



Center for Criminal Justice Research, Policy and Practice: **Weapon Arrests in Illinois, by Gender**

Research Brief

Prepared by Brianna Howerton 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).

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

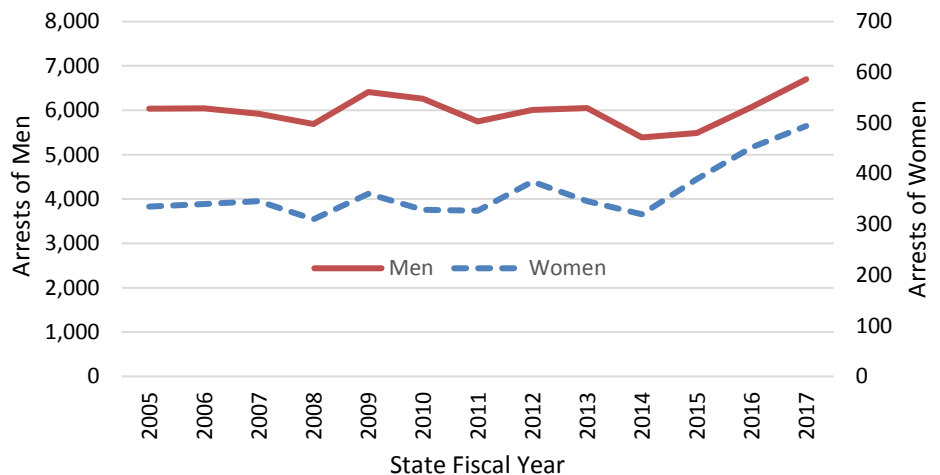
This brief describes custodial arrest patterns and trends for men and women who were arrested for the illegal possession of weapons (primarily firearms) in Illinois between 2005 and 2017. Custodial arrests involve those where the police take someone into custody and fingerprint them. Analyses of arrests over time included arrests for both felonies and misdemeanors, and were based on the state fiscal year (SFY) when the arrest occurred. Importantly, these arrests *do not* include the use of weapons in the commission of violent crimes. 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 Proportions of Arrests

During the period examined, women accounted for 6% of all the arrests for weapon offenses in Illinois. Between state fiscal year (SFY) 2005 and 2017, the *number* of arrests involving adult women in Illinois for offenses involving the illegal possession of weapons increased from 335 in 2005 to 494 in 2017, or a 47% increase. By comparison, during that same period, the number of arrests involving men in Illinois for offenses involving the illegal possession of weapons increased from 6,033 in 2005 to 6,700 in 2017, or an 11% increase (Figure 1). Weapon offenses accounted for less than 1% of all arrests of adult women in Illinois in SFY 2017.

When arrest *rates* were examined to account for changes in the population during the period examined, a similar pattern was evident. Between SFY 2005 and 2017, the

Figure 1: Arrests for Weapon Offenses in Illinois, by Gender
(Note: 2 Different Axes)



arrest rate of women in Illinois for weapon offenses increased 46%, from 8.4 arrests per 100,000 women between 18 and 64 years of age in 2005 to 12.3 arrests per 100,000 women in 2017. By comparison, the arrest rate of men in Illinois for weapon offenses increased 9.4%, from 153.6 arrests per 100,000 men between 18 and 64 years of age in 2005 to 168.1 arrests per 100,000 men in 2017.

Because the arrest rate for women increased more than the arrest rate for men, women accounted for an increasing, but still relatively small, *proportion* of the total arrests for weapon offenses. Specifically, in SFY 2005 women accounted for 5.3% of the arrests statewide for weapon offenses, but by 2017 they accounted for 6.9% of the arrests.

Demographics of Arrestee and Location of Arrest

The characteristics of women and men arrested specifically for *felony*-level weapons 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 a statistically significant, albeit weak, relationship between the arrestee's gender and their age and race. Specifically, women arrested for felony weapon offenses were slightly older than men arrested for these offenses. Women had an average age of 28.8 years old, compared to men, who had an average age of 26.8. In terms of the relationship between gender and race, women arrested for felony weapon offenses were slightly less likely to be black than the arrested men; 66% of the women were black compared to 73% of the men.

Additionally, there were differences between women and men when comparisons were made as to where the arrest occurred. Specifically, women were more likely to be arrested for weapon offenses outside of Cook County compared to men arrested for that same offense; 52% of women arrested for weapon offenses were arrested outside of Cook County compared to 40% of men.

Current Felony Class & Criminal History

Women and men arrested for felony-level weapon offenses also differed in the classification of their current offense and their prior criminal history. In general,

women arrestees tended to be charged with less serious felony-class offenses than men. Of the women arrested for a felony-level weapon offense, 50% were charged with a Class 4 felony, whereas 36% of men were charged with a Class 4 felony.

Women arrested for weapon crimes also had less extensive criminal histories than men; women had fewer prior arrests, convictions, and felony convictions. While women had an average of 3.9 prior arrests for any crime, men had an average of 8.9 prior arrests. Further, less than one-half (42%) of women arrested for weapon offense had a prior convictions for any offense, while 60% of the men arrested had at least one prior conviction. More specifically, 25% of women arrested for a felony weapon offenses had at least one prior *felony* conviction, whereas 47% of the men arrested for a felony weapon offense had one or more prior convictions for any felony offense. Finally, 11% of the women arrested in Illinois for a felony weapon offense had been previously sentenced to prison, while 30% of the men arrested for these offenses had been previously sentenced to prison.

Sentencing and Use of Prison

Among the women arrested and convicted of a felony-level weapon offense between 2012 and 2014, 55% were sentenced to prison, compared to 74% of the men. After statistically controlling for other individual and case characteristics, women were not statistically any more nor less likely to be sentenced to prison than men convicted of a felony weapon offense.

Conclusion

Overall, the number of women and men arrested for a weapon offense in Illinois has risen, although the increase was larger for women than men. Although the characteristics of women and men arrested for felony-level weapons offenses differed slightly in terms of age and race, larger differences between women and men were noted when comparisons were made regarding arrest location, the felony class of the offense, and the extent and nature of the arrestee's criminal history.

The increase in arrests of women for weapon offenses, despite their less extensive criminal histories, can be used to better understand the trends in women being processed through the justice system for these offenses and the likelihood of their being sentenced to prison if convicted.