



B203 Data Mining the War on Drugs From Incarceration to Rehabilitation in Oklahoma

Ruthie O. Kennedy*, Cameron University, Lawton, OK 73505; Kathleen E. Brown, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK 73034; Joselina Cheng, PhD, University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, OK 73034; Rhonda C. Williams, PhD, Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, Edmond, OK 73034

Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to correlate changes in the law and incarceration trends over the past four decades in Oklahoma.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by relaying the effect of new drug laws on the addicted population of Oklahoma.

The war-on-drugs era began in the 1980s and progressed through the 1990s and even through today. This era was remarkable due to courts giving harsher sentences for drug possession and distribution, which caused the prison population to grow from approximately 300,000 to 800,000 in only a decade.¹ The 2017 Bureau of Justice Statistics report showed there were more than 1,439,808 incarcerated individuals. The number of people incarcerated for drug offenses was 40,900 in 1980 and 452,964 in 2017.¹ This increase has caused overpopulation in the prisons and very little hope for rehabilitation. In 2017, the State of Oklahoma passed legislation reducing possession drug charges to misdemeanors in an effort to rehabilitate through drug treatment programs instead of prison time. The theory is that fewer individuals would be incarcerated on drug charges and that some may even receive help that could reduce recidivism and crime escalation. The fees for their misdemeanor charges were to be used to help with rehabilitation programs. The data mining study started with a sample size of 50 randomly selected individuals from Oklahoma that was selected from each of the decades of the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. There was also an additional data group selected from 2017 to 2019, when possession of drugs was reduced to a misdemeanor. In addition to gender and ethnicity, data were broken down into the most common crime categories: Assault & Battery, Possession/Distribution of Controlled Drug Substances (CDS), Larceny, Burglary, Robbery, and Homicide/Manslaughter. Data were compiled and used to report the highest crimes from each category. There were also data on drug charges and the typical incarceration time seen over the decades. The uniform crime report provided by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation showed a 7.5% decrease in drug arrests from 2016 to 2017.² Sample-sized data over the 1980–1990 periods suggested that Burglary and Possession of CDS had the highest frequency/count and may be linked, and this pattern continued over the decades. Newer data from 2017 did not show as significant a decrease in drug charges as expected, probably due to the lagging court system. However, data from 2018 is slowly showing a decrease in drug charges in comparison to previous years. As 2019 data are still being collected, it seems that drug charges may actually be slightly decreasing, especially when referring to possession charges. Tracking the changes over time may determine the effectiveness of the newly instituted misdemeanor drug laws in Oklahoma: 2018 total drug arrests—35,596; 2017 total drug arrests—38,996; 2016 total drug arrests—42,182; 2010 total drug arrests—37,398; 2006 total drug arrests—41,164; and 2002 total drug arrests—40,662.

Reference(s):

- ^{1.} *Key Statistics: Total Prison Population*. Bureau of Justice Statistics, accessed July 28, 2019, <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=kftp&tid=1>.
- ^{2.} *Crime Statistics*. Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, accessed July 28, 2019, <https://osbi.ok.gov/publications/crime-statistics>.

Oklahoma Drug Laws, Incarceration vs. Rehabilitation, War on Drugs