drug users. Contradictory tendencies may cancel each other out: while some frequent crack users may support their habit by selling or helping to sell drugs, others may have unreliable reputations and have difficulty obtaining supplies to sell (Johnson et al., 1990; Furst et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2000b). The latter may have to resort to other types of income generation, such as sex work, confidence games, theft, and panhandling.

3. Data analysis and findings

3.1. Drug use

While studies point to the decline of crack use among the general arrestee population in New York (Golub and Johnson, 1997), crack continued to be the most preferred drug of use among these respondents. During the previous 30 days, crack was used on an average of 13.5 days by members of the sample while cocaine and heroin use
averaged only 4 days, and marijuana was used on an average of 8 days. Over a quarter of respondents were very habitual crack users. Thus, 28% of the sample used crack for 25 or more days in the last 30 days; in comparison 4.5%, used cocaine powder, 10% used heroin, and 17% used marijuana to the same extent.

One of the most important factors associated with preferred drug(s) was birth cohort (Fig. 1). Respondents born in the 1970s, and who thus came of age after the crack epidemic had peaked, were much less likely to use any of the hard drugs, and were far more likely to report marijuana use only. Those born in the 1970s used marijuana for an average of 23 days, but used crack for only 7 days on average, and their reports of cocaine powder and heroin use were uncommon (two or one day in past month). In contrast, the 1960s cohort used crack for an average of 13 days and the pre-60s cohort used crack for an average of 15 days in the previous month. Gender had very little effect upon current drug use within the sample, although women used crack cocaine somewhat more often than men (16 vs. 12 days in the prior month).

‘Frequent’ use was defined by adopting a cut off of 15 or more days in the past 30 days. This operational definition is more stringent than that employed by the National Office of Drug Control Policy used to define ‘hardcore’ users (10 days in past 30 days) (Rhodes et al., 1997). A parallel analysis showed that substantial numbers of frequent (15 or more days) heroin and cocaine powder users self-reported using crack 10–14 days in past 30 days. Adopting a cutoff of 10 days would have substantially decreased the (already small) number of subjects in comparison groups, but increased the number of crack and multiple drug users (where sample sizes were already large).

Using the cutoff of 15 days or more in the past 30 days, a drug-user variable was created having five categories: (1) Not frequent users ($N = 265$) reported use of each of the three main drugs (crack, powder cocaine and heroin) for 14 or fewer days in the preceding 30 days. [Note: to be interviewed for the study, respondents had to have used or sold at least one of the three drugs at least once in the past 30 days.] (2) Frequent cocaine powder users ($N = 27$) reported cocaine powder use during 15 or more days. (3) Frequent heroin users ($N = 29$) reported using heroin for 15 or more days. [Persons classified in categories 2 and 3 may have used crack, but did so less than 15 days in the past 30 days] (4) Frequent crack users ($N = 218$) reported crack use for 15 or more days (but used cocaine powder or heroin less than 15 days in prior 30). (5) Frequent multiple drug users ($N = 62$) reported using crack plus either heroin or cocaine powder for 15 or more days in the past 30 days.

This classification scheme permits several interesting comparisons among these hard drug users of various substances. Forty-four percent were Not Frequent Users (‘Irregular Hard Drug Users’ will also be employed as an appropriate label) and indicates a ‘low use’ of hard drugs (within this sample). This group ($N = 265$) will be the reference category in the logistic regressions reported below. The remaining 56% were classified as frequent users, and were subclassified as frequent users of heroin (5%), cocaine powder (5%), crack (36%), and multiple (10%) hard drugs. With this categorization, frequent users of each specific hard drug can be compared with frequent users of the other drug(s) as well as with the not-frequent hard drug users – in order to document whether frequent use patterns of specific substances are associated with various income generation activities.

3.2. Income generation activities

Average incomes reported were low – from both legal and illegal sources. The average reported legal income was $497 in the previous 30 days, while the average illegal income was $408 for a total average income of $905 a month. Moreover, the reported income amounts were not strongly correlated with the independent variables of drug user type, gender, and cohorts.

The analytic focus below is upon the respondent’s self-reported involvement and labor inputs to obtain money. Income generation activity was measured according to how recently respondents had obtained income from 24 different sources, ranging from full-time work to income from welfare, friends and family, various illegal activities or drug sales. Recency categories were collapsed so that each variable is a count of whether the respondent reported that income generation activity during the previous 30 days. Each dependent variable is a unique measure of the specified IGA. The 24 income sources were aggregated into six broad categories (as dependent variables), as follows:

1. Formal work: Full-time and part-time work in legal jobs (with the exception of work categories defined as informal such as ‘street vendor’).

![Fig. 1. Days with drug use by cohort.](image-url)
2. Informal work: Part-time work defined as informal such as street vending and odd jobs.

3. Formal transfers: Welfare payments such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), General assistance, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and other government support.

4. Informal transfers: Money from friends, family, and partners.

5. Non-drug illegal: Money from burglary, confidence games, stealing, and prostitution or other sexwork.

6. Drug-related: Money from drug sales, assisting in sales, or other money from dealers.

(Exceptions: Robbery was reported by only six individuals and was thus too small a category to be included in the analysis, although all six were frequent crack users. Panhandling was not included above because it did not fit into any of the broad categories; it is discussed separately below.)

A dichotomous variable was created for each broad category and scored a ‘1’ if the respondent reported engaging during the previous month in any of the activities making up that category and scored a zero otherwise. Fig. 2 shows important differences by gender. Formal (legal) work was reported by very few of the respondents (13% of men and 9% of women). Men were far more likely to have informal work income (54–20%), while women were far more likely to have formal transfer income and non-drug illegal income, the latter primarily due to their involvement in sex work. Informal transfer income was reported by about 60% of both men and women. Drug-related IGA were reported by slightly more men than women (21–17%), not a significant difference. Birth cohort differences were also pronounced. While only 14% of the two older cohorts reported having drug-related income, 66% of those born in the 1970s reported such income (data not shown).

3.3. Crack use and income generation activity

The principal hypothesis holds that frequent crack users would have more illegal IGA than other drug users, but not necessarily more drug-related IGA. Further, frequent crack users were expected to have fewer formal and higher informal IGA, both in terms of work and transfer payments.

Different patterns of IGA are documented (Fig. 3). Frequent crack users and frequent users of multiple drugs were far more likely to have non-drug illegal IGA than frequent users of cocaine or of heroin; both of the latter were very similar to irregular hard drug users. Frequent crack users were also slightly more likely to have formal and informal transfers, but the comparison is not as clear as for informal jobs and drug-related IGA. Only frequent cocaine powder users had relatively high levels (38%) of participation in legal formal IGA.

3.4. Multiple logistic regression of specific IGA categories

The objective in this section is to test whether different patterns of frequent drug use impacted upon various categories of IGA. Separate multiple logistic regression analyses were conducted for each dichotomous variable. The independent effects of gender and birth cohort were controlled via logistic regression. Females were the reference group for gender and the 1970s cohort was the reference group for age cohorts. The ‘not frequent user’ group was the reference group for comparison with frequent users. Due to the non-random nature of the sample, the results that obtained a 0.01 level of significance appear most valid. Significance levels of 0.05 suggest marginal significance.

Table 1 shows that the 1960s cohort and frequent cocaine users were the mostly likely (although not at 0.01 level) to have formal work income (column A). By
contrast, men were significantly more likely to have informal work (column B) and significantly less likely to have formal transfers (column c), controlling for cohort and drug use.

Cohort differences were significant for informal work (column B), where both older cohorts have greater odds of participation than the 1970s cohort. This is partially explained by the huge difference in terms of participation in illegal drug IGA (column E), where both older cohorts had odds ratios of about 0.068. This means that the youngest (1970s) cohort had an odds ratio of 15 times for illegal drug-related IGA than their same gender and drug-using counterparts born 1969 and before.

Frequent heroin users appear to have lower odds (0.234), while frequent crack users had higher odds (2.42) of participation in informal transfer IGA (column D). Frequent cocaine users had higher odds (2.93) of participation in formal work IGA (column A). Interestingly, none of the frequent drug user categories appears to have any significant higher (or lower) odds of involvement in illegal drug-related IGA (column E) than the not-frequent hard drug users. This seems to indicate that neither frequent drug use nor the type substance has an aggregate effect on the likelihood of participation in drug sales or distribution. This may be the result of averaging out the higher participation of some frequent drug users trying to pay for their habit with lower participation by others who have become too untrustworthy to be reliable or successful dealers or assistants.

The most interesting finding, however, is the far higher odds ratio for participation in non-drug illegal IGA (column F) by both frequent crack users (11.89) and frequent multiple drug users (20.01) [gender and cohort odds ratios are not significant]. This striking finding indicates that frequent crack use – but not frequent heroin or cocaine powder use – is primarily linked to non-drug illegal IGA.

In order to tease out additional differences, some of the constituent variables were disaggregated in order to compare specific legal and illegal IGA directly. This also allows examination of variables such as panhandling, which did not fit into the above categories. Only IGA variables having a statistically significant relationship with one or more of the independent variables are included. In the case of legal income sources, this included full-time work, odd jobs, AFDC, general assistance, panhandling, family and friends. [Part-time work, food stamps, SSI, and other government assistance had no significant relationship with any of the independent variables, and were thus excluded.] These results are shown in Table 2. Men had higher odds (2.32) of full-time work (column A) and odd jobs (4.14 – column B), but had much lower odds (0.0067) for receiving income from AFDC (this program is strictly limited to those rearing children). Men also have somewhat lower odds (0.506) for receiving general assistance (column D).

Cohort effects are most pronounced for odd jobs (column B), where both older cohorts have higher probabilities of participation. Among the oldest, pre-1960s cohort, family transfer IGA (column F) has
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Dependent variables (constructed categories) odds ratios (logistic regression)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal work (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Male (n = 351)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.74&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (n = 251)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth cohort 1970&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (n = 59)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960–69 (n = 259)</td>
<td>3.23&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-1960 (n = 282)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frequent drug users (15+ days in month)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not-freq user&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (n = 265)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack (n = 218)</td>
<td>0.483&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine (n = 27)</td>
<td>2.93&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin (n = 29)</td>
<td>0.423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple drugs (n = 62)</td>
<td>0.696</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Reference category.
<sup>b</sup> Significant at 0.05.
<sup>c</sup> Significant at 0.01.
<sup>d</sup> Significant at 0.001.

significantly lower odds (0.274), but panhandling (column E) has significantly higher odds (3.56). Aging hard drug users appear to be particularly marginalized in these communities, even from their own families, and may disproportionately need to resort to the kindness of strangers to survive.

The frequent crack user category has significant odds ratios for all of the legal IGA variables except for odd jobs. Frequent crack users have significantly lower odds ratios for full-time work (0.434) and for AFDC (0.386), compared to irregular hard drug users, indicating that the former are more marginalized from participation in more formal avenues of legal income generation. By contrast, the frequent crack users have significantly higher odds ratios for other IGAs, including general assistance (3.26), panhandling (2.14), family transfers (3.82) and friends (7.83). These types of IGA tend to be easier to obtain on an irregular and informal basis. These results are generally mirrored by the frequent multiple drug users, most of whom combine frequent crack use with frequent use of either cocaine or heroin.

By contrast, frequent cocaine users have significantly high odds (4.53) for full-time work, but significantly lower odds (0.162) than even irregular drug users (the reference group) for odd jobs. Frequent heroin use was not significantly related to any of the legal IGAs. The fact that odd jobs, like the informal jobs category, has lower odds ratios among frequent drug users, although not significant in every case, indicates that this informal sector activity is not a good alternative IGA for frequent drug users (although it is for males and older cohorts).

The disaggregation of illegal IGA variables clarifies the effect of gender on income generation, and augments the previous conclusions about the importance of drug use patterns. These results are shown in Table 3. The effect of gender is particularly evident with sex work, which shows miniscule odds (0.047) for men. In contrast, men have higher odds ratios for participation in stealing (1.64) and drug selling (2.13), although only the last was significant at the 0.01 level.

By contrast, frequent crack users have very large odds ratios for sex work (11.4), cons (97.3), and stealing (17.8); these odd ratios are even higher among the frequent multiple drug users. The extreme odds ratios for the non-drug illegal activities, and especially for cons, is due to the almost total absence of these activities among respondents in the not-frequent-user category. The result was that in some cases apparently high odds ratios (such as the 12.8 for frequent heroin users in cons) are insignificant.

The only substantial difference from the broader finding for cocaine powder users in Table 1 was high odds ratios for confidence schemes (23.1) and stealing (5.69), but not for sex work. Again, frequent heroin users were not statistically different from the not-frequent drug use reference group with respect to involvement in any of the illegal IGAs. As in Table 1, the data in Table 3 showed that each subgroup of frequent drug users was not significantly different than the irregular hard drug users in drug sales, assisting in drug sales, and other drug IGA (controlling for gender and cohort).
4. Conclusions

Using individual level data from a sophisticated survey of hard drug users and sellers in Harlem, New York, this analysis has investigated the IGAs of frequent crack users and compared them to not-frequent hard drug users and even with frequent users of heroin and cocaine powder. This has allowed an empirical test of several findings that have emerged from ethnographic research among hard drug users and surveys of arrestees in the criminal justice system. While crack use remained high within this Harlem sample, it was much lower for younger drug users, supporting research among arrestees (Golub and Johnson, 1999) that points to a shift from crack to ‘blunts’ (marijuana smoked in a low cost cigar) among high-risk younger inner-city youths.

The analysis across several IGA variables showed that frequent crack users had lower rates of formal and informal work IGA than did not-frequent hard drug users, but these differences were not strongly significant. Likewise, frequent crack users did not seem to be any less likely to use the formal welfare system, although they were more likely to have informal transfer IGA. When disaggregating the IGA categories into specific types of work, however, some differences did emerge as significant; frequent crack users showed lower likelihood of participating in full-time work, odd jobs, and AFDC, but higher likelihood of participating in general assistance programs, panhandling, and gaining informal support from family and friends.

Perhaps the most important finding of this analysis was that frequent crack users were no more likely to be involved in drug sales/assistance IGA, but were far more likely to be involved in petty crimes such as cons, stealing, and prostitution. The argument that habitual crack users become marginalized by other drug dealers appears to be further supported by the finding that drug selling IGA is overwhelmingly dominated by those in the youngest cohorts (born 1970 and later) which has grown up after the end of the expansion of crack use. Faced with few other opportunities to obtain the income to support their consumption, frequent crack users and frequent multiple drug users can only resort to non-drug criminal activities such as cons and stealing. Moreover, the results show that sex work appears to primarily involve women who are frequent crack and multiple drug users (Fagan, 1992; Maher, 1997; Johnson et al., 2000a).

Because the analysis targets only IGAs and not violent behaviors per se, these results cannot be used to support the argument that frequent crack users are more likely than other drug users to engage in violent criminal behavior. However, frequent crack users and multiple drug users are more likely to be marginalized from virtually every other available form of income, and thus are more likely to turn to non-drug related crime.

At the same time, these data show that hard drug users are far from being a homogeneous group, even

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Odds ratios for legal activities</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-time work (A)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male (n = 351)</td>
<td>2.32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female* (n = 251)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth cohort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-1960 (n = 282)</td>
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<td>0.454c</td>
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<td>Cocaine (n = 27)</td>
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<td>Heroin (n = 29)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple drugs (n = 62)</td>
<td>0.181b</td>
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* Reference category.
† Significant at 0.05.
‡ Significant at 0.01.
⊥ Significant at 0.001.
though this analysis focused on only a single inner-city urban community and one ethnic group (African–Americans). Gender and age differences were just as important in analyzing IGAs, particular in terms of sex work among women and the low levels of drug-related illegal activity among older cohorts.

5. Discussion

Does this finding of higher illegal IGAs by frequent crack users justify the 100 times lower possession threshold for prosecution and severe sentences of crack users and dealers? Probably not. The findings support the argument made by others (Hamid, 1992a, 1992b; Maher, 1997; Furst et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2000a) that frequent crack usage is associated with greater marginalization among this population than does the frequent use of comparable hard drugs such as cocaine powder and heroin. At the same time, the greater involvement in illegal activities already exposes frequent crack users to much higher possibilities of arrest, making such a differential less important as a way of securing higher arrest and prosecution numbers. Finally, the debate about arrest and prosecution policies tend to obscure another urgent need among this population, which is for greater access to, and efforts to steer them into, effective treatment options. Treatment may give them a realistic set of lifestyle alternatives and steer them away from the personally and socially destructive cycle of addiction, crime and prison.

The data in this article also provide considerable empirical support documenting interesting linkages between drug user lifestyles and participation in specific IGAs. At one extreme, the frequent cocaine powder users (N = 27) had the highest odds for holding full time jobs, but low involvement in odd jobs; they also had high odds for cons and stealing, but not for sex work nor for drug-related crimes. The not-frequent hard drug users had especially low involvement in cons and/or stealing relative to the frequent hard drug users. The frequent heroin users (N = 29) had patterns of IGA that were nearly identical to the reference group, rather than to their counterparts who used cocaine or crack frequently.

This article documents the very marginal status of frequent crack users and frequent multiple drug users – within American society and even within the networks of drug-abusers. Even after controlling for gender and cohort differences, the frequent crack and multiple drug users were effectively excluded from conventional economic activity – they were significantly less likely than the reference group to have full time jobs, part-time jobs, welfare support, and AFDC support.

Frequent crack and multiple drug using females were much more likely (odds over 10.0) to report sex work – an illegal behavior that was not especially common among frequent heroin or frequent cocaine powder-using females (odds ratios of less than 2). Frequent crack and multiple drug-using males were significantly more likely to engage in panhandling and non-drug IGA than the reference group.

In short, the frequent crack and multiple drug users (compared to the reference group) have effectively been excluded from most regular forms of legal income (jobs and welfare supports) and even from drug sales and

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Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific illegal Income Generation Activities</th>
<th>Odds ratios for illegal activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent variables</td>
<td>Sex work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 351)</td>
<td>0.047d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n = 251)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birth cohort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s* (n = 59)</td>
<td>0.741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960–69 (n = 259)</td>
<td>0.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1960 (n = 282)</td>
<td>0.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent drug users (15+ days in month)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not frq user* (n = 265)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crack (n = 218)</td>
<td>11.4d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine (n = 27)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heroin (n = 29)</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple drugs (n = 62)</td>
<td>12.7d</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reference category.
b Significant at 0.05.
c Significant at 0.01.
d Significant at 0.001.
assisting in drug sales. Frequent crack-using women are largely relegated to prostitution and sex work roles – a lifestyle extensively documented by ethnographic research (Dunlap et al., 1997; Maher, 1997). Having been largely excluded from legal jobs and drug selling, frequent crack-using men only have the option of non-drug offending and panhandling to support their drug consumption. This evidence suggests that the very frequent crack users have been stigmatized by, are largely excluded from, and perform highly marginal economic roles in the legal economic system (jobs and welfare), the illegal economic system, and even in the hard drug distribution system.

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References

and three variables: Interview context, wave and interviewing skill, in preparation.


