

Drugs and Crime: A Study of Incarcerated Female Offenders

Holly Johnson

Research and Public Policy Series

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Foreword

The Australian Institute of Criminology has underway two national research projects to monitor illegal drug use by offenders: the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) Program and the Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) project. DUMA is an ongoing monitoring activity that has been in operation since 1999 monitoring drug use among police detainees. This program provides early warning data on drug use every 3 months from seven key sites across Australia. The DUCO project was designed to provide more detailed information on the drug use careers of adult males, females and juveniles incarcerated in Australian prisons. The results of the DUCO male study were released in 2003 and the results of the DUCO juvenile study are expected in 2005.

Our knowledge and understanding of female offenders and their drug use in Australia is relatively limited. Many studies have been small scale, specific to a jurisdiction and often comparability of data across studies is limited. Female DUCO attempts to overcome these issues through a large-scale study across six jurisdictions in Australia in 2003. In total 470 women who were incarcerated in prisons participated in the study; only 16 per cent of women who were approached refused to participate. The majority of women who were interviewed reported persistent offending and extensive drug use histories. Large proportions were drug-dependent, under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence, and actively involved in the drug market in the form of buying or selling drugs. While it is well documented that many Indigenous offenders have problems with alcohol, this report also highlights substantial levels of illegal drug use by Indigenous women.

To develop interventions that have a chance of "working" those interventions need to be built on an evidence base that has identified the key risk factors for drug use and crime. Importantly, female DUCO has shown that women are more likely to attribute their offending to drugs, and more often begin drug use prior to offending than was the case for male DUCO. This report highlights that risk factors for drug use among female offenders include early exposure to drug and alcohol problems by family members, incarceration as a juvenile, mental health problems, sexual and physical abuse, and use of prescription drugs. Clearly understanding patterns in offending and drug use, and the connection between the two, are important for assisting in the development of interventions and crime reduction strategies for offenders. It is also important to understand that not one size fits all with females having different drug and crime careers than their male counterparts. The DUCO studies help to address both the gap in Australian criminological research of prisoners as well as providing a significant database for furthering our understanding of the risk factors specific to female offenders.

Toni Makkai
Director
Australian Institute of Criminology

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The DUCO female project owes its success to the efforts and assistance of many people:

- the offenders who agreed to participate in the study;
- the data collection agencies that undertook the interviews;
- the state and territory correctional facilities who agreed to participate and who provided access to the offenders in their care;
- staff at the Australian Institute of Criminology who managed the project, developed the datafile and provided valuable feedback on this report;
- the support of policy officers within the federal Attorney-General's Department; and
- the generous funding of the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department under the National Illicit Drug Strategy.

The Australian Institute of Criminology gratefully acknowledges their contributions. The author accepts full responsibility for the interpretations and analyses presented in this report.

Disclaimer

This research paper does not necessarily reflect the policy position of the Australian Government.

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Executive Summary

Executive summary

The Australian Institute of Criminology is undertaking research on the drug use careers of adult males, females and juveniles incarcerated in Australian prisons. The results of the Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) male study were released in 2003 and the results of the DUCO juvenile study are expected in 2005. The primary focus of this report is on the drug and alcohol use and criminal careers of 470 women who were incarcerated in prisons in six jurisdictions in Australia in 2003. Overall, these women tended to have extensive criminal histories and prior contacts with the criminal justice system. The majority also reported chronic and persistent drug use. A better understanding of patterns in offending and drug use, and the connection between the two, will assist in the development of interventions and crime prevention strategies for women.

Overall, the profile of the women interviewed for this study is similar to the prison population of the six jurisdictions in the study as recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2004b). Incarcerated women tend to be younger and to have lower levels of education than the general population, and Indigenous women are over-represented, accounting for more than one-quarter of the women interviewed.

History of offending

Offenders were involved in a range of offences across their criminal careers. For example:

- three-quarters considered themselves to be 'regular' offenders;
- half were regular property offenders, 62 per cent were regular drug sellers or buyers, 13 per cent were regular sex workers, and one in 10 were regular violent offenders; and
- the majority were involved in multiple property crimes and drug offences.

Drug use

The women interviewed for this study also reported substantial involvement with a variety of illicit drugs. Almost two-thirds were regular illegal drug users in the six months prior to arrest and 39 per cent were using more than one type of drug. In terms of drug type:

- 40 per cent used cannabis;
- 37 per cent illegally used amphetamines;
- 27 per cent used heroin;
- 15 per cent illegally used benzodiazepines; and
- six per cent used cocaine.

Non-Indigenous women were more likely than Indigenous women to be regular users of drugs other than cannabis, and more likely to be polydrug users. Indigenous women, on the other hand, had higher levels of alcohol and cannabis use. Comparisons with the DUCO male study highlight important differences in the drug use histories of incarcerated men and women. For example:

- women tend more often to be high on drugs at the time of the offence and less likely to be under the influence of alcohol (with the exception of Indigenous women); and
- amphetamine use and escalation to regular use of amphetamines and heroin were higher for women than for men.

Links between drugs and crime

The results of this study provide evidence of a connection between drug and alcohol use and criminal offending. For example:

- 42 per cent of offenders were under the influence of drugs and 27 per cent were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offence;
- half of property offenders attributed their crimes to the need to obtain money to buy drugs, a percentage that increased to 87 per cent for women whose preferred drug was heroin;
- 44 per cent of women whose main current offences were burglary or theft and 29 per cent of those who were incarcerated for robbery were under the influence of heroin at the time of the offence. Amphetamines were used at the time of the offence by 35 per cent of women incarcerated for robbery or driving offences, and 30 per cent of those whose main offence was burglary or theft;
- property offenders were more likely than violent offenders to be actively involved in the drug market in the form of buying or selling drugs;
- 55 per cent of the women interviewed met the criteria for drug dependency and 27 per cent for alcohol dependency;
- alcohol dependency among Indigenous women was three times higher than for non-Indigenous women (54% compared to 17%), while dependency on illicit drugs was somewhat higher among non-Indigenous women (57% compared to 48% of Indigenous women).

While the precise link between drug and alcohol abuse and criminal offending is not known, drug use exacerbates criminal offending. This study finds that persistent offenders tend to have begun experimenting with illegal drugs at an earlier age than non-persistent offenders, and they have higher rates of drug dependency. Drug-dependent women were also more likely to be regular offenders and had a significantly higher frequency of property offending.

A number of offenders attribute their criminal offending directly to their use of drugs and alcohol. This study uses a conservative measure of causation, which includes a combination of addiction or intoxication at the time of the current offence, for offenders who stated that the reason they committed the offence was related to drugs or alcohol. In total, 41 per cent of offenders causally attributed their offending to their drug and alcohol abuse: 31 per cent to illegal drugs, nine per cent to alcohol and one per cent to both. Indigenous offenders were almost equally likely to causally attribute their criminal offending to alcohol (24%) or drugs (21%) while non-Indigenous women attributed their offending primarily to illegal drugs. In comparison with men interviewed for the DUCO male study, higher proportions of women in this study attributed their offending to their illegal drug use.

Temporal order of drug use and offending

Whether drug use ‘leads’ to crime or the reverse has been the subject of debate. Much of the research focusing on male offenders has found that criminal activity tends to precede drug use, but that offending, in particular property crime, escalates as drug use increases. Somewhat different results were found for women in this study. One-third of all drug-using women interviewed for this study began offending prior to any drug use, and two-thirds had used illegal drugs prior to or within the same year as their first offence. This suggests that, for a substantial portion of female offenders, drug use plays a role in shaping onset into a criminal career. Women involved in the sex trade, for example, tended to begin sex work after becoming regular users of amphetamines and heroin.

Risk factors for drug use and offending

This study offers many opportunities to examine a range of risk factors for drug and alcohol abuse and offending. Results show that:

- 87 per cent of incarcerated women were victims of sexual, physical or emotional abuse in either childhood (63%) or adulthood (78%). The majority were victims of multiple forms of abuse;
- childhood and adult abuse were correlated with drug dependency and involvement in the sex trade;

-
- physical abuse in childhood was a predictor of violent offending;
 - mental health problems were correlated with drug dependency, violent offending and involvement in the sex trade;
 - a small proportion of offenders had spent time in juvenile detention (17%) and this indicator of early onset of serious offending was related to drug dependency and regular property and violent offending as adults;
 - drug-dependent women and persistent property offending were more likely to have grown up in families with drug problems;
 - women with alcohol and drug dependencies, and those who were violent offenders, were more likely to have grown up in families with alcohol problems; and
 - users of prescription drugs were between two and four times as likely as other women to also use illegal drugs.

Policy implications

Strong interconnections were found among these life experiences, including victimisation, mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse among family members, use of prescription drugs, and drug dependency at the time of arrest. All are important correlates of criminal offending and all are highly interrelated. These results highlight the importance of interventions for women offenders in four main areas:

- whole-of-government approaches and inter-agency cooperation to ensure that the range of factors that can lead to drug use and offending are addressed;
- the prevention of drug dependency through rapid intervention with drug users and effective drug treatment programs;
- early interventions with families and children of high-risk women in order to help avert intergenerational drug abuse and offending; and
- programs targeted specifically to women and their personal histories and drug use patterns.

Interventions based on empirical evidence of patterns in women's offending and drug use histories could help divert novice drug users from becoming dependent, help avoid harms associated with drug dependency, and could help contribute to reducing criminal offending among high-risk women.

Limitations of the study

There are certain limitations to studies based on incarcerated offenders. The results cannot be generalised to all female offenders or illegal drug users, as unknown proportions never come to the attention of the police, and only a small percentage of those who are charged and convicted are sentenced to serve time in prison. Women who receive prison sentences are more likely to be chronic or repeat offenders with extensive criminal histories, vulnerable to detection by police because they are not in the legitimate labour market or are working or living on the street, or less skilled at the crimes they commit.

Accuracy of memory recall and willingness to report sensitive or private experiences are important considerations in self-report studies of this nature. Much of the information provided by participants is in relation to activities that may not have been detected by law enforcement agencies, or disclosed to anyone else prior to the interview, such as the extent of offending and illegal drug use, personal experiences of sexual, physical and emotional abuse, as well as mental health problems. Given the nature and content of this information, the DUCO project, like similar projects, is limited in the extent to which the self-reported information is reliable. In the field of criminology, research has shown that self-reported offending among prisoners is generally reliable, and that self-reported criminal histories are consistent with official records (Peterson, Braiker & Polich 1980). With respect to the accuracy of disclosures of illegal drug use, the DUMA project has established a high degree of consistency between drug use reported in interviews and the detection of drug use in urinalysis tests (Milner, Mouzos & Makkai 2004).

1 Overview of drug use among women in Australia

1 Overview of drug use among women in Australia

Introduction

Drug and alcohol use are considered important factors in criminal offending (White & Gorman 2000; Fagan 1990; Chaiken & Chaiken 1990). The tangible costs to Australian society of drug and alcohol-related crime have been estimated at over \$4 billion (Collins & Lapsley 2002). In a recent report, the cost of crime in Australia was estimated to be at least \$32 billion, and drug offences to be at least \$1.96 billion, but could possibly be higher because drugs are implicated in many other crimes (Mayhew 2003).

The Australian Government has responded to drug abuse through the Australian National Drug Strategy, a partnership of federal, state and territory governments and the non-government sector. The National Drug Strategy aims to improve health, social and economic outcomes for Australians by preventing the uptake of harmful drug use and reducing the harmful effects of licit and illicit drugs in society. Eight priorities are identified as areas for future action within the 2004–2009 National Drug Strategy:

1. prevent the onset of drug use;
2. reduce the supply of drugs;
3. reduce drug use and related harms;
4. improved access to treatment;
5. develop the workforce and organisations to respond effectively;
6. strengthen partnerships among governments, communities, organisation, business, medical professions and research institutions;
7. implement the National Drug Strategy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Complementary Action Plan 2002–2003; and
8. identify and respond to emerging trends through research, environmental scanning and evaluation.

(Source: www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au-pdf-framework0409.pdf)

The Australian Government's National Illicit Drug Strategy (NIDS) forms a significant part of the National Drug Strategy. In addition to a supply reduction initiative, the latest phase of the NIDS, introduced in 2003–04, identified a number of new priorities focusing on psychostimulants, co-morbid drug use and mental health problems, research into prevention and treatment, support to families, diversion of users from the criminal justice system into education and treatment, and expansion of treatment programs (see Baker, Lee & Jenner 2004; Teesson & Proudfoot 2003). The Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) and the Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) projects are initiatives funded under NIDS and

managed by the Australian Institute of Criminology. DUCO and DUMA are the only national research projects that focus on the interconnections between drug use and crime. The main objective of the DUCO project is to contribute to the key areas of research and monitoring through the examination of alcohol and illicit drug use and the criminal careers of incarcerated adult males, adult females and juveniles. The results of the DUCO male study were released in 2003 (Makkai & Payne 2003a) and the results of the DUCO juvenile study are expected in 2005. This report summarises the results of the female component.

Offenders in the DUCO female study were interviewed in prisons in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and Northern Territory in 2003. As the following brief overview of drug use among women in Australia will show, although women are generally less likely than men to be drug users, and are less likely than men to be charged and imprisoned for committing crimes, drugs play an important role in women's contact with the criminal justice system, perhaps a different role than for men. An important question is whether the level of drug abuse among women in correctional institutions and the risk markers for drug abuse are the same or different as for men. Lack of reliable statistical data in this area has hampered our understanding of the nature of these links, and has affected the development of policy and treatment programs for women both inside and outside of prisons.

The DUCO female study will contribute to the empirical evidence about the interaction between drug use and criminal offending among women. Despite the limitations inherent in studying an incarcerated population, this study has some particular benefits. Drug use (especially heroin, cocaine and amphetamine use) is relatively rare among the general population, so that very large random samples would be needed to examine the connections between drug use and crime. Targeted studies of known offenders are therefore warranted. One particular harm associated with drug use is crime, and targeted studies of drug use among known offenders can add to discussions about the links between them. Studies like this one and the DUCO male and juvenile studies provide empirical data that can help target efforts to reduce drug and alcohol abuse among offenders, and reduce crime among drug and alcohol abusers, therefore avoiding a criminal career.

Unlike some other criminological research, this study has the added advantage of covering a wide variety of offences and criminal careers in addition to the offence that led to the current incarceration. Since the current offence may be unusual or atypical in the overall history of the offender, this method provides a more accurate description of lifetime offending frequency and patterns. This study also covers a wide range of drugs. It is not restricted to a small number of drugs such as heroin or amphetamines in the way that some other more targeted research has been. It uses a large sample of incarcerated offenders and covers most jurisdictions in Australia. It therefore offers a comprehensive examination of drug and alcohol abuse and offending patterns among women that can be compared to male offenders (Makkai & Payne 2003a).

This monograph begins with a description of drug use in Australia among the general population and among offenders, summarises the literature on women, drugs and crime, and presents the responses of the women interviewed to questions about their drug use, criminal offending and connections between the two. Separate chapters focus on alcohol use and Indigenous offenders. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of the results for the reduction of drug abuse among women offenders.

Indicators of drug use among women in Australia

Illegal behaviour, such as the use of illicit drugs, is difficult to quantify. However, there is a range of monitoring activities in Australia that together can help estimate the level and patterns of drug use among women in society, as well as certain harms associated with drug use, such as arrest and incarceration. These include:

- the National Drug Strategy Household Survey;
- arrests for drug offences;
- women incarcerated for drug offences; and
- levels of drug use among women detained in police custody.

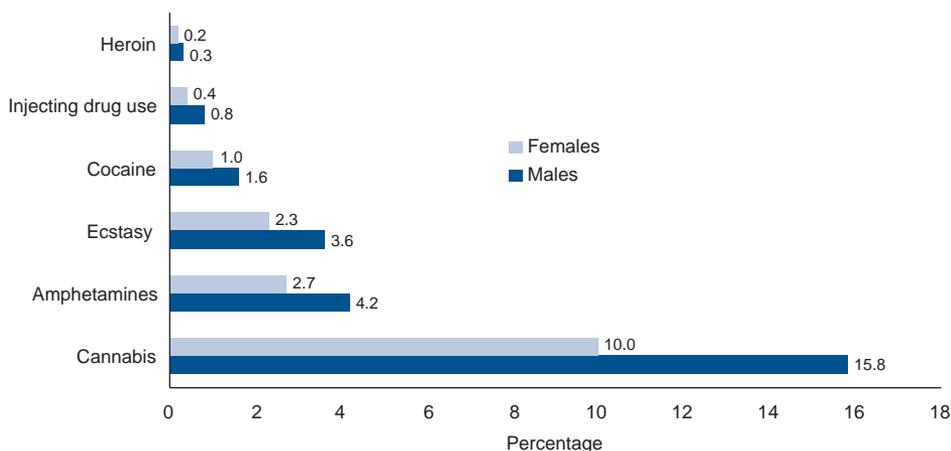
National Drug Strategy Household Survey

In the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), a random sample of Australians are interviewed about their drug use at approximately three-year intervals (AIHW 2002). In 2001, almost 27,000 people aged 14 years and over were interviewed about their drug consumption patterns, and their attitudes and behaviours concerning tobacco, drugs and alcohol. According to the NDSHS, 14 per cent of females and 20 per cent of males reported using illicit drugs in the 12 months prior to the survey. This was comparable to rates of drug use in 1995, but lower than in 1998 when 19 per cent of females and 25 per cent of males and reported recent drug use.¹ The highest rates of drug use were among 20 to 29-year-olds, for both females and males (31% and 40%, respectively).

Females reported a lower prevalence of recent drug use than males for all types of drugs. The illicit drug most commonly used was cannabis, followed by amphetamines and ecstasy. Small percentages of females and males had recently used heroin or were injecting drug users. The most common type of drugs to be injected were amphetamines, heroin and other opiates. According to the NDSHS, an estimated 32,400 women and 58,600 men were injecting drug users in 2001.

¹ Due to the larger sample used in 2001 (26,744), these estimates are considered the most reliable. The sample was 10,030 in 1998 and 3,850 in 1995.

Figure 1: Illicit drug use in previous 12 months, population 14 years and older, 2001



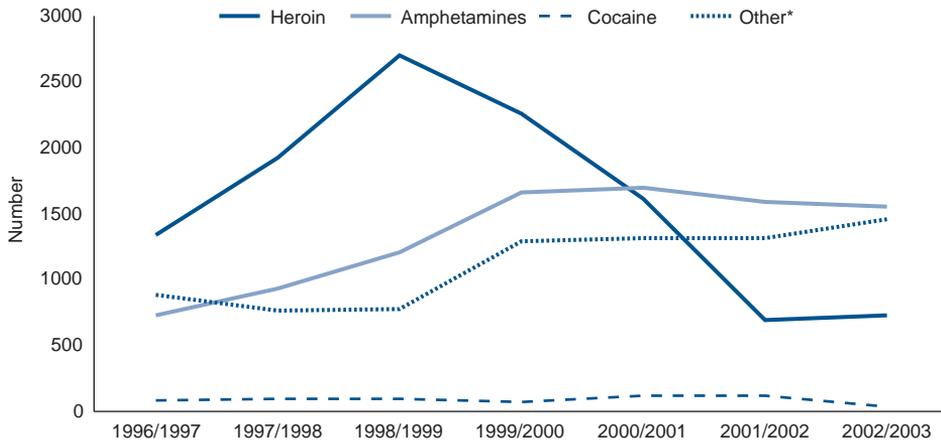
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, adapted from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 2001

Arrests for drug offences

Arrest statistics reflect only those crimes that come to the attention of police and for which an offender is identified and arrested. Arrests for drug offences are therefore more an indication of police action around the enforcement and detection of drug-related activity than a measure of drug use in the community. Police action can be affected by the availability of resources and setting of priorities, including targeted operations, which may shift over time. Nevertheless, the number of arrests is a good indicator of the number of women who are at risk of being criminalised and imprisoned for their drug use.

There were 12,924 women arrested for drug offences in 2002–03, just two per cent less than the number in 1996–97 (13,180) (Australian Crime Commission 2004). However, trends vary according to the type of drug. Arrests for cannabis offences declined by 10 per cent, which may be a consequence of decriminalisation in some jurisdictions or diversion schemes such as cautioning. Figure 2 shows trends in the number of women arrested for other types of drugs, excluding cannabis. The number of women arrested for heroin offences reached a high in 1998–99 then declined by 73 per cent during the time of the heroin shortage. At the same time, arrests for amphetamines and other drugs (hallucinogens, steroids and others) increased. Arrests for amphetamines more than doubled between 1996–97 and 2002–03, while arrests for other drugs increased by 65 per cent. Cocaine arrests increased by 40 per cent up to 2001–02 then dropped dramatically in 2002–03. Trends were similar for men.

Figure 2: Number of arrests of women for drug offences, excluding cannabis



* Includes hallucinogens, benzodiazepines, ecstasy, steroids and other drugs

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, adapted from Australian Crime Commission 2004, Australian Illicit Drug Data Report, 2002–03

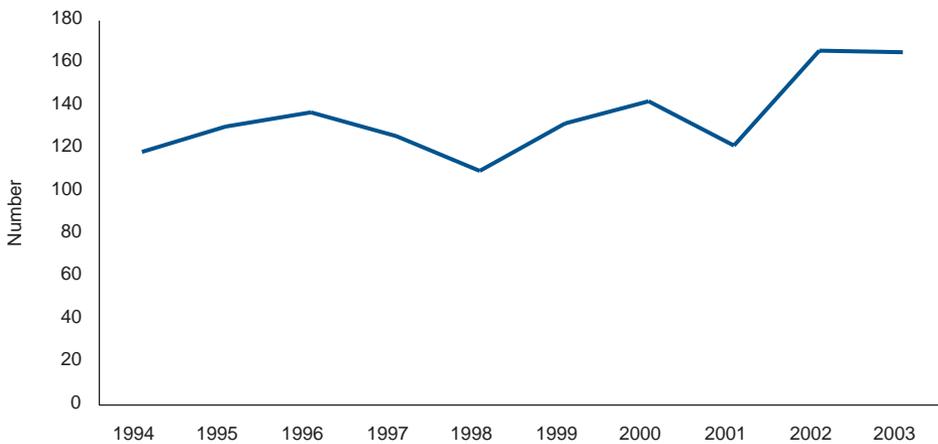
For both women and men, about 80 per cent of arrests in 2002–03 involved drug consumers and 20 per cent involved providers of the drugs (producers, importers and dealers); however, this varied according to the type of drug. For example, 35 per cent of heroin arrests, 25 per cent of amphetamine arrests and 21 per cent of cocaine arrests involving women were for provider offences, compared to just 18 per cent of cannabis arrests. The number of women arrested for consumer offences rose by 10 per cent since 1996–97 while the number arrested for provider offences dropped by 32 per cent. This is somewhat different than the pattern for male offenders which saw a decline in arrests for both consumers (10%) and providers (43%). In 2002–03, 17 per cent of all arrests involved women offenders. Women were implicated in a smaller proportion of arrests for cocaine (13%) and a larger proportion of arrests for ‘other’ drugs (21%).

Imprisonment for drug offences

Women make up a small but growing number of prison inmates. On a prison census taken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on 30 June 2003, 1,198 women were under sentence in Australian prisons, up 67 per cent from 718 on 30 June 1994 (ABS 2004b). The number of male prisoners rose 23 per cent over the same period. As a result of the higher growth rate of women prisoners, they made up a growing proportion of total prisoners, from five per cent in 1994 to seven per cent in 2003.

Since many prisoners are admitted following conviction for more than one offence, offenders are categorised in the prison census according to the most serious, determined as the offence that resulted in the longest sentence. Although the number of women incarcerated in Australian prisons is much smaller than the number of men, a higher proportion of incarcerated women are serving prison sentences for drug offences as the most serious offence – 14 per cent compared to 10 per cent of men. Higher proportions of women are also incarcerated for fraud and theft, whereas men are more likely to be in prison for violent offences. The number of women counted in the prison census who were incarcerated for drug offences increased by 40 per cent between 1994 and 2003, from 118 to 165 (Figure 3), while the number of males declined four per cent, from 1599 to 1666. This rise occurred despite the drop in women arrested for the more serious offences of trafficking, manufacturing or importing (provider offences) that tend to result in a prison sentence.

Figure 3: Number of women incarcerated for drug offences (annual one-day snapshot)



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004b

Court statistics show that only about 10 per cent of all convictions for drug offences result in a prison sentence (ABS 2004a). In contrast to arrest statistics which show the largest proportion of arrests were for possession of illegal drugs, about 80 per cent of adults incarcerated in Australian prisons for drug offences were serving sentences for trafficking in drugs, 12 per cent for manufacturing, and only seven per cent for possession (ABS 2004b). This reflects the different sentences given for drug trafficking and manufacturing as compared to possession of illegal drugs where possession more often results in a non-custodial sentence.

Prison census figures must be used with caution as they undercount the true number of drug offenders in prison. This is because under ABS counting rules, only the most serious offence is recorded for each person imprisoned. Consequently, someone imprisoned for drug offences, in addition to another offence that resulted in a longer sentence, will not be counted among drug offenders. In addition, these figures represent a snapshot of the number of women incarcerated on 30 June each year; the number going through the justice system on drug-related charges each year is far higher. Women serving short sentences may serve more than one period in prison during a given year and may be counted only once or not at all.

Drug use among police detainees

The Drug Use Monitoring in Australia project (DUMA), managed by the Australian Institute of Criminology, measures drug use among male and female detainees in seven sites across Australia, through a combination of interviews and urine tests. This project is designed to gain a more accurate picture of previous drug use among this high-risk population, to better understand the links between drugs and crime, and to measure patterns of drug use.

In 2003, 80 per cent of women and 72 per cent of men arrested by police in the DUMA sample tested positive to at least one drug. Across all sites, female detainees were more likely than males to test positive for methylamphetamines (41% compared with 28%), benzodiazepines (40% and 24%) and heroin (23% and 14%). Cannabis was the only drug for which a slightly higher proportion of males tested positive (57% compared with 53% of females). The differences between men and women fluctuate each year, which may be due to smaller sample sizes for women (Milner, Mouzos & Makkai 2004). However, these percentages are considerably higher than those reported by women in the general population (as shown in Figure 1).

Similar drug monitoring programs overseas found the following results:

- in the United Kingdom, 75 per cent of female arrestees tested positive to at least one drug, 43 per cent tested positive for multiple drugs, 45 per cent for opiates (including heroin), 30 per cent for cocaine, and 33 per cent for cannabis; women were significantly more likely than men to test positive for opiates and cocaine (Bennett 2000); and
- in the United States, more than half of the women tested positive to at least one illicit substance, and in half of the 29 sites 63 per cent or more tested positive (US Department of Justice 2003).

Summary

This overview highlights the limited data available in Australia to monitor drug use among women and the connections to criminal offending. The DUCO female study is designed to help address some of the shortcomings in available empirical information by providing statistical data about the level of drug use among women offenders, the role of drug use in criminal offending, the temporal ordering of drug use and offending, and risk factors for drug dependency and chronic or persistent offending.

2 Women, drugs and crime

2 Women, drugs and crime

Investigations into women's drug use problems, and women's offending patterns, are relatively new. Until the last few decades, studies of drug users and studies of criminal offenders focused on males or simply included women in the sample but did not examine their experiences separately from men's experiences (Willis & Rushforth 2003). In some cases, sex differences were noted but not explained. Women who had drug or alcohol abuse problems or who broke the law were considered somehow worse than men with the same problem. These women were seen as 'doubly deviant,' as women who have not only violated legal conventions but who have also violated social norms about appropriate feminine behaviour (Broom & Stevens 1991; Lloyd 1995).

A growing body of research has examined female offenders and female drug users separately, in comparison to males, and in relation to their gendered social roles. A number of gender differences have been found that highlight the importance of examining women's drug use separately from men's. For example, addicted women are more likely to suffer from depression and low self-esteem, more likely to combine drugs and alcohol, and to begin and sustain an addiction through association with an addicted male associate (Pohl & Boyd 1992; Donath 2004). Women also face distinct issues related to their social roles as women, mothers and carers that affect their drug abuse, offending and treatment options. These include:

- early experiences of sexual and physical abuse;
- mental health issues;
- social stigma related to drug abuse and offending;
- caring for children and other relatives;
- poverty associated with being single parents; and
- disease and abuse associated with sex work.

The stigma for drug-abusing mothers, the effects of drug use on their children, and fears about losing their children if the drug abuse becomes widely known, can have the positive effect of helping women turn away from drug abuse, but it can also deter women from seeking treatment (Bean 2002). Some argue for research that considers the way in which women's social lives shape and inform their drug use, for example, the way depression that results from women's dependency and oppression in society can contribute to drug and alcohol abuse as a coping mechanism (Broom & Stevens 1991). Women's drug use is seen by some as a reaction to pressures to conform to social norms around femininity (Broom & Stevens 1991: 27; Sargent 1992: 82). Drug abuse is viewed as 'a reaction to the isolation of confining domesticity' that defines the female role (Sargent 1992: 105).

Researchers and prison administrators within Australia and overseas find that sexual and physical abuse figures prominently in the lives of women offenders. For example:

- 64 per cent of women in a Victorian prison had a history of physical or sexual abuse, and the prevalence of physical abuse was twice as high for women with drug or alcohol abuse problems (74% compared to 36% of others) (Denton 1994);
- 42 per cent of women in Queensland prisons in 2002 were victims of sexual abuse before the age of 16 (Hockings et al. 2002);
- in 2001, 77 per cent of women in West Australian prisons had a history of abuse, 74 per cent as an adult and 57 per cent in childhood (WA Department of Justice 2002);
- in 1997, over half of women in prison in the United States reported a prior history of physical or sexual abuse (Ekstrand 1999);
- 57 per cent of women in a prison study in Texas experienced abuse in childhood and 75 per cent were victimised as adults, the majority by male partners (McClellan, Farabee & Crouch 1997); and
- 68 per cent of women in Canadian prisons reported a history of physical abuse and 53 per cent reported sexual abuse (Shaw et al. 1991).

Random population surveys provide comparative data for women in the general population. The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey, in which a sample of 6,677 women were interviewed about their experiences of violence, estimates that 57 per cent of women between 18 and 69 years of age have had at least one incident of physical or sexual violence in adulthood, and 29 per cent had a childhood experience of abuse (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). This study found childhood abuse to be a risk factor for violent victimisation later in life: women with childhood experiences of abuse had rates of adult victimisation that were about 50 per cent higher than for other women.

Physical and sexual abuse can have a range of negative short- and long-term consequences, including running away, poor school success, low self-esteem and prostitution. Many researchers provide strong evidence of a link between drug or alcohol abuse and physical and sexual abuse among incarcerated women in Australia and overseas (WA Department of Justice 2002; Jarvis, Copeland & Walton 1995; Browne, Miller & Manguin 1999; Shaw et al. 1991; Comack 1996; Marcus-Mendoza, Sargent & Chong Ho 1994; Fletcher, Rolison & Moon 1994; Harlow 1999). These studies suggest that the connection between drug or alcohol abuse and criminal offending may be mediated by factors associated with early experiences of abuse, such as psychological distress, trauma, other negative family experiences, and street life. Substances may be used to cope with negative emotions resulting from abuse (for example, grief, anxiety, sadness and anger) and to

build social confidence, or to adapt to ongoing abuse (Jarvis, Copeland & Walton 1995; Widom 2000; Marcus-Mendoza, Sargent & Chong Ho 1994). A growing drug dependency then leads to property crime, drug selling or prostitution to cover the cost of the drug habit and often to support drug-addicted partners. Table 1 summarises factors identified in the research literature as influencing women’s drug use and criminal offending, and shows how drug use, physical and sexual abuse, crime and many other factors are inter-related.

Table 1: Factors influencing drug use and criminal offending among women

Factor	Reference	Nature of relationship
Family problems	Denton 2001; Dowden & Blanchette 1999; McClellan et al. 1997	Drug abuse, alcohol abuse and crime are more prominent in the families of drug-addicted and criminal women.
Sexual and physical abuse	Comack 1996; Hockings et al. 2002; Browne et al. 1999; Shaw et al. 1991; Marcus-Mendoza et al. 1994; Fletcher et al. 1994; Harlow 1999; McClellan et al. 1997	Physical and sexual abuse are linked to mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse and criminal behaviour among
Disadvantage	Luck et al. 2004; Maher et al. 2002	Minority women and those from low-income communities are vulnerable to abuse, drug abuse and criminal offending. Drug addiction can also lead to welfare dependency.
Drug and alcohol abuse	Browne et al. 1999; Shaw et al. 1991; Marcus-Mendoza et al. 1994; Fletcher et al. 1994; Harlow 1999; Anglin & Hser 1987	The majority of women offenders have a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse. Higher frequency users are likely to commit more crimes. Prostitution and property crimes are common sources of income to pay for drugs.
Mental illness	Hockings et al. 2002; McClellan et al. 1997; Denton 1995	Women prisoners are more likely than men to report psychiatric disorders and depression, and this is linked to early experiences of abuse, and to drug and alcohol abuse.
Unemployment	Maher et al. 2002; Luck et al. 2004	Unemployed or underemployed women are more likely to be involved in crime and drug abuse. Drug abuse limits the ability of women to retain legitimate employment.
Association with other drugs users and offenders	Sargent 1992; Denton 2001; Pollock 1999	Women tend to be initiated into illegal drug use through family members or intimate partners and often become involved in crime to support drug addicted partners.

Case studies of women drug users

Two contrasting views of women drug users have emerged in case studies: one of women as passive victims ‘turned on’ to drugs by intimate partners or family members, and the other more recent view of women as active participants in the drug trade. Sargent’s (1992) interviews with women drug users in Sydney, London and Amsterdam describe women leading a secondary or passive role as drug users, and a sexual division of labour in the drug scene that parallels the divisions in straight society. The types of work viewed as women’s work included courier jobs and prostitution, while men occupied positions of power. A few women occupied roles within the purview of men, such as dealing, receiving stolen goods and robbery, which carry greater status and rewards. Nearly all the women reported being raped at least once, some in childhood. Some described their drug-taking as self-destructive and connected to feelings of self-hatred resulting from past abuse.

In one of the few in-depth case studies of women drug dealers in Australia, Denton (2001) conducted formal and informal interviews with over 60 women in Fairlea Prison, Victoria. She found that most women drug users were introduced to drugs through partners or other social relationships but that family and social networks were then used as an important milieu for acquiring skills, accomplices and back-up needed to be a successful dealer. She found no single model of how women get involved in drug-taking and dealing, but all tended to mix in an environment and in family and social networks where drugs were readily available. As a result, there was a high rate of polydrug use.

These women moved easily from licit to illicit activities and were lured by the size of the profits from drug dealing compared to legitimate work or welfare. As they became dependent on drugs, they often became increasingly dependent on the income from selling drugs. Other crimes, such as trading in stolen goods, fraud, theft, selling stolen goods, burglary, robbery and car theft supplemented the drug trade. Few relied mainly on sex work. Violence occurred in women’s drug dealing, but most used their criminal family’s reputation to threaten violence, or contracted the services of men. The majority were involved in the drug scene prior to becoming involved in crime, and criminal activity increased as drug using increased.

Maher and her colleagues (2002) studied African-American women involved in selling crack cocaine and other drugs in a low-income community in New York City. They found that most cocaine sellers were drawn from the unemployed, low wage earners, or women with histories of drug abuse. The lack of viable economic alternatives in the paid labour market (due to racism, sexism, low education, job restructuring) led these women to see drug dealing in the informal economy as more lucrative. The choices were often between drug dealing and menial labour.

Motivations for drug dealing extended beyond paying for drugs consumed; many saw it as a profession that provided them with a sense of security and self-esteem. Similar to Denton's study, women's participation in the informal economy and drug market was influenced by family and community networks and opportunity structures. All grew up in an environment where participation in the informal economy was seen as crucial for survival, and participation in the formal labour market was limited. Contrary to the women in Denton's study, strong connections to the informal economy preceded drug use or drug selling, and drug use and criminal careers occurred simultaneously during adolescence. But drug use contributed to crime through drug selling, prostitution and violence. Immersion in street life and the informal economy eventually led to the erosion of social and labour force skills required to function in the legitimate economy, further reducing their chances for legitimate work.

The drugs–crime link

Drugs are linked to crime in a variety of ways. The use, selling and production of illegal drugs is in itself a crime. Some drug users, as their dependence grows, are increasingly incapable of holding a legitimate job and find the need to commit income-generating property crimes in order to support their drug habit. Violence and threats may be a by-product of drug distribution systems and are often used by drug dealers to enforce payment of debts or to assert control over drug markets. Some crimes are committed while under the influence of alcohol or drugs (White & Gorman 2000). There are three main explanatory models for the relationship between drugs and crime (White & Gorman 2000: 170):

1. drug use leads to crime;
2. crime leads to drug use; and
3. drug use and crime are not causally related but are the result of a third factor.

Under the first scenario, drug use leads to crime due to the pharmacological properties of drugs, the need to acquire money to pay for drugs, or due to the violence associated with the drug trade (Goldstein 1985). According to the second explanation, those who engage in crime are exposed to social situations in which alcohol and drugs are readily available and use is reinforced. Involvement in crime weakens ties to conventional society and drugs and crime become part of a lifestyle. According to the third model, drug or alcohol use and crime occur simultaneously due to a third common cause, such as childhood abuse, early school failure, family problems or neighbourhood disorganisation (White & Gorman 2000). In certain subcultures, drug use and crime can help achieve membership and status. Rather than being two disparate populations, drug users and offenders coexist in some social groups and the motivating factors for drug use and crime are the same – excitement or risk-taking (Chaiken & Chaiken 1990; Simpson 2003; Denton 2001).

Research has also found that crime committed for material gain more commonly precedes drug use and offending escalates with levels of drug use (Makkai & Payne 2003a; Chaiken & Chaiken 1990; Blumstein et al. 1986; Wish & Johnson 1986; Dobinson & Ward 1985, 1987; Simpson 2003; Johnson D 2001). In the DUCO male study, 17 per cent of drug users began using drugs prior to committing any crime, 29 per cent began drugs and crime in the same year, and 54 per cent began offending prior to drug use. However, there is conflicting evidence about the sequencing of crime and drug use where women are concerned (Cusick, Martin & May 2003; Anglin & Hser 1987; Denton 2001; Baskin & Sommers 1993). The temporal ordering of crime and drug use for incarcerated women is examined in Chapter 5.

Crime attributed to drugs

Many offenders attribute their own offending to drug and alcohol abuse (Indermaur 1995). In the DUCO study of male prisoners, 30 per cent attributed their criminal offending to illegal drug use, combining both intoxication and addiction (Makkai & Payne 2003b). Offenders with a chronic history of offending reported higher levels of illegal drug use. In a macro-level analysis, a statistically significant relationship has been established between heroin use and robbery rates in NSW, estimating that each 10 per cent increase in the annual number of dependent heroin users has led to a six per cent increase in the robbery rate (Chilvers & Weatherburn 2003). In addition:

- 61 per cent of males in NSW prisons attributed their offences to illegal drugs, either through intoxication, to get money to buy drugs, or withdrawal from drugs (Kevin 2003);
- 80 per cent of arrestees in a Brisbane study were dependent on drugs (Heffernan et al. 2003);
- 80 per cent of women and 72 per cent of men arrested by police in the DUMA sample in 2003 tested positive for at least one drug (Milner, Mouzos & Makkai 2004);
- 26 per cent of those who had committed violent offences in the Amphetamines in Queensland Research Project (street interviews) were using amphetamines at the time of the offence (Lynch et al. 2003);
- in a Canadian study, between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of crimes were related to alcohol or drugs, because of intoxication at the time, alcohol/drug dependency, or having committed the crime to obtain drugs or alcohol (Pernanen et al. 2002); and
- 65 per cent of inmates in local jails in the US were actively drug-involved at the time of the offence (Wilson 2000).

Although crime rates are much lower for women than for men, women's criminality is believed to be more closely related to their drug use than it is for men (Pollock 1999). Studies of women in prison show that:

- over half of women in Queensland prisons had a history of injecting drug use and two-thirds had used illegal drugs regularly in the preceding 12 months (Hockings et al. 2002);
- 61 per cent of female prisoners in Victoria were diagnosed with a drug or alcohol dependence disorder at the time of arrest, predominantly opiate and benzodiazepine dependence (Denton 1994);
- a survey in NSW prisons found that 73 per cent of females and 64 per cent of males had used an illegal drug at some time in the past; female drug users were more likely than males to use drugs on a daily basis, to be using drugs at the time of their arrest, and to be injecting drugs while in prison (Butler 1997);
- 57 per cent of women in NSW prisons were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence; two-thirds of these were under the influence of heroin (Kevin 1994);
- about 60 per cent of women in US prisons had used drugs in the month prior to their current offence; one in four were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence (Ekstrand 1999);
- drugs or alcohol played a role in their involvement in crime for 70 per cent of women in Canadian prisons, while half were under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they committed their current offence (Shaw et al. 1991); and
- 40 per cent of sentenced women and 50 per cent of women on remand were dependent on drugs in the year before entering British prisons; female arrestees had higher rates of opiate, amphetamine and benzodiazepine use than did men and spent more money on drugs (Home Office 2002).

Summary

Research consistently finds high rates of problem drug use among women offenders. Drug dependencies, injecting and regular use of illicit drugs were common among incarcerated women in jurisdictions in Australia and overseas. The remainder of this report will provide an in-depth examination of the 470 women interviewed for this study, their histories of drug-taking and criminal offending, as well as interconnections between early life experiences, drug use and crime.

3 Characteristics of the women interviewed

3 Characteristics of the women interviewed

The DUCO female study comprised 470 women who were incarcerated in prisons in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and Northern Territory. Face-to-face interviews with these women took place between July 2003 and January 2004 (details about the methodology and limitations of the study are provided in the Technical Appendix). A comparison with the total female offender population in these jurisdictions shows that the DUCO sample is similar to the profile of female offenders overall (see Table A.2). This chapter provides descriptive data on the sociodemographic characteristics of the women, as well as their criminal histories and drug use.

Demographic characteristics

Women interviewed for this study included 342 non-Indigenous and 128 Indigenous women. Overall:

- four in 10 offenders were under 30 years of age, which makes them younger than the general adult female population where 28 per cent are under 30 (ABS 2002);
- a disproportionate number of offenders were single – 43 per cent compared to 28 per cent in the general population – and a smaller number were married (10%), living in a de facto relationship (23%), separated or divorced (20%) or widowed (4%);
- education levels among female prisoners were lower than among Australian women in general: one-quarter had only a primary school education as compared to 11 per cent of women in the population;
- the mean age of school leaving among female prisoners was 15.6 years;
- this was a relatively impoverished group of women with 30 per cent living in public housing and five per cent on the street prior to entering prison; and
- a majority had children.

Indigenous women comprised 27 per cent of offenders, a proportion that far exceeds their representation in the Australian population (2%). In addition:

- Indigenous offenders were younger on average than non-Indigenous offenders, had lower levels of education and a lower mean age of school leaving; and
- Indigenous women were far more likely to have been living in public housing or on the street prior to their arrest – 62 per cent and seven per cent compared to 18 per cent and four per cent, respectively, of non-Indigenous women (see Table 2).

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of offenders

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age						
Under 20 years	6	5	7	2	13	3
20–24	30	23	56	16	86	18
25–29	29	23	70	20	99	21
30–34	19	15	58	17	77	16
35–39	23	18	59	17	82	17
40 and older	21	16	92	27	113	24
Total	128	100	342	100	470	100
Mean age	31.0		33.9		33.1	
Education						
Primary school	43	34	66	19	109	23
Year 10	32	25	75	22	107	23
Apprenticeship	3	2	9	3	12	3
Year 12	5	4	26	8	31	7
TAFE/technical college	42	33	122	36	164	35
University	3	2	42	12	45	10
Total	128	100	340	100	468	100
Age left school (mean)	15.2		15.7		15.6	
Housing prior to prison						
Rented/owned house/apt	34	27	233	70	267	58
Public housing	79	62	58	18	137	30
Someone else's home	—	2	12	4	14	3
Street	9	7	13	4	22	5
Other	—	3	15	4	19	4
Total	113	100	331	100	459	100
Have children	99	77	237	69	336	71

— fewer than five cases

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

History of offending

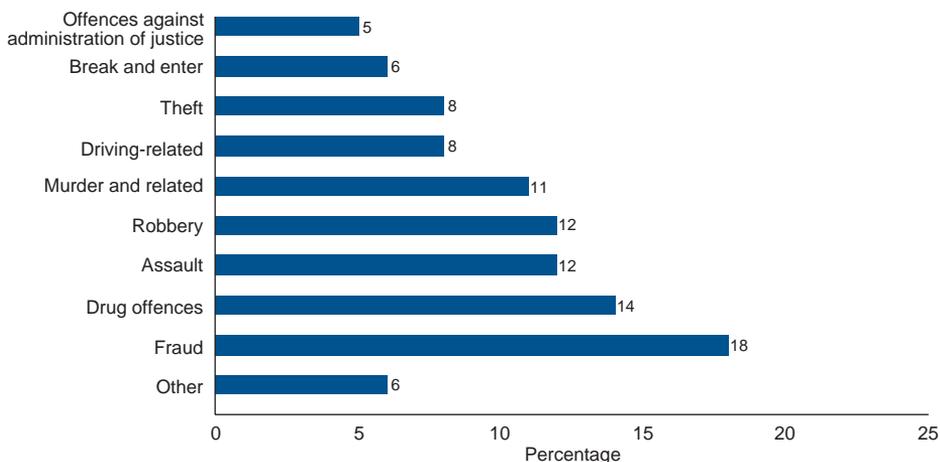
Unless they are involved in very serious crimes, such as homicide, or property or drug offences involving very large sums of money, offenders rarely receive a prison term on the first and many subsequent convictions. This is the case especially for women because they are less likely than men to be involved in violent crime and so will more often receive community sentences. But even for the same types of offences, women are less likely than men to be sentenced to prison (ABS 2004a). By the time a woman receives a prison sentence, she can therefore be expected to have an extensive criminal history.

The ability to measure history of offending is a major advantage of the DUCO study, but lengthy criminal histories can complicate the classification of offenders for analytical purposes. In this report, offenders will be classified according to:

- the main offence for which they are serving their current sentence of incarceration (self-reported by the women) organised according to ABS scoring rules; and
- past offences in which they became regularly involved.

Figure 4 shows the main offences for which these women were serving their current sentence: one-third were imprisoned for violent offences, one-third for property offences, and 14 per cent for drug offences.

Figure 4: Main offence for current incarceration



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

Offenders were asked about their criminal careers, including acts for which they were detected and charged by police and acts the police did not find out about. This provides a more accurate and complete picture of offending than relying simply on the primary offence for which they were convicted for their current incarceration since a majority of offences do not come to the attention of police. In fact, 70 per cent of women who committed burglaries, 44 per cent of those involved in fraud or forgery, and over 90 per cent of those involved in drug buying and selling said the police never or rarely found out about these crimes.

However, a substantial percentage of these offenders had been convicted of a crime and incarcerated previously. For example:

- 43 per cent had been in adult prison previously and 11 per cent were in prison at least five times before;
- women whose current offence was break and enter or theft had the most numerous previous incarcerations – over 30 per cent reported five or more;
- property offenders were the group most likely to have numerous offences associated with their current conviction; over half of the women whose main offence was break and enter, theft or fraud were currently imprisoned for five or more property offences; and
- women whose principal offence was a violent crime tended to have only one or two violent offences associated with their current conviction; like property offenders, women serving time for violent offences were more likely to have committed numerous property crimes both in the past and associated with their current conviction.

Details about the criminal careers of these women are shown in Table 3 which displays the number and percentage of women who reported ever committing a range of violent, property and drug offences and sex work, as well as those who became regular offenders. ‘Escalation’ was calculated as the percentage of those who had ever engaged in each crime type who then went on to become regular offenders. Sex work, although not always considered a criminal offence, was included within the range of lifetime offences because of the strong association between this type of activity and drug abuse, and the risk of these women to violent victimisation (Cusick, Martin & May 2003; Hunt 1990). The most common type of analysis presented in this report will be ‘regular’ offenders, either grouped by the larger classifications of property, violent or drug crimes or sex work, or in more detail by individual offence types.

Box 1: Regular and non-regular offenders

Throughout this publication, a distinction is made between ‘regular offenders’ and ‘non-regular offenders’. The definition of ‘regular’ offending was left up to each offender, and when queried about what ‘regular activity’ meant to them, open-ended responses varied depending on the type offence. For example, most regular burglary offenders considered daily or weekly offending to constitute ‘regular’ offending, although a few said every five to six months or a few times a year. Daily or weekly stealing or trading in stolen goods was considered to be ‘regular’ offending by the vast majority of these offenders. Regular buying or selling drugs or sex work was likely to be at least daily or multiple times per day. Fraud occurred less frequently with ‘regular offending’ ranging from weekly to as infrequently as twice yearly.

Offenders categorised as regular property offenders report that they are currently imprisoned for an average of 18 property offences, as compared to an average of three for other offenders.

In total, 74 per cent of incarcerated women in the sample identified as regular offenders and 26 per cent were non-regular offenders. Women who identified as non-regular offenders differed from regular offenders in important ways: the offence for their current conviction was more likely to be murder and related, assault and related or drug offences, and they had lower rates of illicit drug use. Only 50 per cent said they had ever used any illicit drug compared to 91 per cent of regular offenders and just 15 per cent were regular drug users at the time of their arrest compared to 78 per cent of regular offenders. However, higher percentages of non-regular offenders were regular alcohol users at the time of arrest: 57 per cent compared to 42 per cent of regular offenders (differences are all statistically significant, $p < .01$).

As shown in Table 3, the most common categories of offences committed by these women in the past were property and drug offences, reported by 73 per cent and 69 per cent of women, respectively. The most common offences were buying illegal drugs, stealing without break-in, assault, trading in stolen goods, fraud and selling drugs. Escalation was very high with half to two-thirds of property offenders escalating to regular offending. The exception was vandalism, which rarely became a regular activity. Among all these crimes, the highest rate of escalation was reported for buying illegal drugs (91%). In other words, nine out of 10 women who began buying drugs continued on to become regular drug consumers. While the percentage who ever sold drugs was smaller (40%), 72 per cent of these became regular drug dealers. Sex work also had a high rate of escalation (74%) although just 18 per cent

ever engaged in this activity. Half of all offenders ever committed a violent act, the majority of these a physical assault. However, the escalation rate for violent female offenders was comparatively low at 25 per cent or less. The small number of women reporting regular violent offending limits the analysis of violent female offenders in this study.

Table 3: History of offending

	Ever		Regular		Escalation ¹
	n	%	n	%	%
Property offences	343	73	228	49	66
Break and enter	159	34	84	18	53
Stealing without break-in	243	52	152	32	63
Traded in stolen goods	195	41	128	27	66
Vandalised property	79	17	7	1	9
Fraud, forgery	194	41	91	19	47
Violent offences	260	55	48	10	18
Physical assault	230	49	37	8	16
Robbery without a weapon	56	12	14	3	25
Armed robbery	63	13	8	2	13
Drug offences	324	69	293	62	90
Bought illegal drugs	317	67	287	61	91
Sold illegal drugs	190	40	137	29	72
Sex work	84	18	62	13	74
Total	470	100	347	74	74

¹ Escalation is the percentage of those who ever committed the crime who became regular offenders
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Table 4 shows a comparison between incarcerated males in the male DUCO study and this sample of incarcerated females. Males reported a higher prevalence of violent offences and a higher rate of escalation: 33 per cent of males who ever committed a violent offence went on to be regular violent offenders compared to 18 per cent of females. With respect to property crimes, males and females had comparable levels of regular offending and similar escalation rates. Women had slightly higher rates of escalation to regular drug offending.

Table 4: History of offending among female and male inmates (percentages)

	Females			Males		
	Ever	Regular	Escalation ¹	Ever	Regular	Escalation
Property offences	73	49	66	79*	50	63
Violent offences	55	10	18	70*	23*	33*
Drug offences	69	62	90	70	60	86*
Total	100	74	74	91	71	78*

* difference between female and male offenders are statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

¹ Escalation is derived by dividing regular offenders by those who have ever committed the crime

Offence categories have been adjusted to be comparable between the female and male samples. Regular property offending includes fraud and violent offending excludes regular homicide and sexual offenders since these were not asked for the female sample. Results concerning male offenders will therefore differ from Makkai & Payne 2003a and will not add to 100 per cent

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470; DUCO male survey, 2001 [computer file], n=2,135

The extensive criminal histories of these women and the diversity of their involvement in crime is shown in Table 5. Just 27 per cent of regular offenders were involved in only one crime type while three-quarters reported regularly committing multiple crime types. Half of all regular offenders regularly committed three or more offences included in this study. Burglars and women who traded in stolen goods reported regular involvement in an average of five different types of crimes, drug purchasers in an average of three, and the remaining offenders were regular participants in an average of four different types of offences. Regular fraud offenders, violent offenders and drug purchasers were the offenders most likely to specialise with about one-fifth reporting regular offending of that crime type only. Violent offenders are grouped in this table due to low numbers of women who reported regularly engaging in either robbery or assault. The 21 per cent who reported regular involvement in violent crime only were all women who regularly committed physical assault (n=10). There were no regular robbers (armed or unarmed) who were not regularly involved in other crimes.

The largest overlaps in offending were with respect to property and drug offences:

- the majority of those who had committed break and enter, stealing without break-in, trading in stolen goods or fraud were involved in at least one other type of property crime;
- at least 90 per cent of regular sex workers and all types of property offenders (with the exception of fraud) were regularly involved in buying drugs;
- 60 per cent of women who regularly traded in stolen goods were also regular drug traffickers;

-
- small percentages of regular property or drug offenders or sex workers were also regular violent offenders;
 - however, more than half of violent offenders were involved in stealing and 71 per cent in buying drugs; and
 - property offenders, with the exception of fraud, were more actively involved in the drug market in the form of buying and selling drugs as compared to violent offenders.

The extensive involvement of these women in multiple crime types illustrates the difficulty of classifying offenders according to offending background. The complexity of their offending patterns and the limits imposed by a relatively small sample means that very few offenders could be classified according to a single crime type. In an attempt to create discrete offence types for analysis, the principal focus of this report will be on the following categories of offenders:

1. regular property offenders (excluding women who had any regular involvement in violent offending or sex work);
2. regular violent offenders (whether or not they were also involved in any other offence types);
3. regular sex workers (whether or not they were also involved in any other offence types); and
4. regular drug offenders (whether or not they were also involved in any other offence types).

Due to the importance of studying women's violent offending and involvement in sex work, and the relatively low numbers of women in this sample who were regularly involved in these activities, these groups have been separated as much as possible from property offenders. The category of property offenders is therefore pure property offenders who were not involved in violent offending or sex work, although most were also drug offenders. Women with a history of violent offending tended to be involved in a range of property offences and drug buying, while few were sex workers. Women with a history of sex work also reported involvement in a range of property and drug crimes with little involvement in violent offending.

Table 5: Multiple offending by offence type (percentages)

Regular offenders	Break and enter	Steal without break-in	Traded in stolen goods	Fraud	Bought drugs	Sold drugs	Sex work	Violent offences
Property offenders								
Break and enter	-	39	48	25	26	28	29	29
Steal without break-in	70	-	72	56	47	48	53	58
Traded in stolen goods	74	61	-	47	43	56	45	38
Fraud	27	34	34	-	23	23	27	15
Violent offenders	17	18	14	8	12	12	13	-
Drug offenders								
Bought drugs	88	88	97	73	-	96	97	71
Sold drugs	45	43	60	34	46	-	42	33
Sex work	21	22	22	19	21	19	-	17
Mean number of offence types	5	4	5	4	3	4	4	4
Regular offending this crime type only	7	3	0	20	17	4	-	21
(n)	(n=84)	(n=152)	(n=128)	(n=91)	(n=287)	(n=137)	(n=62)	(n=48)

Excludes vandalism due to low counts. Offenders can be counted in more than one column
 Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Prevalence of illegal drug use

Drug use among these incarcerated women was high: 80 per cent had ever experimented with illegal drugs, and 66 per cent of women had used illegal drugs in the six months prior to the time of their arrest (Table 6). Almost the same proportion (62%) were regular users at the time of their arrest. This study focuses on illegal drug use and excludes those who only used such drugs as amphetamines, benzodiazepines and morphine legally. Reference to methadone is explicitly 'street methadone'. In practice, only 22 of the 470 women (5%) self-reported only legal drug use (see Box 5 in Chapter 6). Thirty-nine per cent of offenders were regular users of more than one illegal drug at the time of their arrest.

The rate of escalation from ever using drugs to current regular drug use was 78 per cent (Table 6). In other words, almost eight in every 10 offenders who ever experimented with an illegal drug were regular users at the time of their arrest. These figures are similar to the results of the DUCO male study in which 69 per cent had used at least one of the four main illegal drugs in the six months prior to arrest, 62 per cent were regular users, and the escalation rate was 76 per cent (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 29). If analysis of the DUCO female data is restricted to the four drug types examined in the male study (cannabis, heroin, cocaine and amphetamines), the results do not change. This is due to the fact that almost all the women who use other drugs were also using at least one of these four. The results also do not change if the analysis is restricted to looking only at female inmates in the four states where interviewing took place for the male study (Queensland, West Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory).

Similar to other research, cannabis is the drug most likely to have been ever used or regularly used in the six months prior to arrest: 78 per cent and 40 per cent of offenders, respectively. Regular illegal amphetamine use was almost as high as cannabis use, followed by heroin and benzodiazepines. The percentage of women who had ever used cocaine was 42 per cent, but the regular use of this drug was comparatively low: just six per cent were regular cocaine users at the time of their arrest. Rates of escalation for drugs other than cannabis were highest for amphetamines, heroin and benzodiazepines.

The definition of 'regular' drug use was left up to the interpretation of offenders, similar to the categorisation of 'regular' offending. The frequency of 'regular' drug use varies according to the type of drug. To be a regular heroin user, for example, typically means using daily or several times a day, which is a reflection of the nature of heroin dependency. Regular cocaine use involves weekly or monthly use or less. Cannabis, amphetamine and benzodiazepine users also tended to be heavy users with at least half of these women using at least once a day. This heavy drug use implies an ongoing need for the financial resources to pay for drugs along with a diminishing capacity for legitimate employment and therefore a need to turn to crime to sustain a drug habit.

Table 6: Prevalence of illegal drug use (percentages)

	Cannabis	Amphet- amines ¹	Heroin	Cocaine	Benzo- diazepines ¹	Other ²	Any	More than one
Ever used	78	61	46	42	31	54	80	65
Used in six months prior to arrest	49	42	29	14	20	27	66	47
Current regular user ³	40	37	27	6	15	16	62	39
Escalation⁴	51	61	59	14	48	30	78	60
Frequency of use for current regular users								
Less than monthly	11	11	5	28	10			
One to several times a month	8	12	5	31	19			
One to several times a week	18	21	11	21	21			
Once a day	18	17	14	14	18			
Several times a day	45	39	66	7	32			
Total	100	100	100	100	100			
(n)	(189)	(176)	(125)	(29)	(72)			

¹ Excludes legal use of these drugs

² Includes hallucinogens, ecstasy, street methadone and morphine.

³ Those who used drugs during the six months prior to arrest, and who said they had been regular users

⁴ Escalation is the percentage of those who ever used the drug who became current regular users

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

The DUMA study shows that women detained by the police are more likely than men in similar situations to test positive for drug use (Milner, Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Similarly, a comparison of the DUCO male and female samples shows that drug use among the incarcerated population is higher for females than for males for some drug types. The prevalence of regular amphetamine use and rates of escalation for both amphetamines and heroin were higher for women than for men (Table 7) (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 29). The percentage of male inmates reporting current regular use of amphetamines was 31 per cent compared to 37 per cent of women. Rates of escalation to regular use of amphetamines was 53 per cent for males as compared to 61 per cent for female users. Escalation to regular use of heroin was also significantly higher for women. Men had higher rates of cannabis use than did women, as well as higher rates of escalation. With respect to cocaine, a higher percentage of women had ever tried the drug but men were more likely to escalate to regular use so that similar small percentages of both women and men were regular users of cocaine at the time of their arrest.

Table 7: Prevalence of illegal drug use among female and male inmates (percentages)

	Cannabis		Amphetamines		Heroin		Cocaine	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
Ever used	78	81	61	58	46	45	42	32*
Current user	49	62*	42	42	29	27	14	16
Current regular user	40	53*	37	31*	27	21	6	7
Escalation	51	65*	61	53*	59	47*	14	22*

* differences between females and males are statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470; DUCO Male Survey, 2001 [computer file], n=2,135

Rates of drug use among incarcerated women were also considerably higher than among women in the general population. According to the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 13 per cent of all women aged 18 years and older had used illegal drugs in the previous 12 months. The percentage of incarcerated women in this study reporting any illegal drug use in the previous six-month period was 69 per cent. Types of drugs used by women in the general population are also somewhat different to those reported by women in prison. Cannabis was the most common drug used by women in both groups and amphetamines were second most common, but the third most commonly used drug by incarcerated women was heroin or benzodiazepines as compared to ecstasy for women generally.

It is evident from the very high percentage of drug users in each category in Table 6 that these incarcerated women did not tend to specialise in one type of drug. Sixty-five per cent had experimented with more than one drug type and 39 per cent were regular users of more than one type of illegal drug in the six months prior to arrest. Table 8 shows the combinations of multiple use of five main drug types among these women in the six months prior to their incarceration:

- between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of regular users of other drugs were also cannabis users;
- six in 10 benzodiazepine users also used heroin and three-quarters used amphetamines;
- over half of heroin users also used amphetamines;
- few cocaine users were regular users of that drug only: eight in 10 also used amphetamines and six in 10 used heroin; and
- amphetamine and heroin users were most likely to specialise in one drug with nearly one in five reporting regular use of that drug only.

Table 8: Regular use of multiple drug types (percentages)

	Cannabis	Heroin	Cocaine	Amphetamines	Benzodiazepines
Cannabis	-	61	79	63	72
Heroin	40	-	59	40	61
Cocaine	12	14	-	14	12
Amphetamines	59	56	83	-	74
Benzodiazepines	28	35	31	30	-
Mean number of drug types	3	3	5	3	4
Mean number of drug types, excluding cannabis	2	3	4	2	3
Regular use of this drug only	10	17	—	19	7
(n)	(189)	(125)	(29)	(176)	(72)

Means and totals include all drug types, including hallucinogens, ecstasy, street methadone and morphine

Includes only illegal drug use

— fewer than five cases

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Women reporting the highest mean number of drug types were regular users of cocaine and benzodiazepines, reporting five and four different types of drugs, respectively. Those least likely to be using multiple drug types are regular users of cannabis, heroin and amphetamines, all of whom reported using an average of three different types of drugs. Focusing only on drugs other than cannabis, amphetamine users are least likely to be multiple drug users, reporting two types. There is a substantial cross-over with these drugs such that amphetamine is the drug other than cannabis most likely to be used regularly by heroin users and vice versa. Among women who regularly used multiple drugs other than cannabis, amphetamines were commonly used by 83 per cent, heroin by 70 per cent, benzodiazepines by 51 per cent and cocaine by 22 per cent.

Looking at users by preferred drug of choice, women who preferred heroin were regular users of other drugs, such as illegal amphetamines (45%), cannabis (51%) and benzodiazepines (33%) (Table 9). However, a different pattern emerges for women with a preference for amphetamines: just 18 per cent were also regular heroin users, a similar proportion were regular users of benzodiazepines and over half were regular cannabis users. Those who preferred other drugs (including cocaine, ecstasy, morphine or inhalants) were also regular users of amphetamines, cannabis and benzodiazepines. Not unexpectedly, there is a strong correlation between preferred drug of choice and regular use of that drug.

Table 9: Preferred drug of choice by type of regular drug use (percentages)

	Heroin	Amphetamines	Cannabis	Other
Type of regular use				
Heroin	95	18	—	30
Amphetamines ¹	45	95	28	53
Cannabis	51	57	86	40
Cocaine	9	12	—	23
Benzodiazepines ¹	33	20	10	37
(n)	(100)	(96)	(81)	(30)

— fewer than five cases

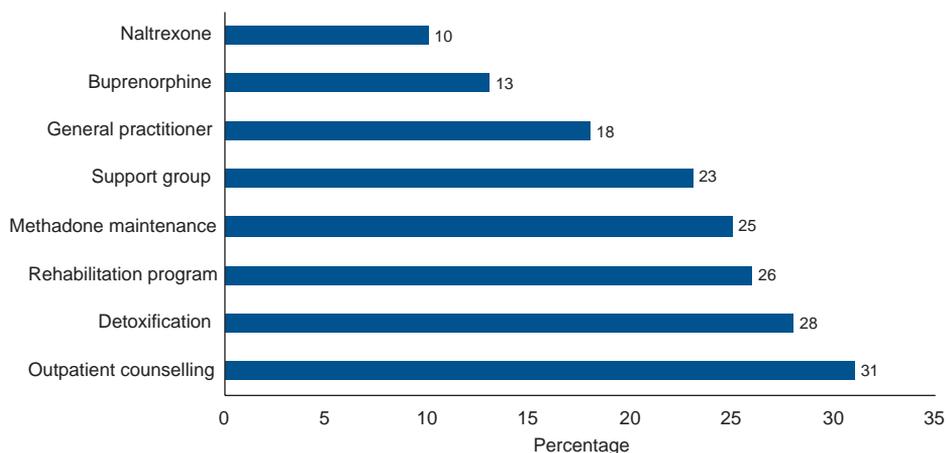
¹ Excludes women who only used these drugs legally

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Treatment for drug problems

Just over half of these women offenders (53%) had received treatment for their drug or alcohol use at some point in their lives. The most common types of treatment were outpatient counselling, detoxification, rehabilitation programs, methadone maintenance, and support groups (Figure 5). Due to the substantial levels of multiple drug use among these women, it is not possible to determine for which drugs each of these treatments were received.

Figure 5: Type of treatment received



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=448

Three-quarters (74%) of regular drug users and 78 per cent of women with a drug dependency had received some form of drug treatment (drug dependency will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4). One-quarter of women who had received treatment had received one type, one-quarter had received two types, and half had received three or more of the types of treatment listed. The fact that the vast majority of women who had been treated for drug abuse were dependent on drugs at the time of their arrest (80%) is indicative of the chronic relapsing nature of drug dependency. It also leaves open to question the impact treatment has had on the lives of these women and their ability to control their drug abuse.

Four in 10 women who had ever received treatment were in drug or alcohol treatment at the time of the interview. This amounts to one-fifth of all women in the prison sample. Heroin was the most common drug they were being treated for (64 per cent) followed by amphetamines (16%). The most common current treatment was methadone maintenance, buprenorphine, support groups and other counselling. Two-thirds of the women currently in treatment had received treatment in the past. Fourteen per cent of all offenders, and 20 per cent of those with drug dependencies, had been turned away from treatment in the six months prior to their arrest due to lack of available space.

Summary

The women interviewed for this study have been involved in significant levels of prior offending and drug use. For most women, their criminal histories involved multiple types of offending, primarily multiple property crimes, buying and selling drugs. A small percentage were regular sex workers, but those who were engaged in sex work were also involved in property crimes and almost all were regular drug purchasers. A majority of drug-dependent women had received treatment for drug abuse at some time in the past, and most had undergone more than one type of treatment.

These results support other research that has found higher rates of drug use among women offenders than among male offenders. Compared to incarcerated men in the DUCO male study, use of drugs other than cannabis was higher among incarcerated women. Higher percentages of women were regular users of amphetamines in particular, and women had higher rates of escalation from experimentation to regular use for both amphetamines and heroin. This suggests somewhat different profiles in the drug use of incarcerated women as compared to men, and suggests that drugs may play a different role in the criminal offending and incarceration of women.

4 Linking drugs and crime

4 Linking drugs and crime

An important question for the development of effective drug treatment and crime prevention programs for women is the extent to which drug use is related to criminal offending. Accurate information can assist in a clearer understanding of how interventions and treatment might help avert drug use and/or crime. This study provides numerous ways in which to assess the role of drug and alcohol abuse in the criminal behaviour of these incarcerated women, including:

1. intoxication at the time of the current offence;
2. the women's own perceptions of the effect of drugs and alcohol on their criminal careers;
3. reasons given for committing crimes in general;
4. the main reason for committing the current offence;
5. methods used to obtain drugs;
6. drug use in the backgrounds of offenders; and
7. drug dependency among offenders.

Together, these various dimensions measuring the link between drug use and crime will help establish the prevalence of women's offending that can be directly or indirectly attributable to their drug use. From a policy perspective, methods 1 and 4 will help quantify the percentage of offenders who attributed drug or alcohol abuse to their current offences, while the others will help quantify the effect of drugs and alcohol on their lifetime criminal careers.

Intoxication at the time of the current offence

A high percentage (58% of all women) reported they were under the influence of illegal drugs and/or alcohol at the time of the offence for which they were imprisoned: 31 per cent were under the influence of illegal drugs, 16 per cent alcohol, and 11 per cent both drugs and alcohol. Altogether, 42 per cent were high on drugs when they committed the offence. Table 10 lists the types of drugs present at the time of the offence. Most prevalent were amphetamines, heroin, cannabis and benzodiazepines. It is obvious from the high percentages that these women were using more than one type of drug at the time of the offence: 21 per cent of those under the influence of drugs were using two types, and 32 per cent were using three or more. Three in 10 women also said they were 'sick' or 'hurting' due to lack of drugs. By comparison, a slightly higher percentage of incarcerated males in the DUCO male sample, 62 per cent, said they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the current offence (Makkai & Payne 2004b: 8). However, males were less likely to be under the influence of illegal drugs (24% as compared to 31% of women) and more likely to be under the influence of alcohol (21% compared to 16% of women), or both drugs and alcohol (17% compared to 11% of women).

Table 10: Intoxication at the time of current offence

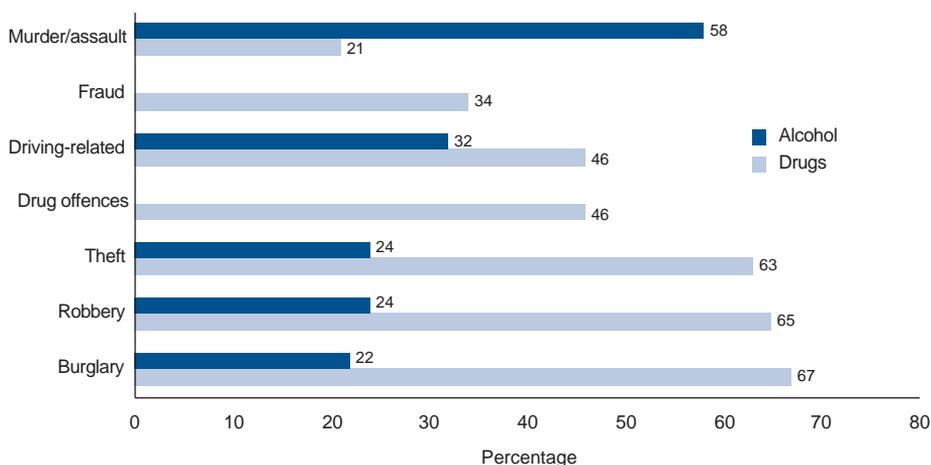
Type of substance	n	%
Illegal drugs	145	31
Alcohol	77	16
Both drugs and alcohol	50	11
Not intoxicated	198	42
Total	470	100
Sick or hurting (lack of drugs) at time of offence	137	29
Type of drug at time of current offence		
Alcohol	127	47
Amphetamines	114	42
Heroin	93	34
Cannabis	82	30
Benzodiazepines	59	22
Morphine	25	9
Ecstasy	15	6
Cocaine	14	5
Methadone	11	4
LSD/hallucinogens	6	2
Total ¹	272	

¹ Multiple responses were permitted. Percentages are based on the number of women under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offence

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Intoxication by illegal drugs or alcohol varies according to the type of offence. With respect to the main offence for which these women were incarcerated, they were most often under the influence of alcohol when they committed violent offences such as murder or assault (Figure 6). Drug intoxication occurred most commonly during burglary, robbery and theft. Driving-related offences were committed while offenders were intoxicated by drugs in 46 per cent of cases and one-third involved alcohol (a total of 65% of driving offences involved impairment by drugs or alcohol). One-third of women incarcerated for fraud offences were under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence. The role of alcohol in the criminal backgrounds of these offenders is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Figure 6: Intoxication at the time of current offence by most serious offence type



There were too few cases of alcohol intoxication during fraud or drug offences to present results (fewer than 5)
 Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

Heroin and amphetamines were especially likely to have been present during the commission of certain types of offences. Heroin intoxication was reported by:

- 44 per cent of women imprisoned for burglary or theft as the main offence for which they were incarcerated;
- 29 per cent imprisoned for robbery;
- 22 per cent of those incarcerated for drug offences; and
- 14 per cent of those imprisoned for fraud or driving offences.

Amphetamines were especially likely to be present among women whose main offences were:

- robbery (35%);
- driving offences (35%);
- burglary or theft (30%); and
- drug offences (28%).

Women whose main offence was theft, burglary or robbery were most likely to say they were 'sick' or 'hurting' due to lack of drugs at the time of the offence (62%, 59% and 47%, respectively).

Perceptions of the effect of drugs or alcohol on criminal careers

Women who reported ever using drugs or alcohol were asked to describe in their own words the effect of their personal alcohol or drug use on their offending careers. The results of this analysis will help quantify the effect of drugs and alcohol on lifetime criminal offending. It is important to note that attributing alcohol or drugs to a pattern of offending does not necessarily indicate that use of drugs or alcohol is the *cause* of these crimes, although some offenders reported their drug or alcohol use had a substantial effect on their lifetime offending. The majority of the women interviewed (91%, n=429), provided responses that could be quantified into general response categories. As shown in Table 11, 35 per cent said that all (100%) of their criminal offending could be attributed in some way to their personal use of alcohol or drugs. A further 23 per cent said drugs or alcohol had a very large effect on their criminal offending, and six per cent said it had some effect. About one-quarter of the sample of women said that drugs or alcohol had nothing to do with their criminal activities. Comparing these results to the DUCO male study, women were more likely to say that 100 per cent of their offending was attributable to drugs or alcohol (35% compared to 26% of males) (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 46).

Table 11: Lifetime offending attributions by type of offender

	All offenders		Regular offenders		Non-regular offenders	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
None	125	27	71	21	54	44
Some	28	6	22	6	6	5
A great deal	110	23	91	26	19	15
All	166	35	147	42	19	15
Unspecified	41	9	16	5	25	20
Total	470	100	347	100	123	100
Type of effect						
Psychopharmacological	99	32	75	29	24	53
Economic/compulsive	61	20	60	23	—	—
Other ¹	145	48	125	48	20	44
Total	305	100	260	100	45	100

— fewer than five cases

¹ Includes unspecified responses, drink–drug driving offences and drug offences.

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Other results show:

- regular offenders were more likely than less persistent offenders to make the attribution that their criminal careers were totally affected by alcohol or drugs (42% compared to 15%);
- women who were regular sex workers were more likely than others to attribute all their offending to alcohol or drugs (56%); and
- women whose preferred drug was heroin or amphetamines attributed all their criminal offending to their drug use in 64 per cent and 48 per cent of cases, respectively.

With respect to the type of effect, of the women who said alcohol or drugs had an effect on their lifetime history of offending, 160 provided sufficient information in their open-ended responses to categorise them as either psychopharmacological (32%) or economic/compulsive (20%), and an additional 145 (48%) gave general or unspecified responses. Psychopharmacological effects include being high, drunk or 'sick' or 'hurting' for drugs at the time of the offence. Economic/compulsive includes committing gainful crimes for money to buy drugs or, to a lesser extent alcohol, including dealing in drugs. Other unspecified responses include those that simply state that drugs caused the offending history, or if it were not for their drug habit they would not be in jail. 'Other' also includes driving offences relating to drugs or alcohol, and possession of illegal drugs. Results showed:

- regular offenders were more likely than non-regular offenders to indicate that the effect was economic/compulsive;
- non-regular offenders more likely to state that the effect was psychopharmacological;
- property offenders were more likely to say the effect of drugs or alcohol on their criminal careers was based on economic need (26%); and
- violent offenders were more likely to state that the effect was psychopharmacological (49%).

A sample of verbatim responses to the question about the effect of their alcohol or drug use on women's offending careers are shown below. Those who identified an economic effect often highlighted the difficulties drug users have holding down a legitimate job:

It's a high-price lifestyle. You can't have a job and a habit at the same time.

The more money you bring in, the more heroin you use.

I break the law to get an income. If you're a drug user you're not really up to doing a real job.

The drug turns me into a thief. Because I've been stealing for so long, I think the stealing's become a habit.

The psychopharmacological effect was usually explained in terms of the courage provided by drugs or the lack of judgment that resulted from drug use. For example:

Drugs, speed made me crazy. You live in an unreal space. I was quite psychotic when I did my armed robbery.

Drugs give me courage and I think I can do anything, so I do crime.

It made me feel good and happy, but my decisions between right and wrong were cloudy.

Other, unspecified responses often pointed to other troubles in the women's lives that preceded drug use, or the effect of drugs on their lives in general:

I started to drink and take drugs because of my anger and sadness of my childhood. It was because I was drunk.

It has been based around my offending, but mainly stuff leading up to the events, mainly the sexual abuse as a child.

Had an effect on me, on my criminal history and my family, my life and the community I live in. Affected everyone around me.

Loss of freedom, loss of friends, loss of health, loss of family. General loss of everything.

It has ruined my life. It has taken control of my life.

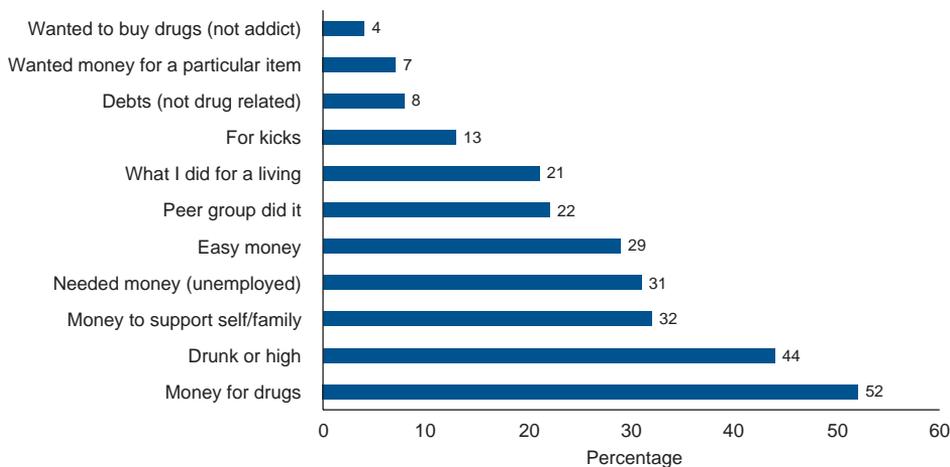
Reasons for committing crimes

The primary reasons women gave to explain why they became involved in crime are related directly to their drug and alcohol use. The most common reason given for committing property crime was to obtain money to buy drugs (52%) and the second most common reason was that they were drunk or high at the time (44%) (see Figure 7). Overall, 31 per cent of property offenders said they committed property crimes because they were unemployed and needed money, a figure that rises to 42 per cent of those whose drug of choice is heroin. Women with a preference for heroin also committed property crimes because they were high at the time (46%), or to get money to support their drug habit (87%). They were less likely to say they committed these crimes for kicks (eight per cent), a reason more likely to be given by amphetamine users (19 per cent). Amphetamine users were also more likely to say that committing property crime was what they did for a living (33%).

Among women who reported involvement in violence offences, a small number (15%, n=37) said their violence was associated with obtaining money to buy drugs. Half were drunk or high at the time of committing a violent offence (see Figure 8). Using violence to acquire money for drugs was more common among women who were involved in armed or unarmed robbery (36% and 29%, respectively) than among those involved in assaults (10%). In a separate question, only six per cent of women said they used a weapon or threats of violence to obtain their preferred drug; those whose preferred drug was heroin were twice as likely to have used violence to obtain drugs (12%).

In an open-ended question asking offenders to describe the main reason why they started committing crime, 30 per cent spontaneously said their initiation into crime had to do with their drug use. Seven per cent said it was related to alcohol abuse. Other responses related to boredom or personal problems in their background, such as sexual or physical abuse or other family problems.

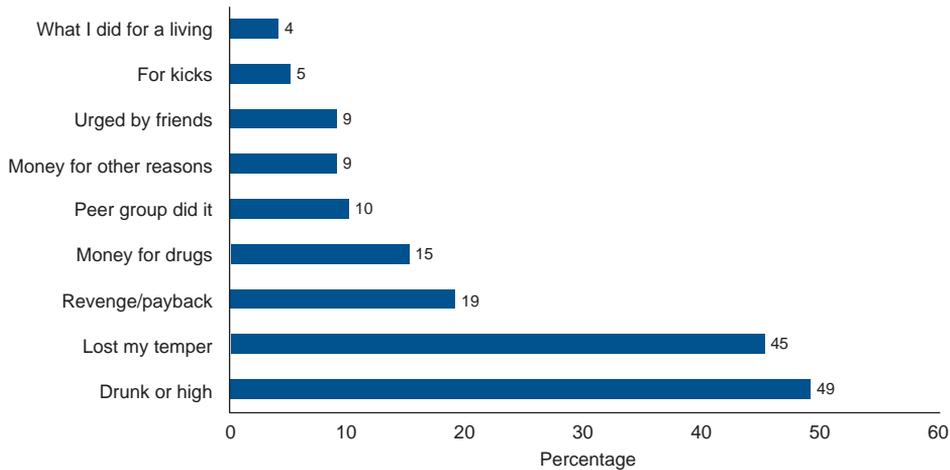
Figure 7: Reasons for committing property offences



Per cent who said these reasons were 'a lot' like the ones they would use to explain their involvement in crime
Multiple reasons permitted

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=278

Figure 8: Reasons for committing violent offences



Per cent who said these reasons were 'a lot' like the ones they would use to explain their involvement in crime
Multiple reasons permitted

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=240

Main reason for committing the current offence

Offenders were also asked to describe in their own words the main reason they committed the offences related to their current incarceration. Half of all women attributed their current conviction to either alcohol (10%), drugs (35%) or to gambling debts (3%) (Table 12). Gambling debts were associated exclusively with fraud and theft offences. In fact, 92 per cent of women who said that the reason for their current offence was to acquire money to pay a gambling debt had committed a fraud offence, and 83 per cent were regular fraud offenders.

Property offenders were more likely than violent offenders to attribute their current offending to illegal drugs (42% compared to 28% of violent offenders), while women incarcerated for a violent offence were more likely to attribute their offending to alcohol (17% compared to 4% of property offenders). The reason drug use was thought to contribute to offending was more likely to be economic motivation in the case of property offences: 20 per cent compared to eight per cent of women convicted of violent offences.

Table 12: Reason for committing the current offence by type of current offence

	All offenders		Property offences		Violent offences	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Alcohol	48	10	6	4	27	17
Drugs	163	35	62	42	46	28
Gambling debts	12	3	12	8	0	0
Other	247	53	69	46	90	55
Total	470	100	149	100	163	45

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

With respect to offenders' verbatim responses to the question asking them for the main reason they committed the offences that lead to the current conviction, many just said 'addiction', 'drugs' or 'money for drugs'. Examples of more detailed responses are listed below:

Because we [partner] were using. We got addicted and produced and sold drugs to feed our habits. It got out of control towards the end.

Defending myself – he (my husband) was hitting me – said he would kill me.

Drugs and homelessness. In six months I went from having my own home with good stuff to being homeless. I sold all my belongings for drugs and gave my son to my mum and ended up with nothing.

My child was sexually assaulted so I stabbed my partner. I didn't realise he was a paedophile.

Methods used to obtain drugs

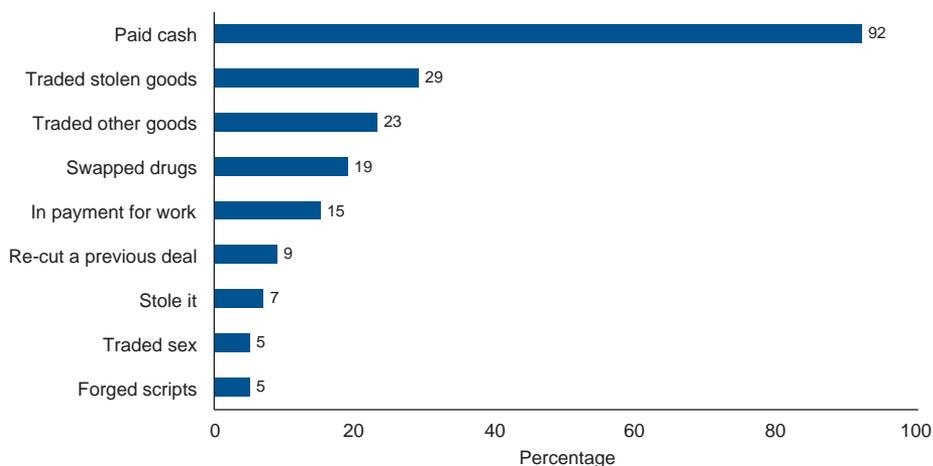
A range of methods were used to pay for the drugs these women used. When asked how they obtained their drug of choice, the majority, 92 per cent, paid cash, but a proportion also engaged in criminal activities to pay for drugs: 29 per cent traded in stolen goods, seven per cent stole the drugs, five per cent traded sex, and five per cent forged scripts (multiple responses permitted; Figure 9). Added together, this amounts to 35 per cent who used illegal means to obtain drugs. This adds evidence to the argument that drug users are economically motivated to commit certain crimes. Some drug types are more likely to be acquired through illegal means:

- 61 per cent of those with a preference for heroin and 55 per cent of those who preferred amphetamines used illegal means to acquire drugs, including trading in stolen goods (54% and 51%, respectively) and trading in sex (13% and 8%); and

- women with a preference for heroin or amphetamine were more likely to have traded in other goods (45% and 41%), swapped drugs (40% and 31%) or re-cut previously obtained drug deals (14% and 18%).

This reflects the highly addictive nature of these drugs and the high frequency and cost of daily use that often leads to illegal means to sustain a drug habit.

Figure 9: Method used to obtain drugs



Multiple responses permitted

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=412

Drug use in offenders' history

Regular drug use is widespread in the lives of these offenders. Table 13 shows the proportion of regular offenders who reported regular drug use in the six months prior to their arrest, by type of offender and type of drug. These results show that:

- overall, 78 per cent of regular offenders were drug users and drug use was higher for women who regularly engaged in sex work (92%) than for property offenders (76%) or violent offenders (69%);
- violent offenders, sex workers and drug offenders used an average of three drug types while property offenders used an average of two;
- a higher percentage of property offenders were cocaine users (48%) as compared to other offenders (10%);

- sex workers were more likely than either property or violent offenders to be users of all drug types except cocaine;
- the drugs most prevalent among violent offenders were cannabis and amphetamines; and
- there is a clear association between frequency of offending and illegal drug use as 15 per cent of non-regular offenders compared with 78 per cent of regular offenders were regular drug users at the time of their arrest.

Table 13: Regular drug use in six months prior to arrest by type of regular offender (percentages)

	Property offenders	Drug offenders	Sex work	Violent offences	Total regular offenders	Non-regular offenders
Cannabis	44	56	61	54	49	15
Heroin	39	42	50	27	36	—
Cocaine	48	10	10	10	8	0
Amphetamines	50	58	64	44	49	5
Benzodiazepines	19	24	38	19	20	—
Other drugs ¹	22	24	32	15	20	—
Mean number of drug types	2	3	3	3	2	2
Mean number of drug types, excluding cannabis	1	2	3	2	2	1
Any current regular drug use	76	91	92	69	78	15
(n)	(160)	(293)	(62)	(48)	(347)	(123)

— fewer than five cases

Includes only illegal drug use

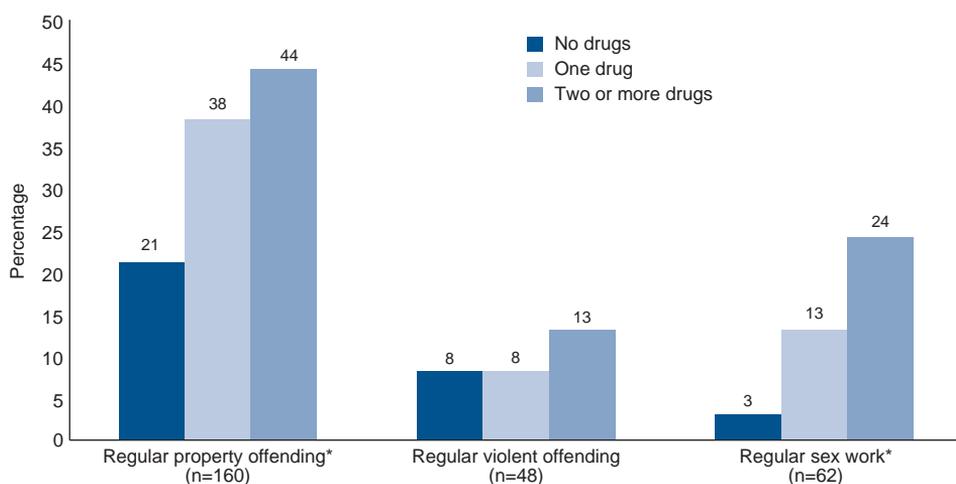
Total property offenders exclude those who were also violent offenders or sex workers

¹ Includes hallucinogens, ecstasy, street methadone and morphine

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

The relative importance of each of these drug types for different categories of offenders is difficult to assess due to multiple drug use among these women offenders. However what is clear is that the likelihood of being a persistent offender increases for users of multiple drug types. Women who used one drug were more likely to be regular property offenders and four times as likely to be regular sex workers than women who did not use any drugs. Women who used two or more types of drugs were twice as likely to be regular property offenders and eight times as likely to be regularly engaged in sex work as compared to women who did not use drugs. Differences in the prevalence of regular violent offending by number of drug types used were not statistically significant (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Prevalence of regular offending by number of drugs used



* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Drug and alcohol dependency

Not only is drug use widespread among these female inmates, over half of them fit the criteria for drug dependency. Using a six-item scale (see Box 2), 55 per cent of DUCO women were classified as drug dependent, 27 per cent were dependent on alcohol (14 per cent were dependent on both). Just one-third of women were not dependent on either drugs or alcohol. This dependency scale was piloted for the first time in the DUMA program in 2003 and produced similar results among persons detained by police: 52 per cent were dependent on illegal drugs and 27 per cent were dependent on alcohol (Milner, Mouzos & Makkai 2004: 18).

Women in this prison study who were regular drug users at the time of their arrest fit the criteria for drug dependency in 80 per cent of cases, whereas just over half (57%) of regular alcohol users were also considered to be alcohol-dependent. Due to the priority of examining the connections between drug use and crime in this study, women classified as dependent on drugs are combined and examined jointly with those dependent on both drugs and alcohol for the remainder of this analysis. The connections between alcohol dependency and criminal offending are presented in Chapter 7.

Box 2: Measuring dependency

Clinical assessments of drug or alcohol dependency were not made of the women in this study. Instead, dependency was defined as women who answered ‘yes’ to any three of the following six areas in the six months prior to being arrested. This set of questions was asked separately for drug and alcohol use.

In the six months prior to being arrested have you:

1. spent more time drinking alcohol/using drugs than you intended;
2. neglected some of your usual responsibilities because of drinking or using drugs;
3. wanted to cut down your drinking or drug use;
4. someone objected to your use of alcohol or drugs;
5. often found yourself thinking about drinking or using drugs; or
6. used alcohol or drugs to relieve feelings such as sadness, anger or boredom.

The percentage of offenders who gave positive responses ranged from 45 per cent to 55 per cent with respect to drug use, and with one exception (using alcohol or drugs to relieve feelings of sadness, anger or boredom) were about twice as high for drug use as compared to alcohol use.

Table 14: Positive responses to dependency scale (percentages)

	Alcohol	Drugs
In the six months prior to being arrested:		
Spent more time drinking alcohol/using drugs than you intended?	22	47
Neglected some usual responsibilities because of drinking or using drugs?	20	45
Wanted to cut down on your drinking or drug use?	24	47
Someone objected to your use of alcohol or drugs?	23	45
Often found yourself thinking about drinking or using drugs?	22	51
Used alcohol or drugs to relieve feelings of sadness, anger or boredom?	40	55

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

This six-item scale is a subset refined from a range of screening items for use in determining the prevalence of alcohol and drug involvement (Hoffman et al. 2003). The six items emerged as the best short set of screening questions for identifying

dependence on alcohol or drugs among arrestees, and performed equally well for women and men. A positive response to three or more of the items was found to have a high level of sensitivity (proportion of dependent persons answering yes to the question) and a high level of specificity (proportion of non-dependent persons answering no to the question) among a sample of arrestees. The internal consistency of the items was also tested with this DUCO sample of incarcerated women and the result was a reliability factor of .89 (Cronbach's alpha) for drug users and .91 for alcohol users. In factor analysis, all items loaded on one factor indicating that the items are all good indicators of a common construct, in this case drug or alcohol dependency.

Current users of drugs or alcohol in this study were asked to name their preferred drug of choice. Twenty-two per cent identified alcohol. When asked to consider illegal drugs only, the most commonly preferred drugs were heroin (33%) and amphetamines (31%) followed by cannabis (26%). Just three per cent stated a preference for benzodiazepines and seven per cent named other drugs. Drug-dependent women were slightly more likely to state a preference for heroin (37%) and amphetamines (34%) (Table 15). Among women who did not fit the criteria of being drug-dependent, 48 per cent identified alcohol as their preferred drug and 15 per cent cannabis. Just as escalation from experimentation to current regular use is high among drug users (see Table 6), dependency was especially high in some drug categories. For example, 95 per cent of women who gave heroin as their preferred drug were drug-dependent, as were 90 per cent of women who preferred amphetamines and 75 per cent of those who preferred benzodiazepines. Because of the high rate of multiple drug use, however, it cannot be determined that the dependency is for the drug identified as the preferred drug.

Table 15: Drug of choice for drug-dependent women

	n	%
Heroin	95	37
Amphetamines	86	34
Cannabis	50	20
Other	23	9
Total	257	100

Includes those who were dependent on drugs alone or both drugs and alcohol
 Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Certain crimes also tend to be associated with drug dependency. As shown in Table 16, drug-dependent women were more likely to be in prison for acquisitive crimes (robbery, burglary or theft), or driving offences, as their most serious offence that lead to the current prison sentence. Women without a drug dependency were more likely to be in prison for the violent crimes of murder and assault and for fraud.

Table 16: Type of current offence by drug dependency (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Total
	Yes	No	
Murder and related	7	17	11
Assault	8	16	12
Robbery	19	3	12
Break and enter	8	3	6
Theft	12	3	8
Fraud	12	25	18
Driving-related	11	4	8
Drug offences	12	16	14
Other	11	13	11
Total	100	100	100
(n)	(257)	(213)	(470)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

With respect to lifetime offending patterns, women with a more chronic and persistent history of offending had a higher rate of drug dependency as compared to non-regular offenders. Overall, 70 per cent of regular offenders were drug-dependent compared to just 12 per cent of non-regular offenders. The prevalence of drug dependency was higher for sex workers (84%) and property offenders (71%) than for violent offenders (58%).

While chronic offenders clearly have higher rates of drug dependency, drug-dependent women also tend to have more persistent and chronic offending patterns. Drug-dependent women in this sample were regular offenders in 95 per cent of cases compared to 49 per cent of women who were not drug-dependent (Table 17). Drug-dependent women were especially likely to be regular drug offenders (91%) and property offenders (44%). One in five were regularly engaged in sex work. Violent offending was as prevalent among women who were not drug-dependent as among those who were.

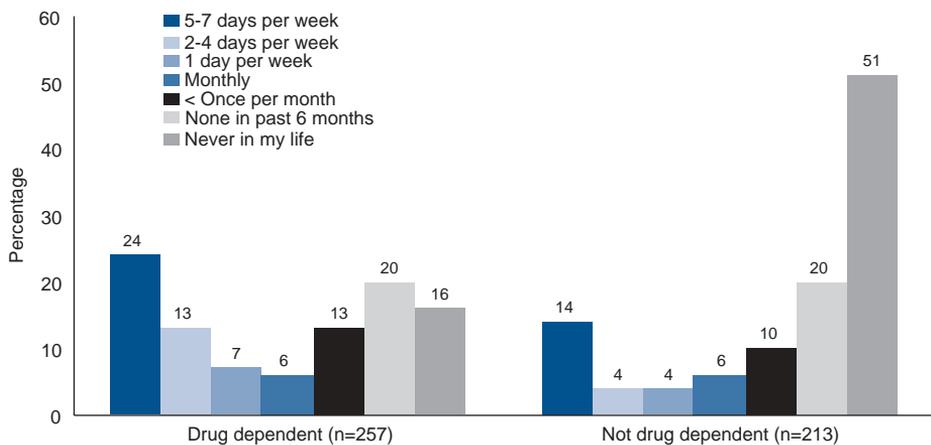
Table 17: Levels of regular offending by drug-dependent women (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Total
	Yes	No	
Property offenders	44	22	34
Violent offenders	11	9	10
Drug offenders	91	28	62
Sex workers	20	5	13
All regular offenders	95	49	74
(n)	(257)	(213)	(470)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

The frequency of property offending was also markedly higher for drug-dependent women: 44 per cent of these women committed property offences at least weekly, twice the percentage of non-dependent women (22%; Figure 11). A minority of drug-dependent women (16%) said they had never committed property offences before in their lives compared to half of women without drug dependencies. When asked about their current imprisonment, drug-dependent women reported being imprisoned for an average of 11 property offences, twice the average for women without a drug dependency (five offences).

Figure 11: Frequency of property offending among women by drug dependency



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

As shown in Table 18, some of the other associations between drug use and crime covered earlier in this chapter occurred against a backdrop of drug dependency. For example, women with drug dependency were 12 times as likely as other women in the sample to be high on drugs at the time of the current offence, about six times as likely to be ‘sick’ or ‘hanging out’ at the time of the offence, and seven times more likely to attribute the current offence to their drug use. Drug-dependent women were more likely to say that the effect of drug or alcohol use on their offending history has been 100 per cent. They were also many times more likely to obtain drugs through illegal means such as trading in stolen goods or forging scripts. Women with a drug dependency were more likely to pay cash for drugs whereas non-dependent women perhaps received drugs from friends or in the context of a social situation but were less likely to initiate payment for them. Women with drug dependencies were also more likely to have accepted drugs in payment for a job. Nine per cent of drug-dependent women traded sex for drugs, a situation that was never reported by women not dependent on drugs.

Table 18: Drug dependency by aspects of offending and obtaining drugs (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Total
	Yes	No	
High on drugs at the time of the offence	71	6	42
Sick’ or ‘hanging out’	46	8	29
Current offence attributed to drugs	57	8	35
Effect of drug/alcohol use on offending history was 100 per cent	51	16	35
Method to obtain drugs			
Paid cash	93	66	81
Traded stolen goods	43	4	25
Traded other goods	35	3	20
Traded sex	9	0	5
Received in payment for a job	22	—	13
Forged scripts	8	—	5
(n)	(257)	(213)	(470)

— fewer than five cases

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Drug buyers and sellers

Drug buyers and sellers come into regular contact with illegal drugs and therefore might be expected to be more likely to report regular drug use. Among the women offenders who were regular drug buyers or regular drug sellers, all were regular drug users in the six months prior to their arrest. Both groups had higher rates of regular use of every type of drug than women who were not regular buyers or sellers.

Perhaps due to their regular access to drugs, drug sellers tended to use drugs with greater frequency than other women. Almost three-quarters of drug sellers used heroin several times a day, 56 per cent used cannabis, and 47 per cent used amphetamines with the same frequency. These are higher than the proportions for all regular users of these drugs as shown in Table 5. Drug buyers and sellers were also more likely than other women in the sample to have a drug dependency: 80 per cent of regular drug buyers and 84 per cent of regular drug sellers were classified as drug-dependent.

Is there a causal link between drug abuse and crime?

This study provides convincing evidence of a strong link between drug and alcohol abuse and offending among these incarcerated women. But to what extent can the relationship between drug and alcohol use and crime be said to be *causal*? Is there a portion of crime by women that can be said to be directly attributed to drugs or alcohol?

Researchers involved in the DUCO male study were concerned about this question and devised a methodology to arrive at a conservative estimate of the proportion of crime committed by a sample of incarcerated males that was caused by alcohol or drug abuse. The percentage of offences with a causal attribution to drugs or alcohol was based on a combination of (a) those attributable to addiction and (b) those where the offender was intoxicated at the time of the offence. Estimates of the first of these two components, those attributable to addiction, were based on those offenders who reported (a) addiction at the time of the current offence, and (b) that the reason they committed that offence was related to drugs or alcohol (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 154). Using this methodology, it is estimated that 24 per cent of all current offences committed by males were causally attributable to addiction: 18 per cent to addiction to illegal drugs, three per cent to alcohol and three per cent to both drugs and alcohol.

The same method can be used to calculate causal attribution to addiction for women offenders, although there were differences in the method used to estimate 'addiction' in the two DUCO projects. Men in the DUCO male study were asked which drugs they think they were addicted to in the six months prior to arrest. By contrast, the concept of 'dependency' was measured in the DUCO female study by way of the six-item scale

discussed previously. The word ‘addiction’ was not used which may affect the comparability of these two approaches. The results show that 41 per cent of male offenders reported being addicted to cannabis, amphetamines, heroin, cocaine or any combination of these drugs (Makkai & Payne 2003: 152). Among female offenders, 55 per cent were considered to have a dependency on drugs (types of drug were not specified). Without further research, it is not possible to know the extent to which these methods over- or under-count drug-related problems in comparison to the other.

Using the same method used in the DUCO male study to calculate the percentage of crimes attributable to addiction (dependency at the time of the current offence and the reason for the offence was related to drugs or alcohol), 39 per cent of all current offences committed by these women offenders were causally attributable to addiction: 30 per cent to addiction to illegal drugs and eight per cent to alcohol, while just one per cent were attributable to both drugs and alcohol. Addiction to illegal drugs in particular was higher for women than for men (30% compared to 18%). Addiction attributions varied across type of offending: 60 per cent of regular sex work offenders attributed their offending to addiction, as did 49 per cent of regular property offenders and 46 per cent of regular violent offenders. It is difficult to say how these results are affected by the different methodologies for determining ‘addiction’.

The second component of this equation, intoxication at the time of the offence, was calculated through a combination of intoxication at the time of the current offence and attributions that alcohol or drugs were the cause of their offending. Twenty-nine per cent of male offenders were intoxicated at the time of the offence for which they are currently incarcerated, and attributed their offending to their use of alcohol or drugs: 11 per cent to illegal drugs, 10 per cent to alcohol and eight per cent to both alcohol and illegal drugs (Makkai & Payne 2003b: 8). The comparative figure for women in the DUCO female study is higher at 35 per cent: 25 per cent involving illegal drugs, nine per cent involving alcohol and one per cent involving both drugs and alcohol (Table 19). Once again, women were more likely than men to attribute their offending to intoxication, and especially to illegal drugs, although men were more likely to attribute their intoxication to both drugs and alcohol. The fact that women were more likely than men to attribute their offending to intoxication, using measures that were exactly the same in both the male and female surveys, adds credibility to the differences found in addiction attributions, where the measures were not identical.

A calculation of how much crime in total can be said to be caused by illegal drugs or alcohol uses a combination of these two figures, both addiction and intoxication attributions. Using this methodology, the DUCO male study concluded that 39 per cent of current offences were causally linked to drugs or alcohol, while for DUCO females the figure was similar at 41 per cent. In other words, for 41 per cent of female prisoners their current

offence was causally attributed to intoxication or addiction at the time of the offence: 31 per cent to illegal drugs, nine per cent to alcohol and one per cent to both drugs and alcohol (Table 19). While overall levels of attribution are similar for males and females, women gave higher levels of both intoxication and addiction attributions and a higher level of overlap between the two. This suggests that women who were intoxicated at the time of the offence were likely to be drug-dependent more often than is the case for men.

Table 19: Model attributions for intoxication and addiction for males and females (percentages)

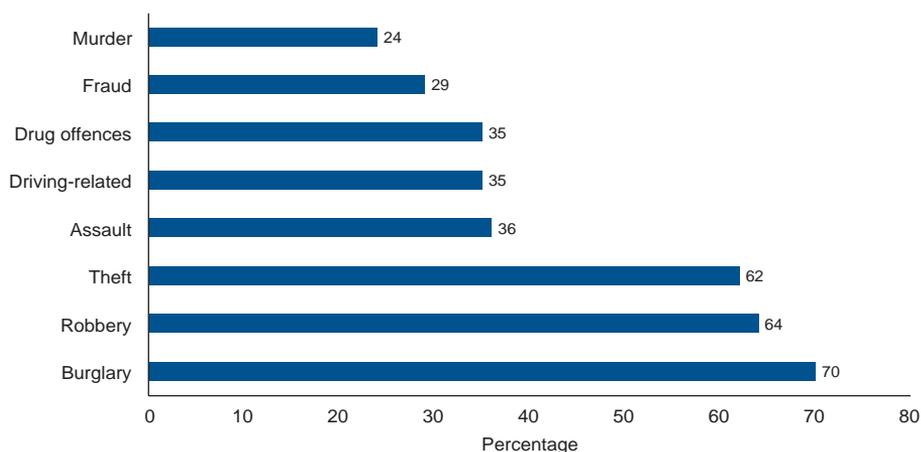
	Intoxication		Addiction		Combined	
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
No attribution	65	71*	61	76*	59	61*
Attribution						
Illegal drugs	25	11*	30	18*	31	18*
Alcohol	9	10*	8	3*	9	9*
Both	1	8*	1	3*	1	12*
Total	35	29*	39	24*	41	39*

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .01$

Sources: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], $n=470$; DUCO male survey, 2001 [computer file], $n=2,135$

As these attributions relate to the offence for which these offenders are currently incarcerated, it is appropriate to examine the percentage of offenders who gave these attributions according to their current main offence type. As shown in Figure 12, certain offences were more likely to be linked causally to offenders' drug or alcohol abuse. For example, women whose main offence was burglary, robbery or theft were most likely to attribute their offending to their drug and alcohol abuse (Figure 12). Murder and fraud were less likely than other offences to be causally related to offenders' drug or alcohol abuse. Sample counts were too low to examine causal attributions to drugs and alcohol separately.

Figure 12: Current offence causally linked to drugs or alcohol



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

Summary

This study provides a wide range of techniques through which to examine the relationship between drug use and criminal offending. Results demonstrate a clear link between drug use and crime among this group of incarcerated women offenders, and the link with persistent offending and drug use is stronger than with non-persistent offenders. The evidence shows, for example, that:

- 42 per cent of these female prisoners were under the influence of drugs at the time of their current offence;
- half of property offenders committed their offences in order to obtain money to buy drugs;
- 55 per cent of offenders were drug-dependent;
- 35 per cent attributed all of their criminal history to their personal drug or alcohol use;
- in total, 41 per cent of criminal offending by these women was causally linked to alcohol or illegal drugs either through intoxication at the time of the current offence or addiction; women were far more likely to attribute their offending to drugs than to alcohol;

-
- 78 per cent of regular offenders are regular drug users as compared to 15 per cent of non-regular offenders; and
 - 95 per cent of drug-dependent women were regular offenders and their offending was more chronic.

Drug use clearly played a significant role with respect to both the offence that led to the current incarceration and the criminal histories of these women prisoners. Overlaps between the two indicate that intoxication at the time of the offence is symptomatic of a lifetime of drug problems requiring treatment. Compared to the DUCO male study, crimes committed by these female prisoners were more likely to be causally attributed to drug use. Women were more likely than men to attribute their offending to drug addiction or drug intoxication. This indicates that drug treatment should be widely available for women offenders, and that drug treatment programs may aid significantly in efforts to reduce criminal offending by women.

5 Temporal order of drug use and crime

5 Temporal order of drug use and crime

There is a debate in the research literature about the temporal order of drugs and crime and whether the onset of crime pre-dates the onset of drug use or the reverse. Much of the literature states that criminal activity tends to precede drug use, but that criminal activity, in particular property offending, escalates as drug use increases. Most of these studies have focused on male offenders. The present study tests this assumption with women offenders. Answers to questions about the temporal order of drug use and crime can add to an understanding of what types of interventions might be more effective for deterring women from offending, whether it is the offending behaviour that is the original problem, or drug use that leads to crime. Chapter 6 investigates other problems in the backgrounds of offenders that are correlated with drug use and crime.

Onset and persistence of drug use and crime

By calculating mean age of first and regular drug use, along with mean age of first and regular offending, it is possible to elaborate on the progression of drug use and crime. If the onset of drug use occurs at an earlier mean age than the onset of offending, drug use might have contributed to the onset of crime. Similarly, if the age of first or regular drug use follows the onset of offending but precedes the age of regular offending, drug use may have contributed to the persistence of offending behaviour (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 39).

Offenders who carry on to become regular offenders tend to begin at an earlier age, and for the women in this sample, this was the pattern for all offences except for fraud and selling drugs (Table 20):

- the crime with the earliest age of onset in this study was stealing without break-in, which occurred at a mean age of 15.9 for women who became regular offenders, and 16.4 for all offenders;
- stealing is followed by buying drugs and burglary;
- buying drugs comes before selling drugs;
- fraud stands out as the crime that begins on average much later, at about age 26, yet becomes a regular activity very quickly;
- trading in stolen goods, robbery, sex work and selling drugs all became a regular activity within a year or less; and
- break and enter, stealing, assault and buying drugs are much slower to progress to regular offending.

For most, but not all, drugs covered in this study, drug use also tended to begin at an earlier age for those who continue to become regular users:

- cannabis was the first drug used, on average at age 15.2, prior to any offending;
- benzodiazepines and amphetamines began next, and regular use two years after initiation of these drugs;
- regular heroin use began about the same age but progressed more quickly to regular use; and
- cocaine users tended to begin use later and to take about two years to become regular users.

Table 20: Mean age of offending and drug use for regular offenders and drug users

	Onset – all offenders/ drug users	Onset – regular offenders/ drug users	Regular activity	Difference in years¹
Property offenders	19.1	17.7	20.8	3.1
Break and enter	18.0	16.7	19.4	2.7
Steal without break-in	16.4	15.9	19.3	3.4
Traded in stolen goods	20.8	20.0	20.8	0.8
Fraud	25.6	25.9	26.5	0.6
Violent offenders	21.9	17.6	19.9	2.3
Assault	22.0	18.3	20.5	2.2
Robbery without weapon	18.6	18.0	18.8	0.8
Drug offenders	17.9	17.6	19.8	2.2
Bought drugs	17.6	17.3	19.5	2.2
Sold drugs	22.0	22.1	23.1	1.0
Sex work	20.1	19.5	20.4	0.9
Drug use	16.0	15.1	17.7	2.6
Cannabis	16.0	15.2	17.2	2.0
Benzodiazepines	18.7	19.0	21.0	2.0
Amphetamines	19.6	19.1	21.0	1.9
Heroin	20.0	18.9	19.8	0.9
Cocaine	21.5	21.8	23.7	1.9

¹ Difference between onset and regular offending–drug use for regular offenders/drug users

Drug use totals include all types of drug use. Excludes women who only used drugs legally

Vandalism and armed robbery are excluded due to low counts

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file] n=470

Table 21 compares the age of onset of drug use among these incarcerated women and women in the general population aged 18 and over. For every type of drug shown, women in prison began drug use at an earlier age. Early initiation into drug use is a risk factor for a number of problems later in life, including crime and delinquency and increased frequency of drug use (Johnson D 2001), patterns that have been shown to exist among women in this study. The difference in age of initiation into drug use between these two groups is most pronounced for benzodiazepines which was reported to begin an average of four years earlier among incarcerated women.

Table 21: Mean age of onset of drug use among women in prison and the general population

	Women in prison	Women in the population
Cannabis	16.0	19.0
Benzodiazepines	18.7	23.6
Amphetamines	19.6	20.3
Heroin	20.0	20.4
Cocaine	21.5	22.4

Includes women aged 18 and over in the NDSHS

Sources: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]; National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 2001 [computer file]

Overall, regular offenders were initiated into drug use at a younger age than either women in the population or non-regular offenders (Table 22). Regular violent offenders reported the earliest initiation into drug use with cannabis at age 14.2, and were first to use other types of drugs beginning with amphetamines at age 16.5. Women involved in the sex trade had an earlier onset into drug use than property offenders. Non-regular offenders began using illegal drugs even later. In fact, onset of illegal drug use among non-regular offenders occurs, on average, later than among women in the general population.

Table 22: Mean age of onset of drug use by type of offender

	Property offenders	Violent offenders	Sex workers	All regular offenders	Non-regular offenders
Cannabis	15.2	14.2	15.0	15.2	19.9
Benzodiazepines	18.1	17.0	17.9	18.5	22.6
Amphetamines	19.2	16.5	18.0	19.4	23.1
Heroin	20.0	16.9	19.0	19.9	22.9
Cocaine	21.8	18.3	20.6	21.4	24.0
(n)	(160)	(48)	(62)	(347)	(123)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Just as regular offenders began using drugs at an earlier age than non-regular offenders, women with drug dependencies tended to begin criminal careers at a younger age than women who were not drug-dependent. As shown in Table 23, with the exception of break and enter and trading in stolen goods, drug-dependent women began offending at a younger mean age as compared to other women. The greatest differences in age of onset of criminal offending were shown for fraud offenders: the mean age of first fraud offences was reported to be 21.9 for drug-dependent women as compared to 32.9 for women who were not dependent on drugs, a difference of 11 years. Selling and buying drugs, violent crime and sex work also began at a much later stage for women without drug dependencies.

Table 23: Mean age of onset of offending by drug dependency

	Drug-dependent		Difference in years
	Yes	No	
Property crime	16.4	24.1	7.7
Break and enter	18.2	17.4	-0.8
Steal without break-in	15.6	18.9	3.3
Traded in stolen goods	20.8	20.6	-0.2
Fraud	21.9	32.9	11.0
Violent crime	20.2	24.9	4.7
Drug offenders	16.9	20.4	3.5
Bought drugs	17.1	19.2	2.1
Sold drugs	21.1	26.0	4.9
Sex work	19.4	23.7	4.3
(n)	(257)	(213)	

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

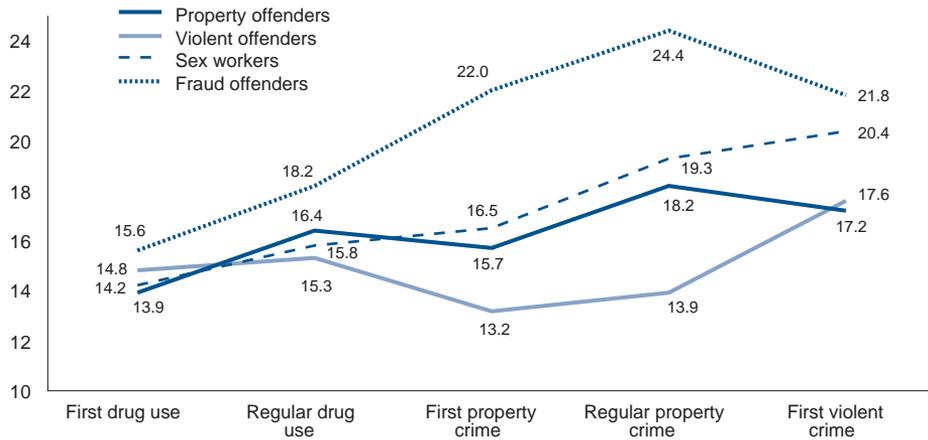
Pathways models

In order to more accurately assess the time-ordering of crime and drug use, it is necessary to select just those women who engaged on a regular basis in specific crimes. Figure 13 selects women who reported regular property offending, violent offending and involvement in the sex trade and calculates their mean age of onset of offending and drug use. Because fraud offenders tend to be much older at onset of offending, they are separated out from other property offenders to more clearly compare the patterns of offending and drug use among regular fraud offenders and other property offenders. Not all women in each of these crime categories engaged in every type of crime or became regular drug users. For example, only two-thirds of regular property offenders and sex workers, and less than half of fraud offenders, ever committed a violent crime. Eighty-two per cent of fraud offenders had used drugs, but just 71 per cent became regular drug users. A similar percentage of violent offenders were regular drug users. Calculations of mean age are based on offenders who were involved in these crimes and drug use. The number of women interviewed for this study was too small to permit more refined analysis.

Results show that:

- initiation into illegal drugs preceded any offending for regular fraud offenders, other types of property offenders, and sex workers;
- violent offenders began their crime/drug careers with first and regular property offending, followed by drug use prior to any violent offence;
- regular violent offenders committed their first property crime more than two years earlier than regular property offenders;
- fraud offenders began using illegal drugs and became regular drug users many years prior to committing their first fraud offence, suggesting a strong causal link between drug use and offending; and
- women involved in the sex trade became regular drug users many years prior to regular property offending, and prior to first and regular sex work (age 19.5 and 20.4).

Figure 13: Pathways model for mean age of onset and regular offending and drug use



Estimates include regular offenders only (property n=39, violent n=48, sex workers n=62, fraud n=91)
 Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

For all groups of offenders, with the exception of fraud offenders, there is a brief period, between about age 13 and 16, when they are initiated into drug use, become regular users, and commit their first offence. For fraud offenders, drug use happens a few years later and offending several years later. Property offenders commit their first property crime after trying drugs but before regular drug use, which differs from male property offenders

who tend to commit their first offence prior to using drugs (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 44). Female violent offenders are similar to males to the extent that initiation into offending precedes first use of illegal drugs by almost two years. However, unlike males, female violent offenders become regular drug users more than two years *prior to* their first violence offence. Males tend to begin violent offending at the same time as regular drug use (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 61).

Studies of male offenders generally find that first criminal activity, particularly property crime, predates first drug use, and offending escalates following regular drug use. The DUCO study of incarcerated male offenders, for example, found that, among offenders who reported any illegal drug use, they tended to begin with the onset of offending, followed by illegal drug use, then persisted into regular offending, followed by regular drug use (Makkai & Payne 2003b: 6). It is estimated that 17 per cent of males used illegal drugs prior to committing any offences, 29 per cent began using drugs and committing crime concurrently (this is, within the same year), and 54 per cent began offending prior to any illegal drug use. The first offence was most likely to be minor property crime, such as vandalism or theft, and the drug first used was most likely to be cannabis.

A comparison can be made with women in the DUCO female study using the same methodology. Overall, by comparing the age of onset of drug use and criminal offending, the following pattern emerges:

- 35 per cent used illegal drugs prior to offending;
- 31 per cent began using illegal drugs and began offending within the same year; and
- 34 per cent began offending prior to any illegal drug use.

This shows that, in general, women in prison were twice as likely as men to have used drugs prior to offending. For women, lifetime drug using and offending careers are equally likely to begin simultaneously as to commence with drug use or with criminal offending. Although these results are not in accordance with patterns shown for male offenders, they tend to support research on women offenders that finds drug use often precedes involvement in criminal activity (Cusick, Martin & May 2003; Denton 2001; Baskin & Sommers 1993). For a total of 66 per cent of these women, their drug use either preceded or occurred simultaneously with their criminal offending. Chapter 6 will explore some of the early experiences in the lives of women offenders that may help to explain the earlier onset of drug use and later onset of crime among incarcerated women as compared to men.

For the vast majority of these offenders, the illegal drug first used was cannabis. If cannabis is excluded so that the mean age of first use of illegal drugs refers to heroin, amphetamines, cocaine and benzodiazepines, the lifetime pattern of drug use and offending tends more often to begin with offending prior to the use of illegal drugs:

- 17 per cent used drugs other than cannabis prior to offending;
- 24 per cent began using drugs and offending concurrently; and
- 59 per cent began offending prior to drug use.

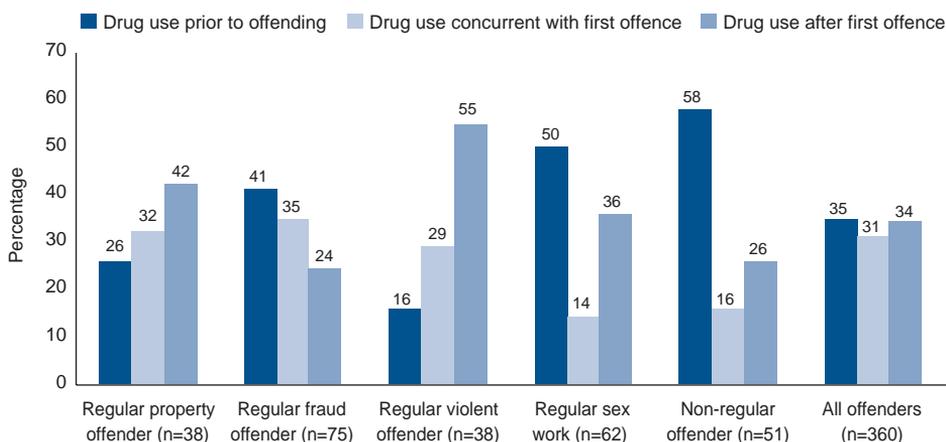
Clearly, where the more serious drugs are concerned, these women tended to have begun a criminal career prior to drug use: a total of 83 per cent committed their first offence either prior to or concurrent with experimentation with these drugs. However, about one in six began experimentation with these drugs prior to committing any offence. This suggests that, for these women, serious drug use played a role in shaping their criminal careers. This is similar to the pattern shown for male offenders for all drugs *including* cannabis (Makkai & Payne 2003b: 6). Among women, regular fraud offenders and non-regular offenders were the groups most likely to have begun using drugs other than cannabis prior to any criminal offending (23% and 27%, respectively).

The lifetime progression of drug use and criminal offending for various types of offenders is shown in Figure 14 (these estimates include all illegal drug use including cannabis). In this graph, fraud offenders were separated out from property offenders, as were violent offenders and women involved in the sex trade:

- regular sex workers and non-regular offenders are the groups most likely have begun drug use prior to committing their first crime;
- fraud offenders were the group most likely to have started using drugs prior to or within a year of their first offence; and
- violent offenders were most likely to have begun drug use after the onset of offending and most closely resemble male offending and drug use patterns.

Multiple drug users involved in the sex trade first became involved and took on regular sex work after they became regular users of cannabis, amphetamines and heroin (not shown). These patterns are in contrast to those found for incarcerated males in the DUCO male study. Among males, small proportions of regular offenders began drug use prior to offending and the less chronic offenders, who began at older ages, were more likely to begin drug use before or concurrent with offending. Among women in this study, while less chronic non-regular offenders were the group most likely to begin drug use prior to offending, high proportions of all types of regular offenders (with the exception of violent offenders and drug sellers) began using drugs prior to their first criminal offence.

Figure 14: Mean age progression for drug use and crime



Regular property offenders exclude regular fraud offenders, and women who were also violent offenders and sex workers. All other categories overlap due to small sample counts

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Generally speaking, the lifetime progression of offending and drug use for persistent property offenders (including fraud) tends to begin with cannabis at a mean age of about 15 before moving on to stealing without break-in at age 17.3 and the more serious offence of burglary at age 17.5. Trading in stolen goods began on average at age 21. Cannabis use was followed by benzodiazepines at age 18, amphetamines at 19, and heroin at age 20. Cocaine was typically the last drug to be tried at a mean age of almost 22 (Table 22).

Unlike regular property offenders, regular violent offenders tended to begin their drug-crime careers with a criminal offence – theft – at age 13. Cannabis use followed at age 14. Like property offenders, violent offenders then continued their criminal careers with burglary (age 15). All three types of violent offences included in this study – armed robbery, unarmed robbery and physical assault – commenced around age 18. Initiation into drugs other than cannabis followed the same pattern as for property offenders, but considerably earlier for each one. Violent offenders had begun experimentation with amphetamines by age 16.5, heroin and benzodiazepines by age 17, and cocaine by age 18.

What factors contribute to these different drug-crime progressions for violent and property offenders? If most offenders begin with minor property offending, what factors influence a shift to persistent violent offending for some while others continue as persistent property offenders and, although they may commit the occasional violent offence, do not develop into regular violent offenders? Part of the answer lies with the different role that drug use

plays in the lives of women who become regular violent as compared to property offenders: experimentation with drugs began prior to offending for 26 per cent of property offenders (excluding regular fraud offenders) but only 16 per cent of violent offenders. However, violent offenders got started in their criminal careers at an earlier age, and began using drugs other than cannabis earlier than did property offenders. Initiation into amphetamines occurred on average one year earlier among drug-using violent offenders, while onset of heroin and cocaine began two years earlier for violent offenders. So although drug use began prior to offending for only 16 per cent of violent offenders, initiation into drugs other than cannabis occurred at an earlier age for violent offenders than for property offenders. Further analysis of the DUCO female study presented in Chapter 6 identifies other risk factors that differentiate property and violent offenders.

Summary

Early initiation into drug use is a risk factor for a variety of problems later in life, including crime and drug use problems. For every type of drug examined in this study, women in prison reported experimenting at an earlier age than women in the general population. Early onset of drug use is also associated with more persistent and regular offending. In addition, drug dependency was indicative of earlier initiation into a criminal career.

In contrast to male prisoners, women in this study tended more often to begin drug use prior to criminal offending. This suggests that for some women, drug use played an important role in the onset and continuation of a criminal career. All regular offenders have a history of property offending, and what differentiates women who also regularly use violence is their earlier onset of drug use, in particular amphetamines, benzodiazepines, heroin and cocaine.

6 Risk factors for drug use and offending

6 Risk factors for drug use and offending

This study presents strong evidence that drug use is closely linked to early onset and persistence of offending among women. What can this study tell us about other risk markers for drug use and offending? Current research literature suggests that behind both drug abuse and offending for women is a history of family problems, behaviour problems, mental health conditions, and sexual and physical abuse. Whereas the questionnaire for the DUCO female study is based on the DUCO male study with core questions related to lifetime offending and drug use, it was also tailored to capture additional information concerning issues pertinent to women. For example, modules of questions were added to capture mental health problems, and experiences of sexual and physical abuse in childhood and as an adult. This chapter explores the interconnections among these issues, drug dependency, and persistent offending for these incarcerated women.

Early family and behaviour problems

Alcohol and drug problems were prevalent in the families of origin of these incarcerated women: 44 per cent said family members had problems with alcohol, 26 per cent had problems with drugs, and a total of 52 per cent had either drug or alcohol problems. Early exposure to drug problems among family members increases the risk of drug use for the women themselves, and is associated with higher rates of persistent offending. As shown in Table 24, women classified as drug-dependent were three times as likely as those without a dependency to have grown up in families with drug problems and more likely to have grown up in families with alcohol problems. An association is shown between early exposure to drugs and causally linking their own criminal offending to drug use: women exposed to family members with drug problems were twice as likely to causally attribute their criminal offending to drugs.

Many of these women also had other kinds of problems earlier in life, as indicated by the fact that 50 per cent said they were 'often in trouble at school.' Researchers have found a relationship between delinquency and poor school attachment and gang involvement, and the relationships are stronger for girls than for boys (Esbensen & Deschenes 1998; Fitzgerald 2003). A positive school experience can act to reduce the odds of delinquency for youth who have other risk factors (Spratt, Jenkins & Doob 2000). Among women in the DUCO study, having been in trouble at school was a predictor of later drug dependency.

A small percentage of the women interviewed (17%) had spent time in a juvenile detention centre. This indicator of early onset offending and involvement with the criminal justice system was also related to higher rates of drug dependency. Women with a history of juvenile convictions and those who were often in trouble while growing up were also initiated into illegal drug use at a younger age with less time between onset and persistence for most drug types. Women with this early involvement in juvenile crime were more likely to

indicate that their criminal activity was causally linked to their drug use, either through intoxication at the time or through addiction. They were more likely than other women to be current regular users of cannabis, heroin, amphetamines and benzodiazepines and to be multiple drug users.

Table 24: History of early problems, drug dependency and offending (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Property offender		Violent offender		Sex work	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Family had drug problems	38	11*	35	19*	33	25	53	42
Family had alcohol problems	50	36*	48	40	58	42*	34	24
Often in trouble at school	62	37*	60	46*	65	49*	61	49
Ever in juvenile detention	23	10*	22	15*	40	14*	20	17
(n)	(257)	(213)	(198)	(272)	(48)	(422)	(62)	(408)

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Early family and behaviour problems are also risk markers for persistent offending. Compared to less persistent offenders, regular property offenders were more likely to have grown up in families with drug problems, to have often been in trouble at school, and to have been in juvenile detention. Regular violent offenders were more likely than other women to have grown up in a family with alcohol problems, to have had trouble at school and to have been in juvenile detention. In fact, persistent violent offenders were about three times more likely than other offenders to have spent time in juvenile detention. Involvement in the sex trade did not show a statistically significant association with any of these risk markers.

Mental health conditions

Researchers have established an association between substance abuse disorders and mental health, especially among women and those with socioeconomic disadvantage (Denton 1995; Kerber, Maxwell & Wallisch 2001; Grant 1995; Farrell et al. 1998). A total of 60 per cent of offenders reported that they often experienced one or more mental health problems while growing up (see Box 3) and two-thirds of these women experienced three or more. About one-third of offenders stated that they were fearful or distrustful, very sad, often had arguments or fights, or were anxious or stressed. Almost 30 per cent said they

often had bad thoughts, one-quarter had nightmares, and one-fifth did not care what happened to them. As with other negative early life experiences, emotional problems were linked to an increased chance of drug dependency (Table 25). Overall, higher proportions of drug-dependent women reported having had a mental health condition: 68 per cent as compared to 51 per cent of women who were not drug-dependent. With the exception of feeling fearful or distrustful of people or having nightmares, mental health conditions were more prevalent in women dependent on drugs as compared to those who were not drug-dependent.

Box 3: Measuring mental health problems

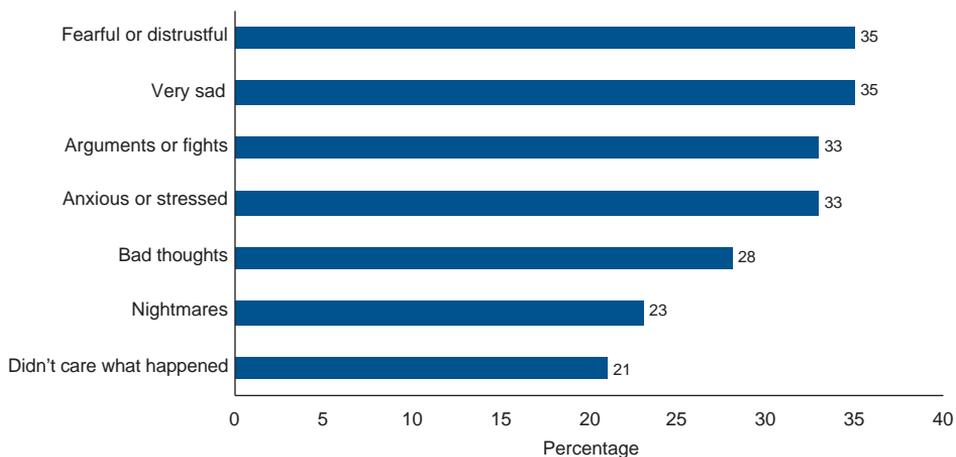
In order to assess the mental health of incarcerated women, the DUCO study devised a general scale containing six questions adapted from a prison study in Texas (Kerber, Maxwell & Wallisch 2001). These results are not designed to be diagnostic but rather are intended simply as indicators or flags for possible mental health problems earlier in life. Offenders were asked:

Thinking back to when you were growing up, how often:

- were you anxious or stressed;
- did you think bad thoughts;
- did you not care what happened to you;
- were you fearful or distrustful of people;
- did you have nightmares;
- did you have arguments or fights; and
- were you very sad.

Possible responses to each of these were 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes' and 'often'. Those who said they 'often' experienced any one of these conditions were considered to have a mental health condition. A test for internal consistency of these items together produced a Cronbach's alpha of .83. In factor analysis, all items loaded on one factor indicating that they are measuring a common construct.

Figure 15: Percentage of offenders stating mental health conditions



Percentage who said they 'often' had these mental health conditions

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

Table 25: Mental health conditions, drug dependency and offending (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Property offender		Violent offender		Sex work	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Anxious or stressed	39	25*	36	31	45	31	48	30*
Think bad thoughts	34	22*	32	27	46	26*	33	28
Didn't care what happened	28	13*	19	22	33	20*	38	18*
Fearful or distrustful	36	33	35	35	44	34	47	33*
Had nightmares	27	19	24	23	29	23	19	24
Had arguments or fights	41	25*	34	33	50	32*	55	30*
Very sad	42	28*	37	34	42	35	50	33*
Any mental health condition	68	51*	61	60	75	58*	76	58*
(n)	(257)	(213)	(160)	(310)	(48)	(422)	(62)	(408)

Percentage who 'often' had these mental health conditions

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Overall, regular violent offenders and sex workers were more likely than property offenders to report having had a mental health condition while growing up – 76 per cent and 75 per cent compared to 61 per cent of property offenders. None of the mental health conditions were associated with persistent property offending, while many of the individual items were associated with higher levels of both violent offending and involvement in the sex trade. For example, violent offenders were more likely to say they had bad thoughts, did not care what happened to them, or had arguments or fights while growing up. Women in the sex trade were significantly more likely to say they were anxious or stressed, fearful or distrustful, had arguments or fights, were very sad, or did not care what happened to them.

Among women who described having these emotional problems, 62 per cent said these problems significantly interfered with their lives at some stage, and 74 per cent of all women reported that their emotional state in the six months prior to their arrest significantly interfered with their lives. Women dependent on drugs were significantly more likely to say their lives were interfered with at some stage due to emotional problems (72% compared to 51% of women without a drug dependency), and in the six months prior to their arrest (84% compared to 38%).

Three-quarters of all offenders had sought help for mental health problems (for example from a psychiatrist, psychologist or other counsellor) and 45 per cent of these women had received a diagnosis from the helping professional. The percentage of women who sought help for mental health problems was higher among women who were dependent on drugs (81%) as compared to non-dependent women (71%), and was high among all types of persistent offenders, including 80 per cent of property offenders, 86 per cent of sex workers and 77 per cent of violent offenders. Open-ended responses to a question about the type of diagnosis received from mental health professionals were grouped into categories:

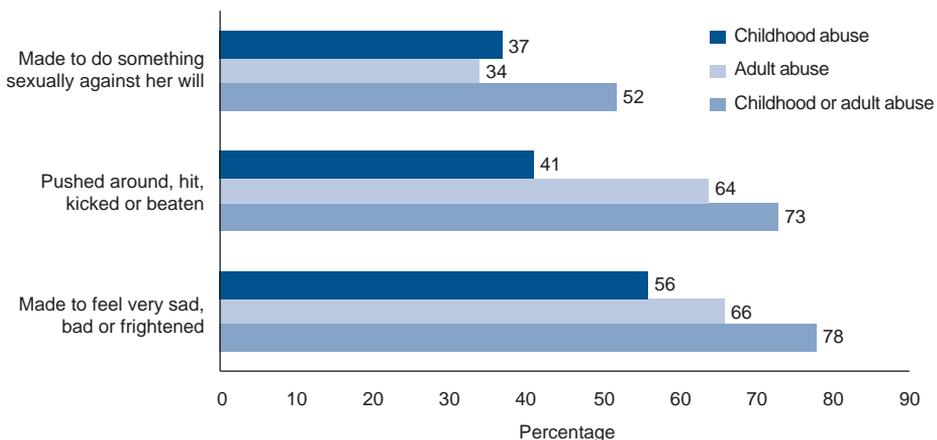
- 51 per cent of women with a diagnosis suffered from depression;
- 11 per cent suffered from schizophrenia;
- 9 per cent suffered from post traumatic stress disorder;
- 8 per cent suffered from personality disorder;
- 8 per cent suffered from manic depressive disorder; and
- 14 per cent from other assorted conditions, including mental breakdown, attention deficit disorder and drug psychosis.

Childhood abuse

Researchers commonly find high rates of sexual and physical abuse in the personal histories of women who are in prison, both in Australia and overseas (Denton 1994; Hockings et al. 2002; Ekstrand 1999). Women offenders also report higher levels of abuse and a stronger association between abuse and mental health problems and substance dependence as compared to men (McClellan, Farabee & Crouch 1997; Kerber, Maxwell & Wallisch 2001). It has been hypothesised that drug use is a way of coping with the negative consequences of sexual and physical abuse, including painful memories, psychological distress and anger (Jarvis, Copeland & Walton 1995). Drug abuse then eventually leads to crime as a way to cover the cost of a growing drug habit. Or there may be a more direct link between early sexual and physical abuse and crime whereby the negative consequences of early abuse lead to a range of acting out behaviours, including violence.

Overall, 63 per cent of women had been subjected to at least one type of abuse as a child. The most common type was emotional abuse (reported by 56% of women), defined as being made to feel very sad, bad or frightened (see Box 4). Although the exact actions that lead to feeling this way are not known from the survey responses, 41 per cent of all women had been emotionally abused by parents, 13 per cent by siblings and 11 per cent by family friends or acquaintances (multiple responses were allowed) (Table 26).

Figure 16: Types of abuse in childhood and adulthood



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

Box 4: Measuring abuse

The DUCO female study measured women's childhood experiences of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect through the following questions (adapted from Kerber, Maxwell & Wallisch 2001):

Thinking back to when you were growing up, did any of the following things ever happen to you?

- Were you ever made to feel very sad, bad or frightened?
- Were you ever pushed around, hit, kicked or beaten?
- Were you ever touched or kissed in a way that made you feel uncomfortable or made to do something sexually that you didn't want to do?
- Were you ever left alone as a child, didn't have enough to eat, or had inadequate clothing?

Experiences of emotional, physical and sexual abuse in adulthood were measured using the same questions as above. Neglect as an adult was excluded.

Physical abuse in childhood (being pushed around, hit, kicked or beaten) was reported by 41 per cent of women (Figure 16). Thirty per cent of women reported physical abuse by parents and 10 per cent were abused by siblings. Over one-third of women (37%) reported sexual abuse in childhood, defined as being touched or kissed in a way that made them feel uncomfortable or being made to do something sexual that they did not want to do. The largest group of perpetrators of sexual abuse was family friends and acquaintances, reported by 14 per cent of all women, followed by parents (10%), siblings (7%) and strangers (7%). Others (not defined) were also implicated in 11 per cent of sexual abuse cases. Neglect (being left alone, not having enough to eat or having inadequate clothing) was reported by 18 per cent of women. Fifteen per cent of women were victims of parental neglect.

Table 26: Types of abuse by perpetrator relationship (percentages)

	Parent	Sibling	Family friend, acquaintance	Stranger	Other
Abuse in childhood					
Sexual abuse	10	7	14	7	11
Physical abuse	30	10	6	2	5
Emotional abuse	41	13	11	5	13
Neglect	15	—	—	—	7
	Spouse, partner	Other family member	Friend, acquaintance	Stranger	Other
Abuse in adulthood					
Sexual abuse	17	3	5	13	4
Physical abuse	52	5	7	8	8
Emotional abuse	49	12	8	9	14

Calculated as a percentage of all incarcerated women

— fewer than five cases

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO Female Survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

Estimates of child abuse in the general population are difficult to come by due to the very private nature of these experiences and the difficulties victims have in reporting these crimes to authorities. The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey (a survey of 6677 women aged 18 to 69) estimates that 18 per cent of women have been sexually abused in childhood (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Two per cent were sexually abused by a parent, 16 per cent by someone else, and 18 per cent were physically abused by a parent (physical abuse by someone other than a parent was not included in this survey). Although this survey is not directly comparable to the DUCO study due to differences in the question wording (the DUCO study used one general question whereas the IVAWS used six specific questions about types of sexual violence and seven questions about physical violence) it provides a general point of comparison. Women in the DUCO sample had a rate of sexual abuse by a parent that was five times as high as women in the IVAWS, and a rate of parental physical abuse that was 50 per cent higher (Table 27).

Table 27: Prevalence of abuse among women in the DUCO and IVAWS (percentages)

	DUCO	IVAWS
Abuse in childhood		
Sexual abuse	37	18
By parent	10	2
By other	31	16
Physical abuse	41	na
By parent	30	18
By other	18	na
Abuse in adulthood		
Sexual abuse	34	34
By spouse-partner	17	12
By other	21	27
Physical abuse	64	48
By spouse-partner	53	31
By other	22	27
(n)	(470)	(6677)

Sources: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file] and IVAWS 2002-2003 [computer file]

Adult abuse

Offenders were also asked if they ever experienced emotional, physical or sexual abuse in adulthood. Overall, 78 per cent of women reported experiencing one or more of these types of abuse. As shown in Figure 16, emotional abuse and physical abuse were most prevalent, each reported by about two-thirds of offenders. The primary perpetrators of emotional or physical abuse were spouses or partners (Table 26).

These figures are considerably higher than the proportion of women in the population who reported physical abuse. The IVAWS estimates that 48 per cent of women aged 18 to 69 had experienced violence at least once since the age of 16. Almost one-third experienced violence by a spouse or partner compared to half of incarcerated women. The IVAWS was a comprehensive survey of sexual and physical violence against women and contained a series of detailed questions to assess the prevalence of sexual and physical violence. This more extensive questioning results in higher estimates that are considered to be more reliable than those produced by a single survey question (Johnson 1996). Nevertheless, women in prison reported higher rates in response to a single question.

Surprisingly, given the higher rates of other forms of abuse reported by women in prison as compared to women in the general population, the percentage of female prisoners who reported adult sexual abuse matches the estimates of sexual violence among women in the general population produced by the IVAWS. Thirty-four per cent of women in both the DUCO sample and the IVAWS reported experiencing sexual violence as adults. Women in prison reported higher rates of sexual assault by a spouse or partner, while higher proportions of women in the general population said they had experienced sexual violence by someone else (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). Although personal interviews are understood to produce more reliable estimates of crime victimisation than other sources, such as police records, some researchers have argued that victims also may be reluctant to report experiences of sexual assault to survey interviewers due to the very personal nature of these events (Johnson 1996). Women in prison who have been traumatised by violence, drug abuse and other negative life experiences may be especially reluctant to report experiences of sexual violence in a face-to-face survey.

The one-third of incarcerated women who reported experiencing sexual abuse in adulthood is similar to the proportion who reported sexual abuse as a child. Considering both child and adult experiences of sexual abuse together, a total of 52 per cent of women in prison reported being victimised. About one in six women were sexually abused by spouses or partners, and 13 per cent by strangers (Table 26). It is evident from these figures that women in prison experienced multiple forms of abuse. A very large majority, 87 per cent, reported experiencing at least one type of abuse as a child or an adult and half of all abuse victims reported four or more types of abuse in their lifetimes. A number of studies have found childhood abuse to be one of the most important risk factors for adult victimisation (Roodman & Clum 2001; Siegel & Williams 2003). In the DUCO study, 70 per cent of adult victims had also been victims of childhood abuse, and 86 per cent of women victimised in childhood were also later victimised as adults. Childhood sexual abuse, in particular, seems to elevate the risk of sexual victimisation violence in adulthood: 51 per cent of victims of child sexual abuse were also sexually abused later in life as compared to 24 per cent of women who were not child sex abuse victims.

A strong correlation between child abuse and adult abuse was also found among women in the general population. According to the IVAWS, among women who were victimised in childhood, the rate of violent victimisation in adulthood was 78 per cent compared to 49 per cent of women who didn't experience abuse in childhood (Mouzos & Makkai 2004). In other words, almost eight in ten victims of childhood abuse went on to be victimised again later in life. The experience of sexual abuse in childhood, especially, doubles the risk of any type of adult victimisation from 26 per cent of women who were not victims of child sexual abuse to 54 per cent of those who were sexually abused in childhood. These patterns are very similar to the experiences reported by women in prison.

Links between abuse, drug dependency and crime

This study finds a link between childhood and adult experiences of abuse and drug use and persistent offending. As shown in Table 28, women dependent on drugs reported significantly higher levels of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect in childhood as compared to women without a drug dependency. Childhood abuse was also a significant predictor of involvement in the sex trade which is consistent with other research (McMullen 1987). Violent offenders reported significantly higher prevalence of childhood physical abuse. This lends support to learning theories that suggest that early life experiences in families of origin are important locations for learning and acquiring violent behaviours (Simmons et al. 1995). No statistically significant links were found between child abuse and property offending.

Table 28: Abuse in childhood, drug dependency and offending (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Property offender		Violent offender		Sex work	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Sexual abuse	42	32*	42	36	48	37	56	35*
Physical abuse	50	32*	45	40	63	39*	61	39*
Emotional abuse	65	48*	60	56	70	56	82	53*
Neglect	21	14*	19	17	24	17	24	17
Any child abuse	71	54*	68	61	69	63	85	60*
(n)	(257)	(213)	(160)	(310)	(48)	(422)	(62)	(408)

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Adult experiences of abuse also show a significant relationship with drug dependency (Table 29). Eighty-four per cent of drug-dependent women had experienced one or more types of abuse as an adult as compared to 70 per cent of non-dependent women. All types of abuse were predictors of having a drug dependency at the time of arrest. Women with a history of childhood and adult abuse were also initiated into illegal drug use at a younger age. Adult experiences of abuse did not show a significant association with persistent offending, but were associated with involvement in the sex trade: 90 per cent of women engaged in sex work on a regular basis had been abused as an adult as compared to 76 per cent of women not regularly involved in the sex trade. All types of abuse were reported more frequently by sex workers as compared to other offenders. Among women who had ever done sex work, 75 per cent had been sexually abused either in childhood or as an adult, compared to 47 per cent of women who had never done sex work.

Table 29: Abuse in adulthood, drug dependency and offending (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Property offender		Violent offender		Sex work	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Sexual abuse	41	26*	34	34	44	33	53	31*
Physical abuse	72	55*	64	64	59	65	84	61*
Emotional abuse	72	60*	67	66	63	67	77	65*
Any adult abuse	84	70*	76	48	73	78	90	76*
(n)	(257)	(213)	(160)	(310)	(48)	(422)	(62)	(408)

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

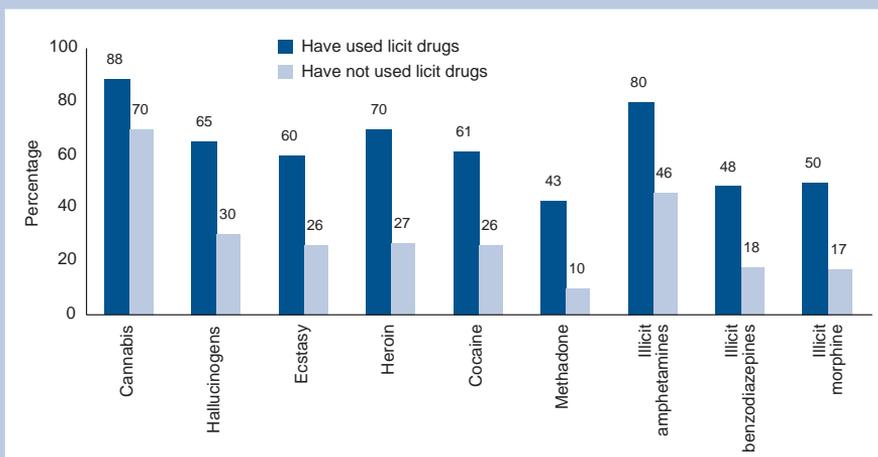
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Box 5: Licit drug users

Use of prescription drugs is a risk marker for illegal drug use. Forty-five per cent of women offenders had used amphetamines, benzodiazepines or morphine legally on prescription. However, Only 5 per cent of all women had used these drugs only in a legal manner and had not used any drugs illegally. In the case of amphetamines, 96 per cent of those who used the drug legally also used it illegally, and all legal users also used other illegal drugs. In the case of benzodiazepines, 50 per cent of legal users also used the drug illegally, and 89 per cent were current users of other illegal drugs at the time of their arrest. In the case of morphine users, 44 per cent of legal users also used the drug illegally, and 83 per cent were current users of other illegal drugs.

Higher proportions of licit drug users reported ever having used all types of illegal drugs as compared to women who had never used amphetamines, benzodiazepines or morphine on prescription (see Figure 17). With the exception of cannabis, women who had used these drugs on prescription were between two and four times as likely to report using illegal drugs as compared to women who hadn't been prescribed drugs legally. Licit users were also more likely to be current regular users of illegal drugs at the time of their arrest, to be multiple drug users, and to have begun using all types of drugs at an earlier age.

Figure 17: Use of illegal drugs by licit and illicit users



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], n=470

The dynamics of drug use are complex and it cannot be said for certain what events led to drug use for these incarcerated women. However, women who had used drugs on prescription were more likely to say they grew up in families with drug problems (34% compared to 19%), experienced abuse as a child (73% and 56%) or as an adult (82% and 74%), suffered mental health problems while growing up (69% compared to 52%), and were more likely to have received a diagnosis for a mental health condition (55% and 25%). The DUCO study did not distinguish between age of onset of licit and illicit drug use and so cannot establish the possible influence of prescription drug use on illegal drug use.

Links between risk factors

Violent victimisation against women can have a range of negative consequences that persist long after the abuse has ended, including depression, anxiety, other mental problems, homelessness, alcohol use, and illegal and legal drug use (World Health Organization 2002; Briere & Zaidi 1989; El-Bassel et al. 2000; Office of the Status of Women 2002). One Australian study found that intimate partner violence has a greater impact on the health of women under the age of 45 than any other risk factor and that the greatest

proportion of the impact of partner violence is associated with mental health problems (Victorian Department of Human Services 2004). The DUCO study provides strong evidence that:

- drug abuse in the family of origin and early behavioural problems are related to drug dependency and persistent violent and property offending;
- mental health conditions are associated with higher levels of drug dependency, violent offending and involvement in the sex trade;
- abuse as a child or an adult is related to drug dependency and involvement in the sex trade; and
- physical abuse in childhood is significantly higher among violent offenders.

Further exploration of the extent to which these risk markers are also interconnected will help contribute to a better understanding of women's drug use and offending and to the development of appropriate treatment programs and interventions.

As shown in Table 30, women who had been abused in childhood or as adults were significantly more likely to report all of the mental health problems included in this study as compared to women who didn't report abuse. Because of the high co-occurrence of childhood and adult abuse, it is not possible to examine child and adult abuse separately; the unique effects of each are therefore not known. However, all mental health conditions were much more prevalent among victims than among women who report no experiences of victimisation. Child abuse victims were between four and seven times as likely as other women to report experiencing each of these mental health conditions compared to women not abused in childhood. Similar proportions of women reporting adult and child abuse sought help for mental health problems (80% and 84%, respectively) and received a diagnosis from a mental health professional (46% and 49%).

Drug problems in the family of origin are also linked to child abuse and mental health conditions of these offenders. Women who were victims of child abuse were more than twice as likely to have grown up in an environment where other family members were abusing drugs or alcohol. In addition, levels of mental health problems were twice as high among offenders who grew up in families with drug or alcohol problems. It is therefore difficult to determine the relative effects of abuse, mental health conditions and having grown up the chaotic circumstances created by drug and alcohol abuse. All are important correlates of criminal offending and all are highly interrelated.

Table 30: Mental health, childhood and adult abuse (percentages)

	Abused in childhood		Abused in adulthood	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Anxious or stressed	41	6*	37	16*
Think bad thoughts	41	6*	32	17*
Didn't care what happened	31	4*	26	5*
Fearful or distrustful	49	10*	39	20*
Had nightmares	33	7*	26	13*
Had arguments or fights	46	11*	39	15*
Very sad	51	8*	41	16*
Any mental health condition	80	24*	65	42*
(n)	(298)	(172)	(365)	(105)

Percentage who said they 'often' had these mental health conditions

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Summary

The incarcerated women in this study suffered a range of problems early in life:

- about half grew up in families with drug or alcohol problems;
- half were often in trouble at school and one in six spent time in juvenile detention;
- six in ten offenders reported experiencing mental health difficulties;
- for the majority of these incarcerated women, violent victimisation began at an early age: six in ten had experienced some form of child abuse while almost eight in ten experienced abuse as an adult; and
- physical abuse most often took place within the family while sexual abuse was most often perpetrated by someone outside the family, although significant proportions of women reported sexual abuse by parents and partners.

This range of early life experiences is linked to drug dependency and to offending and involvement in the sex trade among this group of women:

- drug dependency at the time of arrest is associated with having grown up in a family with drug or alcohol problems, often being in trouble at school, and early contact with the justice system and incarceration;

-
- drug dependency is linked to mental health problems and to childhood and adult experiences of abuse;
 - early exposure to drug problems among family members was also associated with persistent property offending, while violent offenders were more likely to have been exposed to alcohol abuse;
 - persistent property and violent offenders were more likely to have been in trouble at school and to have spent time incarcerated as a juvenile as compared to other offenders; and
 - mental health problems were significantly higher among violent offenders and sex workers, and women who had suffered childhood or adult abuse.

7 Alcohol and crime

7 Alcohol and crime

Alcohol has been linked to violent crime more often than property crime and to crimes involving men more often than crimes involving women. Alcohol cannot be said to lead directly to violence although it may contribute to the occurrence of certain crimes through the effects it has on perceptions and cognition, either directly or in combination with other factors. A complex array of factors interact to influence the outcome of situations where alcohol is used, including individual and situational factors, personality, physiology, expectations about the effects of alcohol, and the social setting and context (Blum 1981; Boles & Miotto 2003; Graham et al. 1998; Pernanen 1991; Fagan 1990). A clear association between alcohol consumption levels and crime and disorder has been found whereby binge drinkers and those with harmful or hazardous drinking patterns self-report higher levels of multiple and chronic offending (Makkai 1998). However, people who behave aggressively while under the influence of alcohol are more likely to do so if they also behave aggressively while not using alcohol (Boles & Miotto 2003; Fagan, 1990). In other words, aggression typically precedes alcohol abuse, but alcohol can exacerbate violent tendencies.

Research on alcohol and crime has shown that:

- four per cent of Australian women and six per cent of men were victims of alcohol-related assaults and 16 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men were 'put in fear' by someone abusing alcohol (AIHW 2002);
- eight per cent of women and 18 per cent of men admitted to driving while under the influence of alcohol (AIHW 2002);
- 21 per cent of offenders in the DUCO male study and 33 per cent of males incarcerated in New South Wales prisons attributed their offences to alcohol (Makkai & Payne 2003a; Kevin 2003);
- one-quarter of women in Queensland prisons had harmful drinking patterns, a figure that rose to over half of Indigenous women (Hockings et al. 2002);
- half of men and one third of women who committed homicides in Australia were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident (Mouzos & Segrave 2004). Close to three-quarters of homicides of Indigenous people involved alcohol consumption by both the victim and offender (Mouzos 2001); and
- offenders are drinking in between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of spousal violence incidents with male perpetrators, and these intoxicated offenders produce more serious injuries and are more likely to commit sexual as well as physical assaults (Johnson H 2001; Mouzos & Makkai 2004; Browne 1997).

According to the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), very high proportions of the population – 88 per cent of women and 93 per cent of men – have had a full serve of alcohol in their lifetime. Women were less likely than men to consume alcohol at least once per week (39% compared to 57%); however, women and men were equally likely to consume alcohol in a way considered risky to their health in the long term (9% of women and 10% of men; AIHW 2002). Examining women’s alcohol consumption and related harms is important because of the differences in the way men and women experience alcohol and alcohol-related problems (Pohl & Boyd 1992; Roche & Deehan 2002; Roman 1988). For example, women:

- begin to drink later in life and develop more severe alcohol problems over shorter drinking histories;
- have lower tolerance for alcohol and become physically addicted on smaller amounts;
- are more likely to combine alcohol with drugs;
- are more vulnerable to sexual and physical violence while intoxicated;
- can put unborn children at risk of foetal alcohol syndrome through heavy drinking; and
- are more likely than men to have a mental health problem combined with an alcohol disorder.

In addition, the outcomes of excessive drinking may be more serious for Indigenous women who are faced with a range of other social disadvantage (see Chapter 8 for a discussion of Indigenous women).

Prevalence of alcohol use among women offenders

As per the general population, almost all offenders (94%) had ever tried alcohol (Table 31). Forty six per cent were regular alcohol users at the time of their arrest, and non-regular offenders and violent offenders had the highest prevalence of regular alcohol consumption (54% and 57%). Half of all offenders who ever experimented with alcohol escalated to regular use by the time of their arrest, and escalation rates were highest for violent and non-regular offenders. Violent offenders and non-regular offenders also had slightly higher than average rates of alcohol dependency (35% and 32%, respectively compared to 27% of all offenders). Among current regular drinkers, heaviest drinking was reported by violent offenders and women engaged in sex work: one quarter and one third, respectively, were consuming several drinks a day. These figures are based on low counts and should be used cautiously.

Table 31: Prevalence of alcohol use by offender type (percentages)

	All offenders	Regular property offender	Regular violent offender	Regular sex work	Non-regular offenders
Ever used	94	96	98	98	89
Used in 6 months prior to arrest	70	59	75	66	76
Current regular user ¹	46	37	54	39	57
Escalation	49	39	55	40	64
Frequency of use for current regular users					
Less than monthly	12	14	—	—	10
One to several times a month	21	24	—	—	26
One to several times a week	30	34	42	38	26
Once a day	15	14	—	—	20
Several times a day	22	15	27	33	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(n)	(214)	(59)	(26)	(24)	(70)

— fewer than five cases

¹Those who used alcohol during the 6 months prior to arrest, and who said they had been regular users

Escalation is the percentage of those who ever used alcohol who become current regular users

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

The prevalence of regular alcohol use reported by women offenders is lower than their reported drug use whereby 62 per cent were regular drug users and 46 per cent were regular drinkers at the time of their arrest. Alcohol use by women offenders is also lower in comparison to offenders in the DUCO male study whereby 58 per cent of property offenders and 71 per cent of violent offenders reported regular alcohol use at the time of their arrest (Makkai & Payne 2003a: 145). Males were also twice as likely to make the attribution that alcohol was a cause of their offending: 21 per cent compared to 10 per cent of women. Although a relatively small percentage of women attributed their offending directly to their alcohol use (see Table 19), alcohol was shown to co-occur with their criminal offending in larger proportions:

- 27 per cent of all offenders and 57 per cent of all regular drinkers had an alcohol dependency; and
- 27 per cent of offenders were under the influence of alcohol at the time of their arrest, a figure that rises to 75 per cent of those dependent on alcohol.

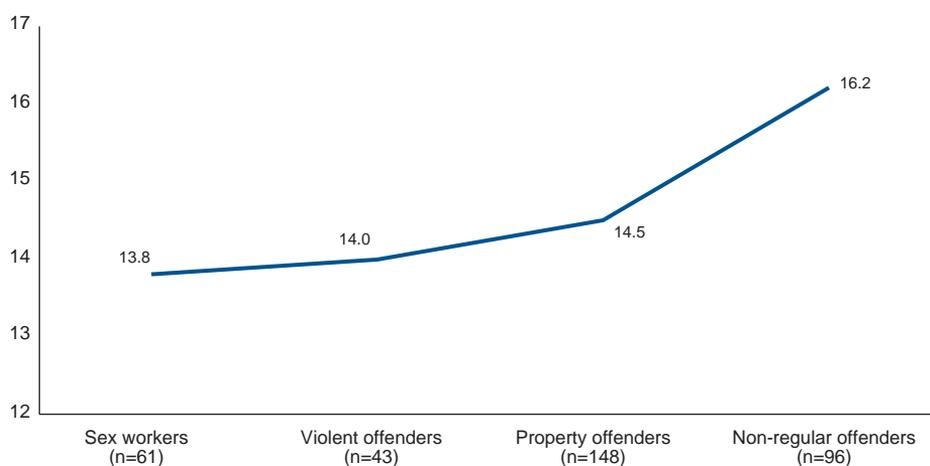
Many offenders mixed alcohol and illegal drugs and had co-existing drug and alcohol problems. Over half of women who were regular drinkers (58%) were also regularly using illegal drugs, and 52 per cent of those with a dependency on alcohol also had a dependency on drugs.

It has been suggested in the literature that the pharmacological properties of alcohol can lead to the commission of violent acts in some people through disinhibition, impaired perceptions and cognition, and misunderstanding of social cues (Barnett & Fagan 1993). Thus alcohol more often leads to violence than to property crime, which tends to be acquisitive or utilitarian in nature. As was shown in Figure 6, incarcerated women in this study reported higher levels of alcohol involvement in violent offences, such as murder, assault and related offences. Other types of offences were more likely to involve offenders under the influence of drugs. Alcohol dependency is also related to frequency of violent offending: when asked about their current imprisonment, the average number of violent offences alcohol-dependent women were imprisoned for was 1.2 as compared to 0.7 for women without an alcohol dependency. These results are consistent with other studies that have found alcohol to be linked to violent crime and drug use to be linked to the commission of property crime.

Age of onset of alcohol and crime

The mean age of onset of alcohol use is about 15 among women in prison, three years younger than among women in the general population (18) (AIHW 2002). As shown in Figure 18, the average age of initiation into alcohol use was lower for regular offenders as compared to non-regular offenders, and lowest for women involved in the sex trade and for violent offenders.

Figure 18: Mean age of onset of alcohol use by type of regular offender



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

In Chapter 5 a relationship was shown between drug dependency and age of onset of offending such that most offences began at a younger mean age for women with a dependency to drugs as compared to women not dependent on drugs. It is not possible to present comparative data for alcohol-dependent women due to the low numbers of women with an alcohol dependency in many categories of offenders. Instead, age of onset of offending for regular alcohol users will be presented. This provides a larger number for analysis; however, results are not comparable to Table 23 showing age of onset by drug dependency. As shown in Table 32, regular alcohol users generally began offending at an earlier stage than other offenders, although the mean age differences are not as large as those shown for drug-dependent women. Overall, regular drinkers began property offending on average 2.2 years prior to other offenders and involvement in sex work 1.6 years earlier, but violent offending actually began slightly earlier on average for women who were not regular consumers at the time of their arrest. These results suggest that drug use plays a more important role than alcohol use in the onset of criminal offending for women.

Table 32: Mean age of onset of offending by regular alcohol use

	Regular alcohol users		Difference in years
	Yes	No	
Property crime	17.8	20.0	2.2
Break and enter	17.0	18.8	1.8
Steal without break-in	15.7	17.0	1.3
Traded in stolen goods	20.5	20.9	0.4
Fraud	25.6	25.6	0
Sex work	19.2	20.8	1.6
Violent crime	22.2	21.6	-0.6

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Risk factors for alcohol dependency

In Chapter 6, statistically significant associations were found to exist between a range of early life experiences and drug dependency. This section explores the links between these same risk factors and alcohol dependence (Table 33). In this context, alcohol-dependent women are a subset of all those who met the criteria for alcohol dependency, by excluding those who were also dependent on drugs in order to more clearly differentiate the risk factors for these two groups. While higher proportions of drug-dependent offenders grew up with early exposure to drug and alcohol problems, among alcohol-dependent women the important risk factor was growing up in a family with alcohol problems. Sixty per cent of alcohol-dependent women were exposed to alcohol problems early in life as compared to 41 per cent of offenders without an alcohol dependency. In addition, women who were

exposed to family members with alcohol problems were twice as likely as other women to causally attribute their criminal offending to alcohol. Heavy drinking patterns therefore may be acquired through a process of social learning and exposure to attitudes favourable to alcohol abuse.

Whereas other factors, such as behaviour problems in school, incarceration as a juvenile, abuse as a child or an adult were associated with having a drug dependency, these factors did not elevate the risk of being alcohol-dependent. Only sexual abuse as an adult differentiated alcohol-dependent and other women; however, it was women who were not alcohol-dependent who reported a higher prevalence of adult sexual abuse and not the reverse. While this may be counter to expectations, 63 per cent of women without an alcohol dependency were dependent on drugs and, as shown previously, all of these risk factors were correlated with drug dependency.

Table 33: Risk factors for alcohol dependency (percentages)

	Alcohol-dependent	
	Yes	No
Family had drug problems	21	26
Family had alcohol problems	60	41*
Often in trouble at school	50	51
Ever in juvenile detention	15	17
Mental health problems	64	59
Child abuse	58	64
Sexual abuse	36	58
Physical abuse	39	42
Emotional abuse	54	58
Neglect	21	17
Adult abuse	79	77
Sexual abuse	18	37*
Physical abuse	74	63
Emotional abuse	59	68
(n)	(62)	(408)

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Summary

Alcohol problems figure in the criminal offending of a smaller number of women as compared to drug related problems. Offenders describe lower rates of alcohol dependency, are less likely to be under the influence of alcohol at the time of the current offence, and are less likely to attribute their offending to alcohol than to drugs. The lower prevalence of alcohol use among women offenders in general, and the less prominent role alcohol plays in their criminal offending, is an important difference in the backgrounds and offending patterns of female as compared to male offenders. Although overall alcohol does not appear to be a causal or precipitating factor in the onset or continuation of criminal careers to the extent that drugs are, Chapter 8 will show that alcohol plays an important role in the criminal careers of Indigenous women.

8 Indigenous offenders

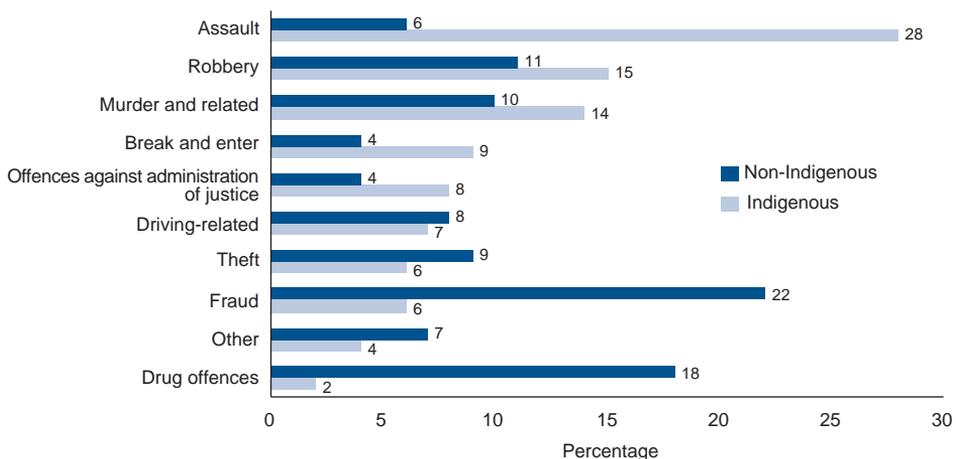
8 Indigenous offenders

Indigenous people are over-represented among the Australian prison population. About one-quarter of female prisoners in this study self-identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, similar to the proportion in the general prison population (ABS 2004b), while they represent only two per cent of women in the general population. In 2003, the imprisonment rate of Indigenous women was about 15 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous women: 235 compared to 16 per 100,000 population (ABS 2004b). At the prison census on 30 June 2003, a total of 390 Indigenous and 1204 non-Indigenous women were in prison. The relatively small number of Indigenous women interviewed for this study (128) does not permit in depth analysis similar to what has been undertaken for the total DUCO sample, but it does allow a comparison of some of the more salient indicators of drug and alcohol use and offending reported by Indigenous and non-Indigenous women offenders.

History of offending

Indigenous people tended to be in prison for somewhat different offences than non-Indigenous people. The major offence for which Indigenous women in the DUCO study were serving their current prison sentence was violent for 57 per cent of women compared with 21 per cent of non-Indigenous women. A higher percentage of non-Indigenous women were in prison for property offences: 35 per cent compared with 21 per cent of Indigenous women. With respect to specific offence types, Indigenous offenders were more than four times as likely to be in prison for assault as their most serious offence, and twice as likely to be in prison for break and enter and offences against the administration of justice (such as breach of probation). By contrast, non-Indigenous offenders were over three times as likely to be incarcerated for fraud and nine times as likely to be in prison for drug offences (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Type of offence for current incarceration by Indigenous status



Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], Indigenous n=128, non-Indigenous n=342

Criminal histories of Indigenous offenders also reflect a greater tendency toward violent offending as compared to non-Indigenous offenders. As shown in Table 34, 79 per cent of Indigenous women had ever committed a violent crime (assault or robbery) compared to less than half of non-Indigenous women, and the rate of regular violent offending among Indigenous offenders was more than twice as high as among non-Indigenous offenders (18% and 7%). Likewise, the rate of escalation from ever committing a violent crime to regular violent offending was higher for Indigenous women. With respect to property offending, Indigenous women reported a higher prevalence of ever committing burglary and becoming a regular burglary offender. Non-Indigenous women, by contrast, had higher rates of stealing and trading in stolen goods and were twice as likely to commit fraud. Indigenous women had lower rates of involvement in drug crimes, both buying and selling illegal drugs, and lower rates of involvement in sex work.

Table 34: History of offending by Indigenous status (percentages)

	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	Ever	Regular	Escalation ¹	Ever	Regular	Escalation ¹
Property offences	64	43	67	76	51	67
Break and enter	40	24	60	32	15	47
Stealing without break-in	44	30	68	55	33	60
Traded in stolen goods	35	22	63	44	29	66
Vandalised property	20	—	—	16	2	13
Fraud, forgery	23	12	52	48	22	46
Violent offences	79	18	23	46	7	15
Physical assault	73	16	22	40	5	13
Robbery without a weapon	14	5	36	11	2	18
Armed robbery	12	—	—	14	2	14
Drug offences	61	52	85	72	66	92
Bought illegal drugs	60	52	87	71	65	92
Sold illegal drugs	30	19	63	44	33	75
Sex work	11	6	55	21	16	76
Total	100	67	67	100	76	76
(n)	(128)			(342)		

— fewer than five cases

¹ Escalation is the percentage of those who ever committed the crime who became regular offenders

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCC female survey, 2003 [computer file]

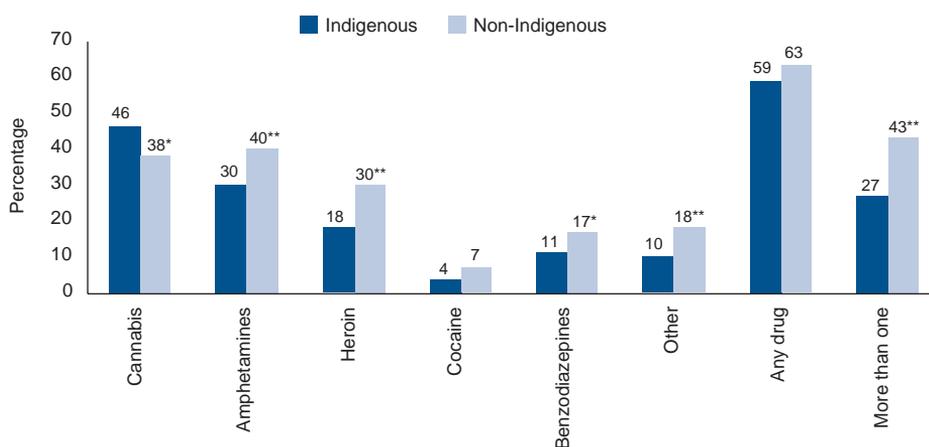
Prevalence of drug use

Drug abuse and harmful levels of alcohol consumption are commonly cited as serious social problems for Indigenous people and as one of the most important factors in their arrest and placement in custody (Ministerial Council on Drugs Strategy 2003; Johnston 1991). For the women in this study, illegal drug use is more prevalent for non-Indigenous women while Indigenous women report higher levels of problems associated with alcohol consumption. Two-thirds (68%) of Indigenous offenders were regular alcohol users in the six months prior to arrest compared to 37 per cent of non-Indigenous offenders. Alcohol and illegal drugs will be examined together in this chapter. ‘Drug dependency’ includes all drug-dependent women, whether or not they were also dependent on alcohol, whereas ‘alcohol dependency’ includes only those dependent on alcohol and not on drugs as well.

As shown in Figure 20, differences were not statistically significant in the overall prevalence of regular drug use by Indigenous and non-Indigenous women: 59 per cent of Indigenous women and 63 per cent of non-Indigenous women were regular users of illegal drugs within six months of their arrest. However, non-Indigenous offenders were more likely to report using all types of drugs, with the exception of cannabis, for which Indigenous women reported higher rates, and cocaine, for which differences were non-significant. Overall, 72 per cent of non-Indigenous women had tried drugs other than cannabis compared with 52 per cent of Indigenous women. Non-Indigenous offenders were also more likely to report multiple drug use: 43 per cent were current regular users of more than one drug as compared to 27 per cent of Indigenous offenders. Although use of drugs other than cannabis is generally lower among Indigenous women, once they begin using drugs, they are as likely as non-Indigenous women to escalate to regular use of all drugs with the exception of heroin.

Substance use among Indigenous offenders is therefore likely to centre on alcohol, cannabis and amphetamines. In fact, 30 per cent of Indigenous women used alcohol only and no other substances as compared to 15 per cent of other women. Twenty per cent of Indigenous women used cannabis only, four times the percentage of non-Indigenous women (5%). The higher prevalence of drug use among non-Indigenous women results in a higher prevalence of drug dependency: 46 per cent of non-Indigenous women met the criteria for classification as drug-dependent only (and not alcohol-dependent) as did 26 per cent of Indigenous women. By contrast, dependency on alcohol alone was five times higher among Indigenous women, and dependency on both drugs and alcohol was twice as high (Table 35).

Figure 20: Prevalence of illegal drug use by Indigenous status



* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file], Indigenous $n=128$, non-Indigenous $n=342$

Table 35: Drug and alcohol dependency by Indigenous status (percentages)

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Drug-dependent	26	46
Alcohol-dependent	31	6
Dependent on both	23	11
Neither alcohol nor drug-dependent	20	36
Total	100	100
(n)	(128)	(342)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Links between substance use and crime

Alcohol abuse is more likely to be associated with the criminal activity of Indigenous offenders whereas illegal drugs are more likely to be connected to crimes committed by non-Indigenous offenders:

- 60 per cent of Indigenous women were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offence compared to just 16 per cent of non-Indigenous women;

- 47 per cent of non-Indigenous women and 35 per cent of Indigenous women were under the influence of drugs at the time of their arrest; and
- 31 per cent of Indigenous offenders cited alcohol as their drug of choice and 30 per cent said they preferred cannabis. By contrast, non-Indigenous offenders were more likely to state a preference for heroin or amphetamines (26% and 22%, respectively) followed by alcohol (19%).

This pattern of higher alcohol use among Indigenous women and higher drug use among non-Indigenous women also shows through in causal attributions made about substance use and criminal offending. Whereas overall offenders were far more likely to attribute their offending to drug use (see Table 19), this is the case for non-Indigenous offenders but not for Indigenous offenders. A higher percentage of Indigenous offenders attributed their offending to substance abuse, either intoxication or addiction: 48 per cent compared to 38 per cent of non-Indigenous offenders (Table 36). However, Indigenous offenders were almost equally likely to attribute their offending to illegal drugs as to alcohol (21% and 24%) whereas non-Indigenous offenders were far more likely to make the attribution that drugs were the cause of their offending and not alcohol (33% and 2%). Drug addiction and intoxication is therefore an area requiring attention and treatment for a large portion of women in prison while a substantial number of Indigenous women also require attention for alcohol-related problems.

Table 36: Model attributions for intoxication and addiction by Indigenous status (percentages)

	Indigenous (n=128)			Non-Indigenous (n=342)		
	Intoxication	Addiction	Combined	Intoxication	Addiction	Combined
No attribution	56	56	52	68*	67	62*
Attribution	44	44	48	32*	37	38*
Illegal drugs	17	22	21	28*	32*	33*
Alcohol	24	19	24	3*	2*	2*
Both	—	—	—	—	2	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

— fewer than five cases

* differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders was statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

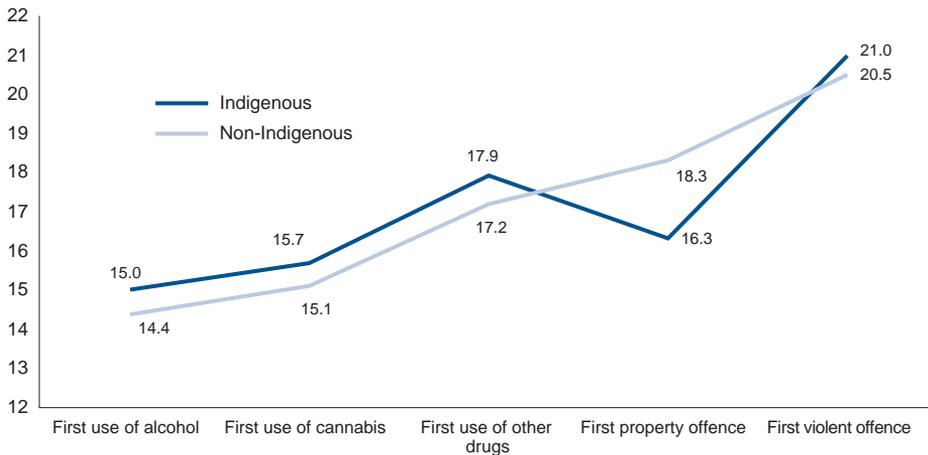
Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCC female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Drug–crime pathways

The pathways between onset of drug use and onset of offending are similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders, with a few exceptions (Figure 21). For example, the mean age of onset of any offending was 18.7 for Indigenous offenders and 18.5 for non-Indigenous offenders. Among regular offenders, Indigenous women began property offending somewhat earlier (17.2 years of age compared to 17.9 for non-Indigenous women) and those involved in violent offending began somewhat later at about 21 years of age for both groups. These figures include all regular offenders; some offenders had not been involved in both property and violent crime, and both alcohol and drug use, although this describes the majority.

Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders began substance use with alcohol followed by cannabis. Mean age of first use of alcohol and drugs was slightly lower for non-Indigenous offenders. Non-Indigenous women also tended to follow a linear pattern from first use of alcohol, to using cannabis then other drugs before the onset of property offending then violent offending. The tendency for Indigenous offenders was to begin property crimes before initiation into drugs other than cannabis, and at an age two years younger than non-Indigenous women. Both groups of offenders first committed a violent offence at about age 21.

Figure 21: Mean age of onset of substance use and offending by Indigenous status



Includes regular offenders only: Indigenous n=86, non-Indigenous n=261

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey 2003 [computer file]

With respect to particular offences, Indigenous offenders who were involved in burglary or fraud were initiated into these offences and began regular offending at a younger age than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Patterns of initiation into drug use and escalation into regular drug taking were similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, with the exception of cocaine which was slower to progress to regular use among Indigenous women for the small number who used this drug.

Table 37: Mean age of offending and drug use by Indigenous status

	Indigenous (n=128)			Non-Indigenous (n=342)		
	First	Regular activity	Difference in years	First	Regular activity	Difference in years
Property offenders						
Break and enter	16.6	18.8	2.2	18.7	19.7	1.0
Steal without break-in	17.4	17.3	-0.1	16.2	20.0	3.8
Traded in stolen goods	20.6	18.9	-1.7	20.8	21.3	0.5
Fraud	22.8	21.1	-1.7	26.1	27.5	1.4
Violent offenders						
Assault	23.5	21.8	-1.7	21.1	18.6	-2.5
Robbery without weapon	18.1	19.5	1.4	19.0	18.2	-0.8
Drug offenders						
Bought drugs	18.2	19.1	0.9	17.4	19.7	2.3
Sold drugs	21.5	21.9	0.4	22.1	23.4	1.3
Sex work						
	16.5	19.6	3.1	20.9	20.5	-0.4
Drug and alcohol use						
Alcohol	15.5	19.3	3.8	14.7	18.4	3.7
Cannabis	16.2	17.9	1.7	15.9	16.8	0.9
Heroin	19.4	18.5	-0.9	20.2	20.6	0.4
Cocaine	20.2	25.8	5.6	21.8	22.0	0.2
Amphetamines	19.7	20.3	0.6	19.6	21.0	1.4
Benzodiazepines	19.7	20.6	0.9	20.5	21.1	0.6

Includes age of first offending and drug use for all, not just those who became regular offenders or drug users, due to low counts of Indigenous offenders

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Overall, the mean age progression for drug use and crime was similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders. One third of both groups began drug use prior to offending, about thirty per cent began offending prior to drug use, and one third reported using drugs and offending within the same year (Table 38). Focusing on drugs other than cannabis, patterns are more dissimilar: 12 per cent of Indigenous women began drug use prior to their first offence as compared to 19 per cent of non-Indigenous women; about 60 per cent in both groups began offending before drug use; and, about 30 per cent of Indigenous women and 22 per cent of non-Indigenous women began drug use and offending concurrently. These differences are not statistically significant. Drug use therefore seems to have a similar effect on offending among drug using Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, while at the same time, the criminal behaviour of a substantial proportion of Indigenous women is also often driven by abuse and dependency on alcohol.

Table 38: Mean age progression for drugs and crime by Indigenous status (percentages)

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Drug use prior to offending	36	33
Drug use concurrent with first offence	34	35
Drug use after first offence	29	32
Total	100	100

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Risk factors for substance abuse and offending

The previous chapter outlined a number of early life experiences that were associated with substance abuse and criminal offending among these incarcerated women. These risk factors are prevalent in the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women alike (Table 39). However, Indigenous women were more likely than non-Indigenous women to have grown up in families with alcohol problems which is consistent with their higher levels of alcohol dependency and attributions about causal connections between alcohol abuse and criminal offending. Indigenous women were also more likely to have spent time in both juvenile detention and adult prison.

High proportions of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous women reported experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse or childhood neglect. Overall, about 90 per cent of both groups experienced either child abuse or abuse as an adult. The only statistically significant difference in experiences of abuse was that a higher proportion of Indigenous offenders reported physical abuse as an adult.

Table 39: Personal history by Indigenous status (percentages)

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Family had drug problems	22	27
Family had alcohol problems	56	39*
Often in trouble at school	52	50
Ever in juvenile detention	27	14*
Previously in adult prison	56	38*
Mental health problems	66	58
Child abuse	60	65
Sexual abuse	37	38
Physical abuse	39	43
Emotional abuse	52	59
Neglect	23	16
Adult abuse	79	77
Sexual abuse	29	36
Physical abuse	74	61*
Emotional abuse	63	68
(n)	(128)	(342)

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

The discussion in Chapter 6 highlighted some statistically significant links between these early life experiences and substance abuse problems and persistent offending for these incarcerated women. Many of the same results are shown for Indigenous offenders (Table 40). For example, drug-dependent Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely to have grown up in families with drug problems, to have been in trouble at school, to be victims of child abuse, and to have had mental health problems. There were no statistically significant associations between these early life experiences and alcohol dependency. As with previous analyses, drug-dependent offenders are those who met the criteria for dependency on drugs, whether or not they were also dependent on alcohol, whereas alcohol-dependent offenders are those who were dependent on alcohol only.

Regular property offending was associated with drug abuse in families of origin, early behaviour problems and incarceration as a juvenile, and child abuse. The only significant risk marker for violent offending was adult abuse, but the association was the reverse to expected: a lower percentage of violent offenders had experienced adult abuse as compared with other offenders. The lack of statistical significance in what appears to be large differences in the case of regular violent offenders may be due to the small numbers of Indigenous women and regular violent offenders in this study.

Table 40: Risk markers for drug and alcohol dependency and offending for Indigenous offenders (percentages)

	Drug-dependent		Alcohol-dependent		Property offender		Violent offender	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Family had drug problems	34	11*	15	25	38	15*	22	22
Family had alcohol problems	56	56	65	52	57	56	65	54
Often in trouble at school	64	41*	46	56	66	47*	61	51
Ever in juvenile detention	32	22	20	30	44	19*	30	26
Child abuse	74	47*	50	65	72	54*	65	59
Adult abuse	82	76	87	75	72	82	61	83*
Mental health problems	74	58*	62	67	70	64	78	63
(n)	(62)	(66)	(40)	(88)	(40)	(88)	(23)	(105)

* statistically significant, chi square, $p < .05$

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]

Summary

Indigenous female offenders reported higher rates of violent offending both for the most serious offence that lead to the current incarceration and throughout their criminal careers, lower property offending with the exception of burglary, and much lower participation in fraud offences. They were also less likely than non-Indigenous women to have a history of drug crimes and sex work.

Involvement in drugs other than cannabis is more prevalent among non-Indigenous as compared to Indigenous offenders. Indigenous women tended to have higher levels of alcohol dependency and were more likely to causally attribute their offending behaviour to alcohol abuse. However, there were substantial levels of drug dependency among both groups of offenders. This study also identified similar risk markers for drug use and crime for Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders, including early exposure to drugs, early behaviour problems and contact with the criminal justice system, experiences of abuse and mental health problems. Early intervention with Indigenous women and treatment for harms associated with sexual and physical abuse, mental health conditions and alcohol and drug abuse problems may help to reduce contact with the criminal justice system.

9 Conclusions and policy implications

9 Conclusions and policy implications

The results of this study have important implications for the development of policy and treatment options for incarcerated women. Treatment is needed for large numbers of incarcerated women to help reduce drug and alcohol use and associated harms. Two-thirds of offenders are dependent on drugs or alcohol and almost 80 per cent of drug-dependent women had received substance abuse treatment at some point in their lives, yet were suffering from dependencies at the time of their incarceration. The results of this study highlight the importance of interventions for women offenders in four main areas: whole-of-government approaches, preventing drug dependency, early intervention, and the need for programs designed for women.

Whole-of-government approaches

These women offenders described a range of negative life experiences, such as sexual and physical abuse, mental health problems, and drug and alcohol abuse in families of origin. Each of these factors were correlated with the women's own drug use problems, offending histories and involvement in the sex trade. Thus, inter-agency cooperation and whole-of-government approaches are needed to ensure that interventions for women offenders address a wide range of issues in addition to criminal offending and drug use, and involve agencies that normally lie outside the criminal justice system, such as mental health services, child abuse and domestic violence treatment, and family services.

Preventing drug dependency

Treatment must also consider that the time available to intervene in the lives of drug users, between onset and regular drug use, is short – two years or less for drugs such as heroin, amphetamines, cocaine and benzodiazepines. This has important implications for the prevention of drug-related problems and the delivery of treatment services to these women. Since drug habits and dependency occur quickly following first use, interventions must be targeted and effective in order to deter novice drug users from dependency, reduce demand for illegal drugs, and reduce drug-related harms, including a criminal career. Treatment focusing on single drug types may not be effective because of widespread multiple drug use. The majority of regular drug users used multiple drug types and were likely to use other types when their drug of choice was not available.

Helping women to curb their drug use before it reaches the level of dependency, and develop alternate strategies for coping with violent victimisation and poor mental health, may go a long way toward reducing criminal behaviour. Because drug use precedes criminal offending in a substantial proportion of cases, a reduction in drug use and drug dependency may have the effect of reducing crime among women. Research has shown, for example, that problematic drug use as the motivation for sex work is one of the main determinants for failure to stop sex work (Cusick, Martin & May 2003).

Early intervention

This study identifies other important avenues for prevention, including early intervention with high-risk families. Drug and alcohol abuse and physical and sexual abuse in families of origin, and poor mental health in childhood, were important risk markers for drug dependency, persistent offending and involvement in sex work later in life. The majority of the incarcerated women in this study have children and these children are at risk of repeating the cycle of drug dependency and criminal offending due to their exposure to drug use by their mothers. Interventions targeted at these families could help reduce the risk of drug use and associated harms in the next generation.

Programs targeted to women

The links between drug use and crime are complex and they differ for men and women. Together with the DUCO male study, this study highlights important differences between male and female prisoners, their offending and drug use histories:

- women were more likely to be high on drugs at the time of the offence and less likely to be under the influence of alcohol (with the exception of Indigenous women);
- cannabis use was higher for male offenders while use of amphetamines and escalation to regular use of amphetamines and heroin were higher for women than for men;
- women were more likely to attribute their offending to intoxication or addiction to illegal drugs while higher percentages of men attribute their offending to a combination of drugs and alcohol; and
- women were more likely to have used illegal drugs prior to any offending whereas men were more likely to have begun offending prior to any illegal drug use.

Drug treatment programs therefore must be targeted to the specific personal and mental health histories of women and their drug use patterns. There are multiple paths that lead to drug use and crime and it is difficult to sort out the temporal ordering in a precise manner. This study provides some support for the hypothesis that drug use leads to crime since 41 per cent of offenders causally attributed their offending to their drug or alcohol use and for the majority of women drug use either preceded or occurred simultaneously with the onset of offending. This suggests that, for a large proportion of women, drug use plays a role in shaping their criminal offending, particularly for regular fraud offenders and women involved in sex work. This is counter to the patterns shown for incarcerated male offenders, but consistent with other research examining the backgrounds of female drug users.

For a smaller proportion of offenders crime may lead to drug abuse: for over half of violent offenders and for drugs other than cannabis, crime tended to precede drug use. Although first time offending tended to occur prior to first drug use for this subgroup of women, there are no details about how the two are related. These women may be situated in an environment that encourages both drug taking and criminal activity, where petty offenders are introduced to drugs, providing a situation where both drug use and crime escalate.

Results also suggest that drug use and offending by women may not be directly related but are the result of a third factor. Sexual and physical abuse, mental health, and early exposure to drug and alcohol use have been identified as important factors in women's drug taking and offending. Experiences of sexual and physical abuse may lead to drug use as a way to cope with negative emotional reactions or to cope with ongoing abuse. Both drug use and the consequences of sexual and physical abuse leave women vulnerable to crime once drug habits become established. Helping agencies must look for and treat the common factors in both drug use and crime – sexual and physical abuse, mental health problems and other negative family experiences – at an early stage. Interventions that provide assistance to families and children in the early stages may help divert women from drug use and associated harms, including involvement in crime.

Technical Appendix

Technical Appendix

The statistical data provided in this report were based on self-reported information provided by incarcerated women through face-to-face interviews and a structured questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained. The survey was conducted between July 2003 and January 2004 in six jurisdictions: South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and Northern Territory.

Methodology

Sampling

Prisons for women in Australia hold a relatively small number of inmates and therefore a complete census of the sentenced prison populations in each jurisdiction was attempted. A small number of inmates were excluded from the sampling frame: those who were possibly a danger to themselves or to others, and those who were non-English speaking.

Content of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was comprised of sections addressing:

- socio-demographic characteristics of participants, such as age, education, marital status, Indigenous status, living situation prior to incarceration;
- experiences of abuse in childhood and adulthood;
- family problems with drug or alcohol abuse while growing up;
- mental health problems;
- past criminal history for eleven offence categories, number of charges and convictions;
- history of drug use for nine categories of illegal drugs, and drug and alcohol dependency; and
- treatment received for drug and alcohol problems.

Interviewing procedures

Eligible offenders were approached by corrective services personnel and advised that a researcher would like to conduct an interview. The custodial official was not informed of the nature of the research and did not offer any explanation to the offender other than 'it is research on why you are presently incarcerated'. In practice, however, the 'grapevine' alerted offenders of the study and its purpose. Inmates who agreed to participate were

escorted to the interview room. Attending officers were required to remain within visual distance for the duration of the interview, or to provide interviewers with personal alarms to ensure their safety. Prior to commencing the interview, a descriptive statement about the survey was read out to the inmate and verbal consent was obtained.

At a number of points during the interview, offenders were reminded of their rights and asked to reconfirm consent. Periodically, interviewers asked permission to continue the interview. Custodial officers or other correctional staff were not allowed to read through either a completed or a blank questionnaire. All project materials were stored in a closed container or briefcase which stayed with the interviewer at all times while on the collection site, and they were removed from the site at the end of each day. Similarly, questionnaires were contained in a locked filing cabinet while on the premises of the data collector. On completion of each site, questionnaires were mailed in secure containers to the Australian Institute of Criminology for coding and processing.

Informed consent

Given the explicit and sensitive nature of the information collected in this study, participants were afforded a measure of protection that meant that they were not required to provide written (signed) consent. Instead, prior to the commencement of the interview a descriptive statement was read to each participant that explained the scope and nature of the study and required offenders to provide verbal consent to participate. The introductory statement was designed in such a way to ensure that all participants understood that:

- the information collected from the interview would be held in the strictest of confidence;
- their participation was voluntary;
- they could not be individually identified in any published material;
- they could choose not to answer any question; and,
- the interview could be terminated at any time.

Confidentiality

To guarantee confidentiality a number of steps were taken so that neither the AIC nor the jurisdictional corrective services agency could identify individual participants and their responses. To ensure this, the contracted data collector applied a unique identifier to questionnaires. As part of the data processing conducted at the AIC, a different unique identifier was applied to each participant so as to further disguise identification.

Reliability of estimates

The response rate for the completion of the survey was 84 per cent. Interviewers in these six jurisdictions approached a total of 561 offenders and 471 agreed to participate. All but one resulted in completed interviews. Northern Territory and Victoria had the highest response rates (100% and 94%, respectively) and Western Australia had the lowest (75%). The number of interviews completed in Victoria was lower than expected due to a number of issues related to accessing prisoners, including more restrictive protocols in Victorian prisons and an industrial dispute.

Table A.1: Response rates by jurisdiction

	Qld	VIC	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Total
Number approached for an interview	243	63	48	170	16	21	561
Number completed an interview	206	59	42	129	14	21	471
Number of interviews declared eligible by AIC	206	59	42	128	14	21	470
Completed eligible response rate (per cent)	(85)	(94)	(88)	(75)	(88)	(100)	(84)

Source: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [administrative file]

Comparisons with the female inmate population in the six jurisdictions covered by this study found some differences between the sample selected for the DUCO study and the population from which it was drawn. Comparing the DUCO sample with the prison census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, women in the DUCO sample were slightly older with a larger percentage over the age of 35. Within jurisdictions age disparities were larger, however, particularly in jurisdictions with smaller samples, such as South Australia, Tasmania and Northern Territory (Table A.2). Both the ABS and the DUCO study involve snapshots of female prisoners at a point in time (30 June 2003 for ABS data and a period of a few weeks between July 2003 and January 2004 for the DUCO sample) and the profile of inmates can be expected to vary considerably at any point in jurisdictions with small numbers of inmates. Overall, similar distributions are shown for the two samples in length of sentence for current imprisonment with the DUCO sample showing a slightly higher proportion of women serving sentences of less than one year and slightly fewer serving sentences of 1-2 years. Within jurisdictions, DUCO samples drawn from Northern Territory and South Australia had the highest degree of comparability in sentence length as compared to the prison population. The proportion of the female prison population in the six jurisdictions that was comprised of Indigenous people was somewhat lower than women in the DUCO sample: 23 per cent compared to 27 per cent. The percentage of female prisoners who were Indigenous ranged from 73 per cent in the Northern Territory to five per cent in Victoria.

Table A.2: Comparison of the female inmate population in six jurisdictions and the DUCO sample (percentages)

	Prison population						DUCO sample							
	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Total	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	Total
Age														
Under 20	1	6	3	3	0	5	3	2	4	2	2	0	5	3
20–24	20	19	23	23	25	9	19	17	21	14	17	21	9	18
25–29	23	18	25	24	13	9	23	25	18	26	25	7	9	21
30–34	18	16	15	20	4	27	18	22	15	12	18	7	24	16
35–39	14	17	15	15	21	23	14	12	18	21	19	21	9	17
40 and over	25	24	19	16	38	27	22	22	24	24	20	43	43	24
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sentence														
Less than one year	31	28	9	22	45	38	27	52	31	9	25	57	38	31
1 to less than 2 years	17	20	6	23	33	29	19	15	15	7	16	29	29	15
2 to less than 5 years	26	19	33	28	6	29	24	17	23	33	32	7	29	25
5 to less than 10 years	15	22	29	15	0	5	18	10	20	24	15	0	5	17
10 years and over	11	4	11	4	17	0	7	5	4	19	10	7	0	7
Life sentence	0	8	13	9	0	0	6	0	7	7	2	0	0	4
Unknown–other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Indigenous status														
Indigenous	5	24	26	40	8	73	23	7	27	21	35	14	62	27
	(n=281)	(n=348)	(n=103)	(n=218)	(n=24)	(n=22)	(n=996)	(n=59)	(n=206)	(n=42)	(n=128)	(n=14)	(n=21)	(n=407)

Sources: Australian Institute of Criminology, DUCO female survey, 2003 [computer file]; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004b

A core component of the DUCO female questionnaire required offenders to provide sensitive information about the extent of their offending and illegal drug use, their personal experiences of sexual, physical and emotional abuse, as well as their mental health. Much of the information provided by participants is in relation to activities that may not have been detected by law enforcement agencies, or disclosed to anyone else prior to the interview. Given the nature and content of this information, the DUCO project, like all projects of this nature, is limited to the extent to which the self-reported information is reliable. In the field of criminology, research has shown that self-reported offending among prisoners is generally reliable, and that self-reported criminal histories are consistent with official records (Peterson, Braiker & Polich 1980). With respect to the accuracy of disclosures of illegal drug use, the DUMA project has established that a high degree of consistency exists between drug use reported in interviews and the detection of drug use in urinalysis tests (Milner, Mouzos & Makkai 2004) and that detainees with higher socio-economic status were most likely to underreport drug use (McGregor & Makkai 2003).

Limitations of the study

Incarcerated women are a very select group, and therefore the results of this study cannot be generalised to all female offenders or illegal drug users. It is not known how representative these women are of the offender or drug using populations, as an unknown proportion never comes to the attention of the police, and among those who do, some are not convicted and others receive community sentences or are diverted from prison through drug courts or other drug rehabilitation programs. This sample of offenders is likely to be biased toward repeat or chronic offenders, those who are indigent, homeless, and not in the legitimate labour market, those who are strung out and living or working on the street. Social class affects who comes to the attention of police: drug users who are poor are more visible to the police and have higher arrest and imprisonment rates than those who use drugs in the privacy of middle class homes. This sample of offenders may also differ significantly in their risk-taking behaviour that leads them to come to the attention of the police, or they may be less skilled at the crimes they commit, or commit them with greater frequency (Dobinson & Ward 1985: 5).

Self-report studies in general have a number of limitations relating to accuracy of memory recall, willingness to report sensitive or private experiences, and in the case of incarcerated subjects, anticipated benefits of participation in terms of early release or other privileges. We cannot overlook the possibility that some study participants may have offered certain responses hoping to mitigate against wrongdoing or otherwise improve their situation while in prison. In addition, the results of this study represent the offending and drug use histories reported by a group of women at a certain point in time and reflect, in part, drug markets and the availability of drugs at the time of their arrest. If the availability of certain drugs were to change, different results may be achieved by a similar study conducted at a different time.

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The Australian Institute of Criminology is undertaking research on the drug use careers of adult males, females and juveniles incarcerated in Australian prisons. The objective of the Drug Use Careers of Offenders (DUCO) female study is to contribute to the empirical evidence about the interaction between drug use and criminal offending among incarcerated women. This monograph presents findings from the DUCO female study. Results have identified important differences in the patterns of drug use of women as compared to men. Risk factors for drug use have also been identified. Understanding patterns in offending and drug use, and the connection between the two, may assist in the development of interventions and crime reduction strategies for women offenders.