



Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy and Practice: Drug Offense Arrests in Illinois, by Gender

Research Brief

Prepared by Christina Frasik as part of Loyola's Fall 2017 *Applied Crime and Justice Research: Focus on Women in Prison* class. This class is conducting research to understand the factors that have influenced the trends and patterns of women sentenced to prison in Illinois, and this research brief is one in a series coming from this class.

Data Source: Data used for this research brief were aggregated from Illinois Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) system records by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA).

Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy & Practice
Loyola University Chicago
25 East Pearson, Suite 1116
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Phone: 312-915-7876
ccj@luc.edu
<https://www.luc.edu/ccj/>
Twitter: CCJ_Loyola

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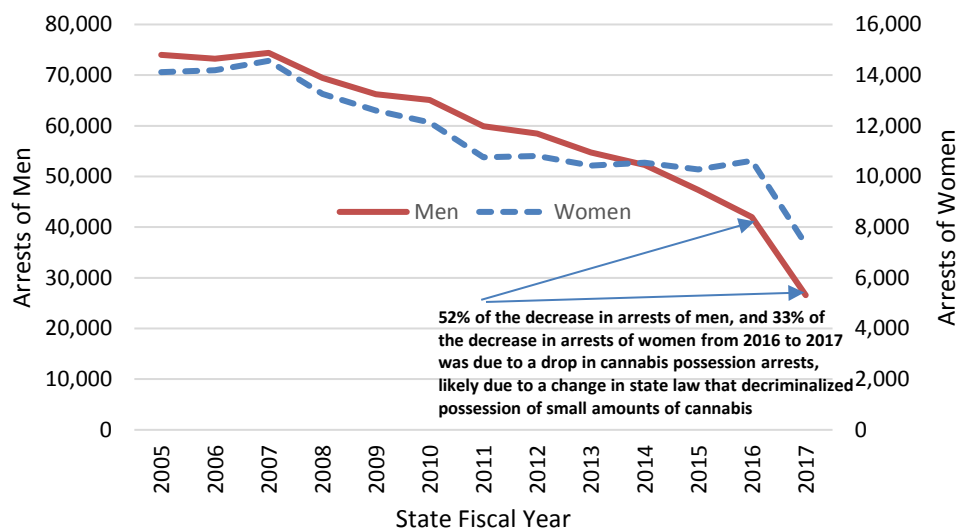
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This brief describes custodial arrest patterns and trends for men and women arrested for drug-law violations in Illinois between 2005 and 2017. Custodial arrests involve those where the police take someone into custody and fingerprint them. Analyses of drug-law violation arrests over time included arrests for both felonies and misdemeanors, and were based on the state fiscal year (SFY) when the arrest occurred. Drug-law violations include the manufacture, delivery or possession of cannabis and other controlled substances and drug paraphernalia violations. More detailed analyses were also performed to compare the characteristics of women and men arrested specifically for *felony-level* offenses in terms of age, race, the county where the arrest occurred, the felony-class of the arrest offense, and the criminal history of the arrestee.

Numbers, Rates and Proportion of Arrests

During the period examined, women accounted for 17% of all drug offense arrests in Illinois. Between state fiscal year (SFY) 2005 and 2017 the *number* of arrests involving adult women in Illinois for drug-law violations decreased, falling from 14,114 arrests in 2005 to 7,326 arrests in 2017, a 48% decline. Drug-law violations accounted for 10% of all arrests of adult women in Illinois in SFY 2017. Similarly, during that same period, the number of arrests involving men in Illinois for drug-law violations decreased from 74,008 in 2005 to 26,578 in 2017, a 64% decline. Taking population changes into account, arrest *rates* were also examined for the time period.

Figure 1: Arrests for Drug-Law Violations in Illinois, by Gender
(Note: 2 Different Axes)



Between SFY 2005 and 2017, the drug-law violation arrest rate of women in Illinois decreased 49%, falling from 356 per 100,000 women between 18 and 64 years of age in 2005 to 182 per 100,000 in 2017. Over the same period, the drug-law violation arrest rate of men in Illinois decreased 65%, falling from 1,885 per 100,000 men between 18 and 64 years of age in 2005 to 667 per 100,000 in 2017.

Since arrests of women for drug-law violations decreased by a smaller percentage than among men, women accounted for an increasing *proportion* of drug-law violation arrests. For example, in SFY 2005 women accounted for 16% of drug-law violation arrests and by SFY 2017 they accounted for 22% of the arrests.

Demographics of Arrestee and Location of Arrest

The characteristics of women and men arrested specifically for *felony*-level drug-law violation offenses were also compared in terms of age, race, the county where the arrest occurred, the felony class of the arrest, and the criminal history of the arrestee. For these analyses, CHRI data for those arrested during the period from calendar year 2012 to 2014 were examined.

There was statistically significant, albeit weak, relationship between the arrestee's gender and their age. Specifically, women arrested for felony drug-law violations were slightly older than men arrested for similar offenses. Women were an average age of 33.7 years old compared to men, who were an average age of 32.2 years. In terms of the relationship between gender and race, again, difference was noted; 62% of women arrested were white, while only 43% of men were white.

Additionally, there were differences between women and men when comparisons were made as to where the arrest occurred. Women were more likely to be arrested outside of Cook County, while men were more likely to be arrested in Cook County, although the relationship was weak. Specifically, 55% of women were arrested outside of Cook County, compared to 39% of men.

Current Felony Class & Criminal History

Women and men arrested for felony-level drug offenses were quite similar in the felony classification of their current offense, but differed in their prior criminal history. In general, the majority (roughly 55%) of both women and men arrested for felony-level drug offenses were arrested

for a Class 4 felony, and fewer than 10% of both women and men were arrested for a Class X felony.

Statistically significant relationships between gender and criminal history measures were also observed, in which women arrested for felony drug-law violations had less extensive criminal histories than men arrested for similar offenses. On average, women had 7.3 prior arrests while men arrested for felony drug offenses had an average of 11.4 arrests. Similarly, 59% of women arrested for a felony-level drug-law violation had a prior conviction for any crime while 68% of men arrested for felony drug offenses had a prior conviction. Furthermore, 40% of women arrested for felony drug-law violations versus 55% of men had at least one prior *felony* conviction for any offense. Finally, while 19% of women arrested for felony drug-law violations had served a prior prison sentence, 35% of men had served a prior prison sentence.

Sentencing and Use of Prison

Among the women arrested and convicted of a felony-level drug offense between 2012 and 2014, 28% were sentenced to prison, compared to 48% of the men convicted of felony drug offenses. After statistically controlling for other individual and case characteristics, women were still less likely to be sentenced to prison than men convicted of a felony drug-law violation.

Conclusion

Overall, arrests for men and women for drug-law violations have decreased, with the greatest decrease observed in arrests of men. Arrests for cannabis offenses accounted for less than 10% of drug arrests involving women in SFY 2017, while possession of a controlled substance comprised 45% of the drug arrests of women that year. Comparing men and women, notable differences were observed in the race the arrestee and the location of the arrests, as well as the criminal histories of the arrestees. Arrests of women for felony drug-law violations were more likely to be outside Cook County and involve white arrestees than their male counterparts. Women were also less likely to have a prior criminal history than men, regardless of how it was measured.

The large decrease in arrests of women, coupled with their less extensive criminal histories, can be used to better understand the trends in women being processed through the justice system and the likelihood of their being sentenced to prison if convicted of a felony drug offense.