Social Reaction to Perceived Deviance: Variation in Juvenile Drug Offence Adjudication

Y.M. Terry-McElrath, U of Michigan
D.C. McBride, Andrews U
E.E. Ruel, U of Illinois at Chicago
E. Harwood, U of Minnesota
C.J. VanderWaal, Andrews U

Introduction & Purpose

• Sociological tradition of examining role of social reaction and labeling in understanding social construction of deviance.

• Social reaction and labeling are a significant force in American drug policy, causing both concurrent and historical variation.

• Current study hypothesizes that juvenile adjudication severity, at any single point in time, varies by:
  • Context (the nature of offense): DUI, alcohol possession, marijuana possession, and cocaine possession
  • Location (community characteristics): age, ethnicity, income, population density, and region
Sampling & Methods

• 173 communities determined by location of public schools in nationally representative sample of students in grades 8, 10, and 12 in the coterminous United States in 2000 (Monitoring the Future, NIDA)

• Identification of prosecutorial office handling the majority of youth cases in sampled communities

• CATI interviews with 135 prosecutors knowledgeable about youth substance offenses (78% response rate)
  – Adjudication practice distribution for DUI and alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine possession offenses
  – All respondents instructed to answer for juveniles “with no prior record of adjudications or convictions for any offense”
Sampling & Methods, cont.


• Dependent variables:
  – Overall Community Severity Levels (OCSLs)
  – Composite Severity Score
Sampling & Methods, cont.

• OCSLs: 4-level ordinal measures indicating the most severe and most frequently used adjudication severity level per offense
  – Level 1 Dismissal
  – Level 2 Minimal Community Reaction: informal probation, fine, community service, mediation
  – Level 3 Community-Based Corrections: court-ordered probation with treatment, court-ordered probation without treatment, home detention
  – Level 4 Placement: detention, residential facility, other out-of-home placement
Sampling & Methods, cont.

- Composite Severity Scale: ordinal scale to compare, within communities, simultaneous adjudication outcomes of all 4 offenses in multi-level analyses
  - Data moved from wide to long format
  - Each substance-specific OCSL score treated as separate case in data, clustered within respondents (or communities)

- Completed bi-variate analyses specifying Pearson’s chi square and Fisher’s Exact in SAS v.8, as well as multi-level thresholds of change analyses using the logistic function in MIXOR (Hedeker and Gibbons 1996)
Thresholds of Change Models

• Removal of Level 1 (dismissal) results in three severity levels, and thus two thresholds:
  – Threshold 1 = moving from Level 2 to Level 3
  – Threshold 2 = moving from Level 3 to Level 4

• Model specification:
  – \( (1) = \theta_0^{(1)} + \text{Pr } \theta^{(1)} \) Threshold 1
  – \( (2) = \theta_0^{(2)} + \text{Pr } \theta^{(2)} \) Threshold 2

  where \( \text{Pr} \) is a set of explanatory variables thought to be related to one or both thresholds

• If \( \theta^{(1)} \) or \( \theta^{(2)} < 0 \), then the identified variable lowers the threshold
• If \( \theta^{(1)} \) or \( \theta^{(2)} > 0 \), then the identified variable raises the threshold
## Community Demographics

- **Age Distribution**
  - Nat'l 12-17: 59.3%
  - Nat'l 18-24: 29.6%

- **Ethnicity**
  - Nat'l African-American: 34.1%
  - Nat'l Asian: 19.3%
  - Nat'l Caucasian: 64.4%
  - Nat'l Hispanic: 25.9%

- **Median Household Income**
  - Nat'l mean: 40.8%

- **Population Density**
  - Urban/suburban: 63.0%
  - Town/rural: 37.0%

- **Region**
  - West: 20.0%
  - Midwest: 27.4%
  - South: 33.3%
  - Northeast: 19.3%
## Overall Community Severity Levels (OCSLs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentencing Severity Level</th>
<th>Alcohol Possession (N=67)</th>
<th>DUI (N=44)</th>
<th>Marijuana Possession (N=86)</th>
<th>Cocaine Possession (N=80)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Resp.</td>
<td>% Resp.</td>
<td>% Resp.</td>
<td>% Resp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Dismissal/release</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Minimal community reaction*</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Community-based corrections**</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% driven by treatment)</td>
<td>(58.6)</td>
<td>(63.0)</td>
<td>(73.9)</td>
<td>(96.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Placement</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Victim-offender mediation, restitution or victim services; community service; fine; informal or voluntary probation

**Court-ordered probation with treatment, court-ordered probation without treatment, home detention
Bi-Variate OCSL Analyses

No relationships with either region or ethnicity (high proportion Caucasian populations), but population density, age, and income effects

- Urban vs. rural communities
  - ↓ severity for cocaine possession
- Communities with high adolescent populations
  - ↑ severity for both alcohol and cocaine possession
- Communities with high young adult populations
  - ↓ severity for cocaine possession
- Communities with high median household income
  - ↑ severity for DUI and cocaine possession
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Threshold 1 Odds Ratios</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Threshold 2 Odds Ratios</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUI</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>.15-.59</td>
<td>0.14* †</td>
<td>.02-1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana possession</td>
<td>0.28**</td>
<td>.11-.68</td>
<td>0.06***†</td>
<td>.08-.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine possession</td>
<td>0.19**</td>
<td>.07-.48</td>
<td>0.01***†</td>
<td>.00-.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Alcohol possession is serving as the referent category*

- Model 1: $2\log L=246.5$ (df=9), intracluster correlation=.425, cluster variance = 2.433
- Model 2: $2\log L=225.0$ (df=21), intracluster correlation=.290, cluster variance=1.345

*p<.10     **p<.05
† Odds ratio significantly different from odds ratio at first threshold, p<.05
## Thresholds of Change: Model 2 (N=276)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Threshold 1 Odds Ratios</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Threshold 2 Odds Ratios</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DUI</td>
<td>0.32**</td>
<td>.11-.93</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>.01-2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana possession</td>
<td>0.29**</td>
<td>.11-.74</td>
<td>0.05**†</td>
<td>.00-.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocaine possession</td>
<td>0.20**</td>
<td>.07-.57</td>
<td>0.01**†</td>
<td>.00-.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian population</td>
<td>4.45**</td>
<td>1.39-14.28</td>
<td>2.21 †</td>
<td>.73-6.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 12-17</td>
<td>0.24**</td>
<td>.07-.86</td>
<td>0.22**†</td>
<td>.05-.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18-24</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.57-4.00</td>
<td>3.63*</td>
<td>.98-13.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.39*</td>
<td>.13-1.17</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>.58-6.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>.24-3.63</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>.24-3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>.22-2.07</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>.22-2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>.08-1.09</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>.08-1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.56-5.58</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.56-5.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *p<.10   **p<.05
† Odds ratio significantly different from odds ratio at first threshold, p<.05
Summary

• As expected, alcohol showed lowest overall levels of social reaction, while cocaine showed highest

• DUI: conflicting social reaction?
  – Not likely to be treated with minimal reaction
  – Less likely to have treatment as driving force within community-based corrections
  – No significant threshold difference for placement over alcohol possession offenses

• Clear between-community differences in substance-specific adjudication severity levels

• Significant within-community effects of ethnicity and adolescent population distributions on thresholds
Limitations and Future Directions

• Limitations
  – Cross-sectional sample (one year of data) and low scale N
  – Sample based on nationally representative student samples; cannot generalize to community characteristics
  – Utilized public school communities only (80% of total sample)
  – Processing severity questions were structured in such a way as to allow for multiple responses

• Future Directions
  – Explore odds of dismissal, formal diversion to treatment, and transfer to adult court
  – Incorporate state-level penalties and merge with youth self-reported drug use-related attitudes and behaviors