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Illicit drug markets, particularly *retail* drug markets, vary in a number of potentially important respects. Some markets impose greater costs on the neighborhoods in which they are set, as a result of the violence and nuisances that they generate, while others operate more discreetly. Some are more vulnerable to enforcement pressure than others are. Social science has produced little theory or evidence about how retail drug markets operate, and how public policy can affect them in socially beneficial ways. But we can describe some features of Capital District drug markets using ADAM data.

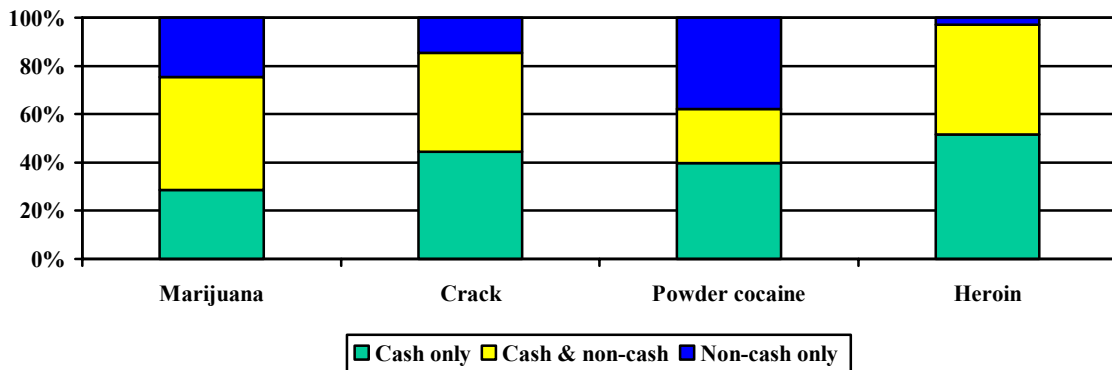
We ask ADAM respondents about whether they have obtained each of the five “primary” ADAM drugs—marijuana, crack cocaine, powder cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine—some time in the preceding 30 days.<sup>1</sup> We ask if the drug was obtained either in a cash or non-cash transaction, and how many times in the last 30 days. We also ask for additional information about the most recent cash transaction: the type of source (one’s regular source, an occasional source, or a new source); the type of location (house or apartment, other building, street or alley, other public location) in which the transaction took place; whether that location was in or outside of the respondent’s neighborhood of residence; how much was paid; and how much of the drug was for their personal use. We also ask about “failed buys,” i.e., occasions on which a respondent had the money to buy

the drug and tried to buy, but was unsuccessful. In this and future issues of the *Bulletin*, we analyze these features of Capital District drug markets.

Each drug may be obtained through cash transactions or through some non-cash exchange. The latter include exchanges of a drug for property or merchandise, for another drug, or for sex, as well as occasions on which the drug may be obtained on credit, with an understanding that it will be paid for at a later time, or on which the drug is fronted to the recipient to sell. Non-cash transactions also include stealing the drug or receiving the drug as a “gift,” as when it is shared among friends or acquaintances.

Of those who had obtained marijuana in the previous 30 days, 29 percent had obtained it only through cash transactions, an additional 47 percent had obtained the drug through both cash and non-cash transactions, and the remaining 24 percent had obtained marijuana through exclusively non-cash transactions (see Figure 1). Different patterns of cash and non-cash transactions hold for other drugs. A smaller proportion—only 15 percent—of those who had obtained crack got the drug through only non-cash transactions, with correspondingly more participating in only cash transactions (45 percent). Nearly 40 percent of those who had obtained powder cocaine had obtained it through exclusively non-cash transactions. By contrast, only 3 percent of those who had obtained heroin had obtained it through exclusively non-cash transactions.

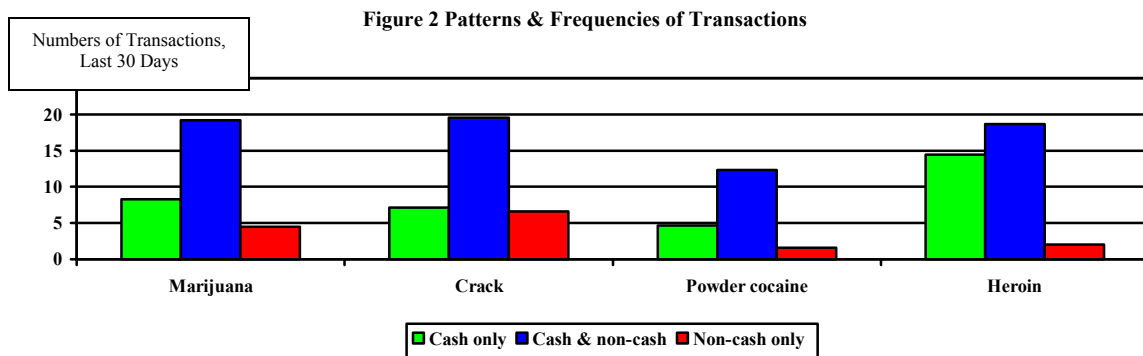
Figure 1 Cash & Non-Cash Transactions: Percent of Arrestees who Participated in Drug Transactions



Those who had obtained marijuana at least once in the 30 days preceding the interview, had obtained marijuana on 12.4 days, on average, 3.7 through non-cash transactions, and 8.7 through cash transactions. Those who had obtained crack at least once in the 30 days preceding the interview, had obtained crack on 12.1 days, on average, 3.7 through non-cash transactions, and 8.4 through cash transactions. But the averages conceal variation in frequencies across the patterns of transactions. Arrestees who had obtained marijuana through only non-cash transactions did so infrequently, just 4.5 days in the preceding 30 days. Those who had participated only in cash transactions did so on an average of 8.3 days. But those who participated in both cash and non-cash transactions obtained marijuana on an average of 19.2 days in the preceding 30 days. A similar pattern prevails for each of the other drugs: those who obtained the drug through both cash and non-cash transactions participated in the largest number of transactions, while those who participated in only non-cash transactions participated in the fewest (see Figure 2). Those who obtain their drug through both cash and non-cash transactions, compared with those who rely on one or the other form of transaction, tend to use the drug more frequently, and they are more likely to be heavy users. One might surmise that drug use plays a larger role in the lifestyles of these users, and that they are integrated into social networks of other drug users, among whom drugs are shared.<sup>2</sup>

The median price paid for marijuana in the most recent cash transaction was \$20; 75 percent of those who made cash transactions paid \$40 or less, and all but 16 percent paid \$50 or less. The median price paid for crack was \$50; 25 percent paid more than \$100 for crack in their most recent transaction. The median price paid for powder cocaine was \$90; 30 percent paid more than \$100. The median price paid for heroin was \$45.

Of those who obtained marijuana through non-cash transactions, three fourths had received it as a gift in the most recent such transaction, while slightly more than 10 percent had obtained the marijuana on credit. Two percent had been fronted the marijuana to sell, and an additional three percent harvested it themselves. A variety of other exchanges not involving cash, as well as thefts, comprise the remainder. Of those who obtained crack through non-cash transactions, 54 percent had received it as a gift in the most recent such transaction, and 16 percent had obtained the crack on credit; 7 percent had been fronted the crack to sell. Two thirds of those who got powder cocaine through non-cash transactions had on the most recent occasion received it as a gift, and 10 percent got it on credit.



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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The interview schedule allows for the possibility that even non-users of a drug may obtain the drug (e.g., to sell). Three percent

of those who obtained marijuana in the preceding 30 days reportedly did not use marijuana in the preceding 30 days, and also tested negative for marijuana. About 6 percent of those who obtained crack in the preceding 30 days reportedly did not use crack in the preceding 30 days and also tested negative for cocaine. One in six of those who obtained powder cocaine in the preceding 30 days did not use powder cocaine in the preceding 30 days. Six percent of those who obtained heroin in the preceding 30 days did not use heroin in the preceding 30 days (or ever).

<sup>2</sup> But it appears that they receive more than they give, as they are only somewhat—if at all—less likely to make cash purchases entirely for their own consumption.