



Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2011

I12 Juvenile Crimes and Substance Abuse

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After attending this presentation, attendees will become aware of the trends in drug related crimes perpetrated by juveniles, as well as, the trends of the types of drugs involved in juvenile arrests, and will be familiarized with the role and effectiveness of juvenile drug courts.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by raising awareness of the alarming trends in drug related arrests in juveniles, and the effectiveness of juvenile drug courts and diversion programs.

There has been an upward trend in the number of teenagers arrested for drug-related crimes. Recent statistics reflect that almost 12% of all arrests for drug-related crimes have been juveniles. More than two-million juveniles have been arrested for drug related crimes within the last 15 years. However the majority of them were arrested for possession of drugs. The number of arrests has increased; however, the types of drugs involved have changed over the recent years. The arrests relating to drugs such as cocaine and heroin have declined, while arrests relating to marijuana have increased significantly. The offenders older ages are directly related to the number of arrests. Recent statistics also demonstrate that white teens accounted for almost three-quarters of all the arrests, followed by black teens at almost one-quarter, and teens of Native American, Asian, or Pacific Islander descent account for less than two percent.

Juvenile justice agencies have embraced the drug court concept as a relatively new method of addressing adolescent substance abuse. This popular innovative idea was imported from adult courts. Specialized drug courts provide judicial supervision and coordinate substance abuse treatment for drug-involved juvenile offenders. Traditional juvenile courts still handle the vast majority of cases, however, fortunately the juvenile drug programs have been rapidly increasing changing the way practitioners and politicians think about the challenge of adolescent drug use. Drug courts provide juveniles the opportunity to benefit from drug diversion programs, change their behaviors, and stop their illegal drug use. As in adult drug courts, those who complete the program may have their sentences reduced, and in some cases even completely dismissed. Even though up until recent years drug courts were considered experimental, there is evidence demonstrating substantial reduction in new adjudicated charges, as well as significant reductions in the proportion of youth categorized as chronic offenders. This has been achieved through the incorporation of many evidence-based principles demonstrated to be effective at decreasing delinquency and adolescent substance use through comprehensive treatment planning, judicial supervision, family engagement, community partnership, and cognitive- behavioral approaches.

Juveniles, Drugs, Crimes