

Between 1998 and 2012, the number of drug offenders in federal prisons grew 63% and made up about half (52%) of the federal prison population at yearend 2012. Almost all (99.5%) of these offenders were serving time for drug trafficking. More than half (54%) of them had an offense related to powder or crack cocaine. Methamphetamine offenders (24%) accounted for the next largest share of federal prisoners, followed by marijuana (12%) and heroin (6%) offenders. Those convicted of crimes involving other drugs (including LSD, some prescriptions, and MDMA or ecstasy) made up an additional 3% of drug offenders.

Offender demographics

About three-quarters of drug offenders in federal prison were non-Hispanic black or African American (39%) or Hispanic or Latino (37%), and less than a quarter (22%) were non-Hispanic white. The majority of drug offenders in federal prison were male (92%) and age 30 or older (79%). Nearly a quarter of the federal inmates serving time for drug charges (24%) were noncitizens.

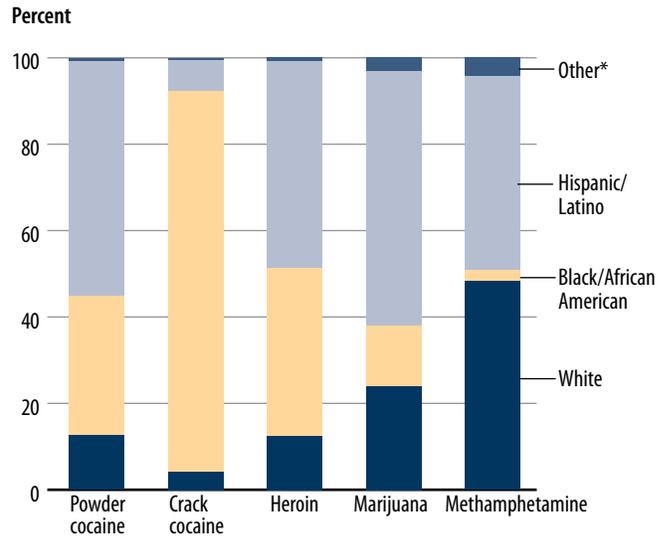
The vast majority of crack cocaine offenders (88%) were black. More than half (54%) of powder cocaine offenders were Hispanic, and 13% were non-Hispanic white. Hispanics also made up more than half (59%) of marijuana offenders and almost half (48%) of heroin offenders. A large proportion of methamphetamine offenders were non-Hispanic white (48%) or Hispanic (45%).

Criminal history

More than a third (35%) of federal drug offenders had no prior imprisonment and minimal criminal histories, although the extent of drug offenders' criminal histories varied by primary drug type. Crack cocaine offenders had more extensive criminal histories than any other type of drug offenders. More than 40% of crack offenders in federal prison were in the highest U.S. Sentencing Commission criminal history category (Category VI), followed by heroin offenders (24%). Powder cocaine (41%) and marijuana (36%) offenders were the most likely to have no criminal history at sentencing.

Nearly a quarter (24%) of the federal drug offenders in prison at yearend 2012 who were sentenced after 1998 used a weapon in their most recent offense. A majority of the weapon-involved offenders received a sentence

Demographics of federally sentenced drug offenders in the Federal Bureau of Prisons at fiscal yearend 2012 by drug type



* Includes American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian and Pacific Islander.
Source: Urban Institute analysis of data from U.S. Sentencing Commission, fiscal years 1994-2012 and Federal Bureau of Prisons, SENTRY data base, fiscal yearend 2012.

enhancement, accounting for 18% of the total drug offender population. About a third of crack cocaine offenders (32%) had their sentence increased because they used a weapon when committing the offense. Methamphetamine offenders were the next most likely to have weapon enhancements—more than 25% had some kind of sentencing related to weapons.

Federal sentencing

The average prison sentence of drug offenders in federal prison was 11.3 years. More than three-quarters (78%) of offenders were sentenced to a term of imprisonment of more than 5 years. Marijuana offenders had the shortest prison terms, with an average sentence of more than 7 years. In comparison, crack cocaine offenders had the longest prison terms, with an average sentence of more than 14 years. A majority (62%) of crack cocaine offenders were sentenced to more than 10 years in prison.

The full report (*Drug Offenders in Federal Prison: Estimates of Characteristics Based on Linked Data*, NCJ 248648), related documents, and additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics can be found on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.

