



Research Snapshot



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Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS
at Yale University

Comparing Black and White Drug Offenders: Implications for Racial Disparities in Criminal Justice and Reentry Policy and Programming

Authors: Alana Rosenberg, Allison K. Groves, Kim M. Blankenship

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What is the research about?

The overwhelming increase in incarceration in the U.S., partly attributed to the drug war, has disproportionately affected black communities. Although it is known that blacks are incarcerated at a higher rate than whites and are thus subject to more of the negative effects of criminal justice involvement, less is known about differences between black and white drug offenders.

Why is this important for HIV prevention and treatment?

Incarceration is increasingly recognized as having negative health impacts, including increasing HIV risk for both incarcerated individuals and members of the community they return to. Effective reentry programming aimed at rehabilitating ex-offenders can prevent return to prison, and thus

potentially reduce individual and community HIV risk.

What did the researchers do?

This research involved 243 participants enrolled in Project SHARRPP (Structures, Health and Risk Among Reentrants, Probationers and Partners) in New Haven, CT in 2011; all of whom had been released from prison/jail or placed on probation in the past year for drug related offenses. We assessed whether their criminal justice experiences, drug use, and reentry opportunities differed by race.

What did the researchers find?

Compared to whites, blacks were significantly more likely to have sales and possession charges; significantly more likely to prefer marijuana; and significantly less likely to report having severe drug problems. Whites were

significantly more likely to prefer heroin. For both races, drug treatment was the most common service accessed through probation or parole.

How can you use this research?

These comparisons suggest that blacks and whites have different patterns of committing drug-related crimes and, thus, different reentry programming needs. Although drug treatment is critical for all who need it, policy and program interventions must address other needs of offenders, such as poverty alleviation and employment opportunities, to decrease racial disparities in health outcomes, including HIV.

Original Research Article:

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