

Rochester SACSI Research
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Estimates of the Size of the Rochester Drug Market
and their Implications for Addressing Homicide

A. Introduction

There have been many efforts to estimate the size of illegal drug markets. Most often these estimates occur at the national level and involve projections based on assumptions about the proportion of drugs that are seized at the border. In other cases, some people have sought to estimate the effect of police activity on drug markets by tracking the purity, potency and cost of illegal drugs.

None of these efforts is ever completely satisfactory. Estimating illegal activity is complicated and difficult. There is, however, some value in such estimates particularly if their limitations are recognized and they are used in general ways that do not require high degrees of accuracy.

Information is available that may allow coarse estimates of the size of the illegal drug market in Rochester. Such estimates may provide useful information for the SACSI focus on homicide in Rochester.

The information used below is derived from Rochester police estimates of the number of active drug selling locations, and customer and revenue estimates made by inmates in focus groups held at the Monroe County Correctional Facility by the SACSI research team.

B. The Figures:

1. Police estimates indicate that there are approximately 300 known or suspected drug-selling locations in Rochester.
2. The inmate focus groups suggest that drug houses commonly have 50-100 customers.
3. The focus groups also suggest that gross revenues of \$1000 a night are not uncommon and that “hot” houses may bring in \$4000-\$5000 a night at times.

C. The Estimates:

1. Total buyer/user population

The figures allow estimation of the total Rochester drug buyer/user population as follows.

300 houses X 50 customers per house = 15,000 total customers.

Please note that this figure uses the conservative estimate of 50 customers per house.

2. Total Revenue

We can also estimate total revenues as follows.

Again being conservative, if average houses make only \$500 a night for only 4 nights a week they gross \$2000 a week or \$104000 a year.

300 houses X \$104,000 = \$31.2 million

D. Are These Estimates Reasonable?

A very conservative approach is taken to develop these estimates. A less conservative but still defensible approach would yield estimates over twice the size of these. These estimates are conservative because 1) they do not include estimates of the number of unidentified drug selling locations, 2) they use the lowest estimate of the number drug house customers and 3) they use an estimate that actually reduces the lowest estimate of revenues that was made by the focus groups.

The estimates indicate that buyer/users make up 6.3% of the population of Rochester. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse show that over 10% of the population over 12 yrs old have used illicit drugs during the past year. The figure is approximately 8% for marijuana and 1.7% for cocaine. It is difficult to make direct comparisons between those numbers and the Rochester estimates but the figures do not suggest the local estimates are unreasonable.

The estimates also indicate that each buyer/user spent on average \$2080 year of \$40 a week on illegal drugs. On its face this does not seem unreasonable.

E. What These Estimates Say About Drug Related Homicide.

In the year 2000, sixteen of the forty homicides in Rochester were described as drug related. Using that figure and these estimates this means:

There was one drug related homicide for every 937.5 drug buyer/users (15000/16).

There was one drug related homicide for every \$1.95 million in gross drug revenues (31.2m/16).

F. Conclusion

These last figures suggest that affecting homicide indirectly through interventions designed to address drugs will be extremely difficult. They support development of interventions which target homicide directly and which may or may not have an effect on drug sales or use.