



A Policy Research Partnership  
to Reduce Youth Substance Use



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# **Social Reaction to Perceived Deviance: Variation in Juvenile Drug Offence Adjudication**

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# Introduction & Purpose

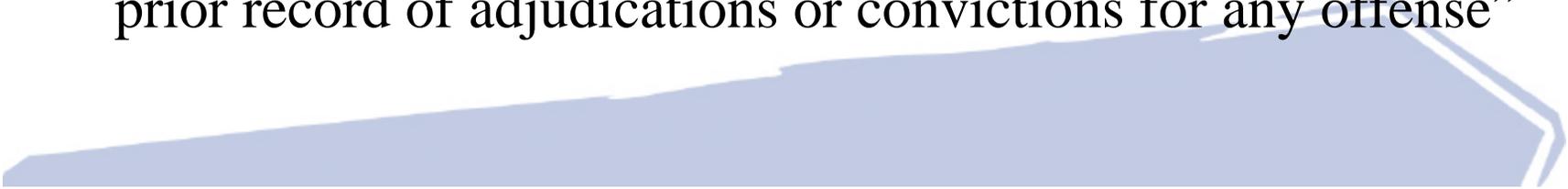
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- Sociological tradition of examining role of social reaction and labeling in understanding social construction of deviance.
- Social reaction and labeling are a significant force in American drug policy, causing both concurrent and historical variation.
- Current study hypothesizes that juvenile adjudication severity, at any single point in time, varies by:
  - Context (the nature of offense): DUI, alcohol possession, marijuana possession, and cocaine possession
  - Location (community characteristics): age, ethnicity, income, population density, and region



# Sampling & Methods

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- 173 communities determined by location of public schools in nationally representative sample of students in grades 8, 10, and 12 in the coterminous United States in 2000 (Monitoring the Future, NIDA)
  - Identification of prosecutorial office handling the majority of youth cases in sampled communities
  - CATI interviews with 135 prosecutors knowledgeable about youth substance offenses (78% response rate)
    - Adjudication practice distribution for DUI and alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine possession offenses
    - All respondents instructed to answer for juveniles “with no prior record of adjudications or convictions for any offense”
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# Sampling & Methods, cont.

- Independent variables: community income, ethnicity, and age distribution data obtained from year 2000 GeoLytics estimates. Population density obtained from National Center for Education Statistics. Dummy variables for identifying drug charge for multi-level analyses.
- Dependent variables:
  - Overall Community Severity Levels (OCSLs)
  - Composite Severity Score



# Sampling & Methods, cont.

- OCSLs: 4-level ordinal measures indicating the most severe and most frequently used adjudication severity level per offense
  - Level 1 Dismissal
  - Level 2 Minimal Community Reaction: informal probation, fine, community service, mediation
  - Level 3 Community-Based Corrections: court-ordered probation with treatment, court-ordered probation without treatment, home detention
  - Level 4 Placement: detention, residential facility, other out-of-home placement



# Sampling & Methods, cont.

- Composite Severity Scale: ordinal scale to compare, within communities, simultaneous adjudication outcomes of all 4 offenses in multi-level analyses
    - Data moved from wide to long format
    - Each substance-specific OCSL score treated as separate case in data, clustered within respondents (or communities)
  - Completed bi-variate analyses specifying Pearson's chi square and Fisher's Exact in SAS v.8, as well as multi-level thresholds of change analyses using the logistic function in MIXOR (Hedeker and Gibbons 1996)
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# Thresholds of Change Models

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- Removal of Level 1 (dismissal) results in three severity levels, and thus two thresholds:
  - Threshold 1 = moving from Level 2 to Level 3
  - Threshold 2 = moving from Level 3 to Level 4
- Model specification:
  - $C_1 = \$_0^{(1)} + \text{Pr } \$^{(1)}$       Threshold 1
  - $C_2 = \$_0^{(2)} + \text{Pr } \$^{(2)}$       Threshold 2

where P is a set of explanatory variables thought to be related to one or both thresholds

- If  $\$^{(1)}$  or  $\$^{(2)} < 0$ , then the identified variable lowers the threshold
  - If  $\$^{(1)}$  or  $\$^{(2)} > 0$ , then the identified variable raises the threshold
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# Community Demographics

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- Age Distribution

- > Nat'l 12-17 59.3%
- > Nat'l 18-24 29.6%

- Ethnicity

- > Nat'l African-American 34.1%
- > Nat'l Asian 19.3%
- > Nat'l Caucasian 64.4%
- > Nat'l Hispanic 25.9%

- Median Household Income

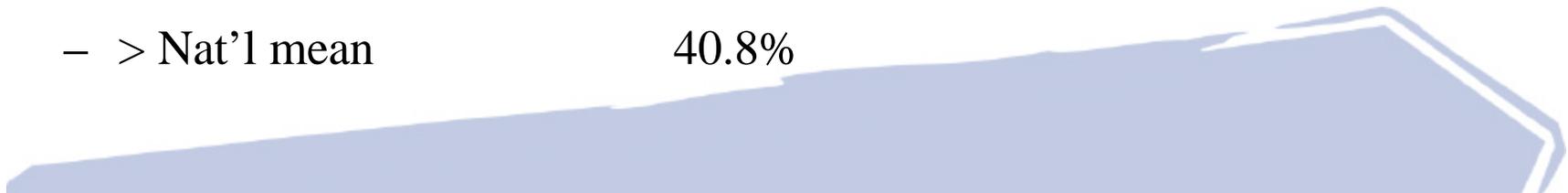
- > Nat'l mean 40.8%

- Population Density

- Urban/suburban 63.0%
- Town/rural 37.0%

- Region

- West 20.0%
- Midwest 27.4%
- South 33.3%
- Northeast 19.3%



# Overall Community Severity Levels (OCSLs)

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Sentencing Severity Level	Alcohol Possession (N=67)	DUI (N=44)	Marijuana Possession (N=86)	Cocaine Possession (N=80)
	% Resp.	% Resp.	% Resp.	% Resp.
1. Dismissal/release	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
2. Minimal community reaction*	53.7	29.6	30.2	25.0
3. Community-based corrections** (% driven by treatment)	43.3 (58.6)	61.4 (63.0)	53.5 (73.9)	35.0 (96.4)
4. Placement	1.5	9.1	16.3	40.0

\* Victim-offender mediation, restitution or victim services; community service; fine; informal or voluntary probation

\*\*Court-ordered probation with treatment, court-ordered probation without treatment, home detention

# Bi-Variate OCSL Analyses

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No relationships with either region or ethnicity (high proportion Caucasian populations), but population density, age, and income effects

- Urban vs. rural communities
    - ↓ severity for cocaine possession
  - Communities with high adolescent populations
    - ↑ severity for both alcohol and cocaine possession
  - Communities with high young adult populations
    - ↓ severity for cocaine possession
  - Communities with high median household income
    - ↑ severity for DUI and cocaine possession
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# Thresholds of Change: Model 1 (N=276)

	<b>Threshold 1 Odds Ratios</b>	<b>95% CI</b>	<b>Threshold 2 Odds Ratios</b>	<b>95% CI</b>
DUI	0.29**	.15-.59	0.14* †	.02-1.41
Marijuana possession	0.28**	.11-.68	0.06**†	.08- .48
Cocaine possession	0.19**	.07-.48	0.01**†	.00- .10

*Note:* Alcohol possession is serving as the referent category

- Model 1:  $2\log L=246.5$  (df=9), intraclass correlation=.425, cluster variance = 2.433
- Model 2:  $2\log L=225.0$  (df=21), intraclass correlation=.290, cluster variance=1.345

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\*p<.10    \*\*p<.05

† Odds ratio significantly different from odds ratio at first threshold, p<.05

## Thresholds of Change: Model 2 (N=276)

	Threshold 1 Odds Ratios	95% CI	Threshold 2 Odds Ratios	95% CI
DUI	0.32**	.11-.93	0.13	.01-2.40
Marijuana possession	0.29**	.11-.74	0.05**†	.00-.94
Cocaine possession	0.20**	.07-.57	0.01**†	.00-.18
Caucasian population	4.45**	1.39-14.28	2.21 †	.73-6.73
Age 12-17	0.24**	.07-.86	0.22**†	.05-.92
Age 18-24	1.51	.57-4.00	3.63*	.98-13.55
Income	0.39*	.13-1.17	1.96	.58-6.61
West	0.94	.24-3.63	0.94	.24-3.63
Midwest	0.68	.22-2.07	0.68	.22-2.07
Northeast	0.29*	.08-1.09	0.29*	.08-1.09
Urban	1.76	.56-5.58	1.76	.56-5.58

\*p<.10    \*\*p<.05

† Odds ratio significantly different from odds ratio at first threshold, p<.05

# Summary

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- As expected, alcohol showed lowest overall levels of social reaction, while cocaine showed highest
  - DUI: conflicting social reaction?
    - Not likely to be treated with minimal reaction
    - Less likely to have treatment as driving force within community-based corrections
    - No significant threshold difference for placement over alcohol possession offenses
  - Clear between-community differences in substance-specific adjudication severity levels
  - Significant within-community effects of ethnicity and adolescent population distributions on thresholds
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# Limitations and Future Directions

- Limitations
    - Cross-sectional sample (one year of data) and low scale N
    - Sample based on nationally representative student samples; cannot generalize to community characteristics
    - Utilized public school communities only (80% of total sample)
    - Processing severity questions were structured in such a way as to allow for multiple responses
  - Future Directions
    - Explore odds of dismissal, formal diversion to treatment, and transfer to adult court
    - Incorporate state-level penalties and merge with youth self-reported drug use-related attitudes and behaviors
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