

Firearm Use Among Denver Arrestees in 2003

Presented to the
Project Safe Neighborhood
Task Force

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PROJECT
SAFE
NEIGHBORHOODS
America's Network Against Gun Violence

BACKGROUND

The National Institute of Justice's Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) program reported trends in drug use among arrestees in urban areas. The data have been a central component in studying the links between drug use and crime.

Since 1989, the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice's Office of Research and Statistics (ORS) participated in the project by interviewing men and women recently booked into the Denver City jail. Arrestees were asked about their illegal drug use and more than 95 percent provided a urine sample upon request. Approximately 250 interviews were conducted quarterly; about 25 percent of these were with women.

In *November 1998* and *October 2003*, ORS added questions about firearm possession and use. The questions in the 1998 study differed slightly from the 2003 study. When the questions from both years are comparable the information is presented in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

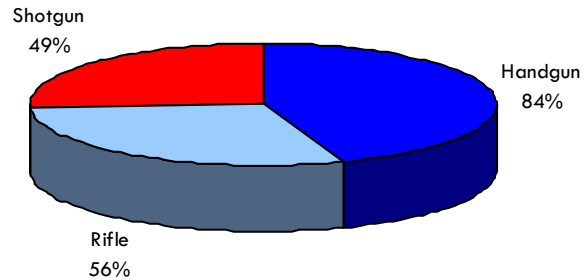
- Half of the arrestees interviewed in the Denver City Jail in October 2003 reported that they “ever” possessed a firearm. In 1998, 30 percent of the arrestees said that they “ever” possessed a firearm. This difference represents a 70% increase in the proportion of arrestees in Denver who reported possessing firearms. However, in 1998, 25 percent of those who said they possessed a gun reported that they used it while committing a crime prior to this arrest. In 2003, thirteen percent gave interviewers this response. While more arrestees in 2003 compared to 1998 reported possession of a firearm, significantly fewer reported using it in a crime, so the increase in possession may not translate into a public safety concern.
- Fourteen percent of the sample of 2003 arrestees said that, at one time, they possessed a handgun, shotgun *and* a rifle.
- Only one person reported having a permit to carry a weapon.
- Approximately half of both the study groups — the 2003 and the 1998 arrestees — told interviewers that they had been threatened with a gun.
 - In 2003, 44 percent said the threat came from a *stranger*.
 - One-quarter said the threat came from *gang members*.
 - Thirteen percent said the threat came from a *friend*.
 - Six percent said the threat came from their *significant other*.
- Being threatened with a gun and actually shot at was much more likely to occur among those individuals who possessed a gun. That is, individuals who “ever” possessed a gun, compared to those who “never” possessed a gun, were significantly more likely to be threatened with a gun. This group was also more likely to be shot at with a gun. In 1998, individuals who had never possessed a gun were half as likely to experience being shot at compared to those who had possessed a gun. In 2003, individuals who had never possessed a gun were a third less likely to be shot at when compared to those who had possessed a gun.
- Only fourteen percent of the arrestees purchased a firearm through a retail outlet. One-third obtained the handgun from a friend, and 18 percent said they got the gun “off the street.”
- In 1998, 36 percent of the arrestees said that “protection” was the primary reason for having a *handgun*. This increased to 43 percent in 2003. Thirteen percent of arrestees interviewed in 2003 said that “protection” was the primary reason they had a *shotgun*. Arrestees interviewed in 2003 who said they possessed a *rifle* most frequently reported that they had it for hunting and target practice. Ten percent said they had it for protection.
- Arrestees in 2003 who tested positive for drug use were slightly more likely to report owning a gun.

FIREARM ACQUISITION, OWNERSHIP AND USE

Participants

- 348 Denver arrestees participated in the drug, alcohol and firearm study in 1998.
- 253 Denver arrestees participated in the drug, alcohol, and firearm study in 2003.
- A description of the sample is located on pages 14—19.

Chart 1: Type of Firearm Possessed by Arrestees in 2003
n=113



Note: These figures add up to over 100% because some arrestees possessed more than one firearm.

Firearm Possession

- In 1998, 30% (105) of Denver arrestees said that they ever possessed a firearm.
- In 2003, this increased substantially to 51% (113) of arrestees had ever possessed a firearm.
- In 2003, 58% of the arrestees who ever possessed a firearm reported that they had possessed more than one type of firearm at the same time.
- In 2003, 36 people (14% of the entire sample) said that they had, at one time, possessed all three types of firearms.

Table 1: Firearm Possession Reported in 2003 (n=113)

Type of Firearm Possessed	n	Percent
Handgun Only	33	29%
Rifle Only	11	10%
Shotgun Only	3	3%
Handgun and Rifle	13	11.5%
Handgun and Shotgun	13	11.5%
Rifle and Shotgun	3	3%
Handgun, Rifle, and Shotgun	36	32%

Note: One person reported “no” to all weapons listed.

Firearm Licensing/Permits

- In 2003, of the 113 arrestees who possessed or used weapons, just one claimed to have a license or permit to carry a gun and no one had a concealed weapons license or permit.

Location of Firearm

- Twelve arrestees said that they kept a firearm in their home, 5 arrestees carried a gun in their car, and 9 said they carried a gun on their person (on their body or in a bag).

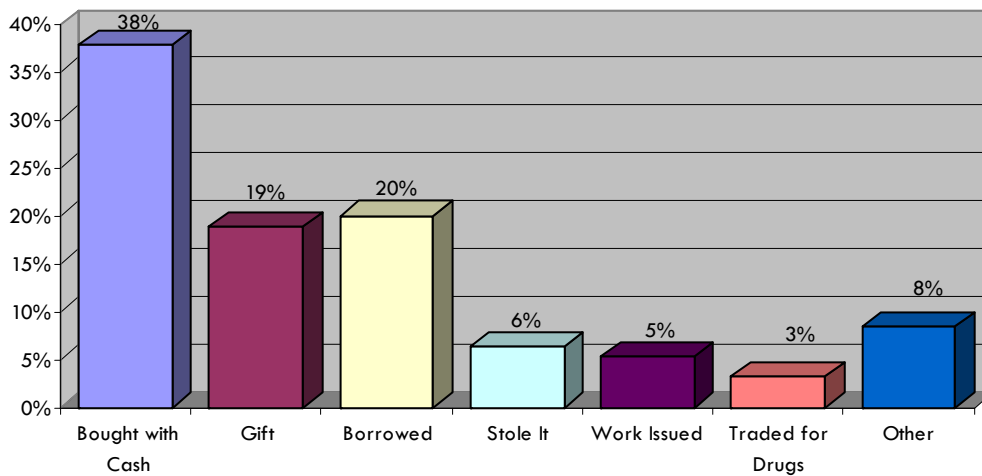
Using a Firearm While Committing Crime

- In 1998, 26% of the 105 arrestees who said they had possessed a gun stated that they had used a firearm while committing a crime prior to this current arrest.
- In 2003, this dropped to 13% who used a firearm while committing a crime prior to the current arrest.
- The arrestees in 2003 reported reasons for using a firearm during the commission of a crime, including: “to scare the victim,” “to get away,” “for protection,” and “to commit robbery”. Three of these arrestees actually fired their guns during the commission of the crime.
- According to 2003 interview statements, no one was armed during the crime for which they were currently arrested.

Handguns

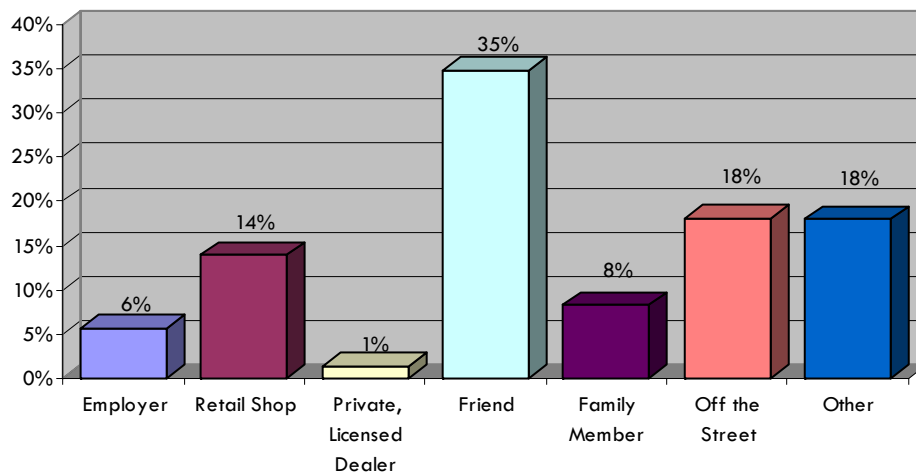
- In 2003, 84% (95) of the arrestees who possessed a firearm reported owning, using, carrying, or possessing a handgun. This constitutes 43% of the entire sample.

2003: How Did You Obtain the Handgun?
n=95



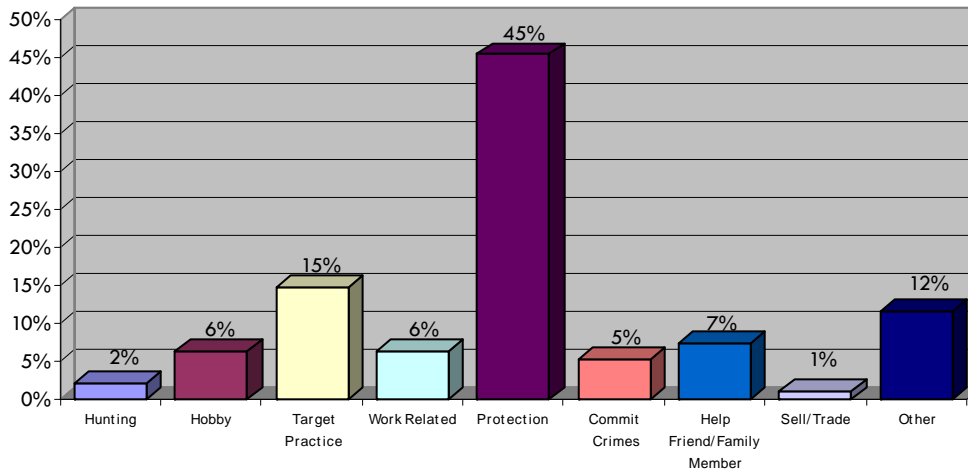
- Over one third of the arrestees bought their gun with cash. These handguns ranged from \$25 to \$1,000.

2003: Where Did You Obtain the Handgun?
n=95



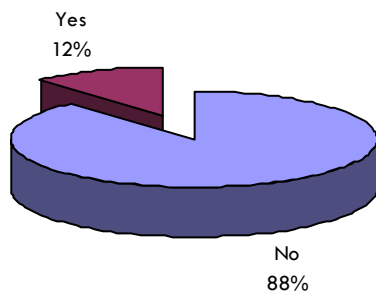
- Ten (14%) of the arrestees purchased their handguns through a retail outlet (gun shop, sporting goods/department store, or at a pawn shop).

2003: Primary Reason for Having the Handgun?
n=95



- In 1998, 36% of arrestees who reported possessing a handgun stated that the primary reason for having the gun was for protection.
- In 2003, nearly half (45%) of arrestees who reported possessing a handgun stated that the primary reason for having the gun was for protection.
- In 2003, 43% percent of arrestees who possessed a handgun stated that it had been at least a year since they had fired the gun.
- Although 45% had reported possessing a handgun for protection, only 5% reported that they had fired the gun for protection.

2003: Do You Still Have the Handgun?
n=95



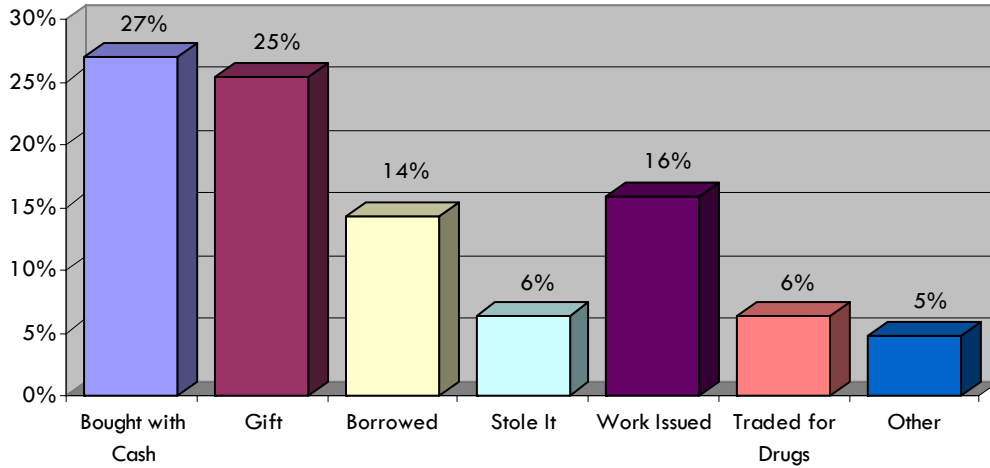
2003 arrestees that did not have handguns anymore said the following:

- 27% reported that they sold the handgun.
- 17% gave it to a friend or family member.
- 7% said the gun was stolen from them.
- 12% had the gun confiscated by the police or a family member.
- 4% threw the gun away.
- 6% other.

Rifles

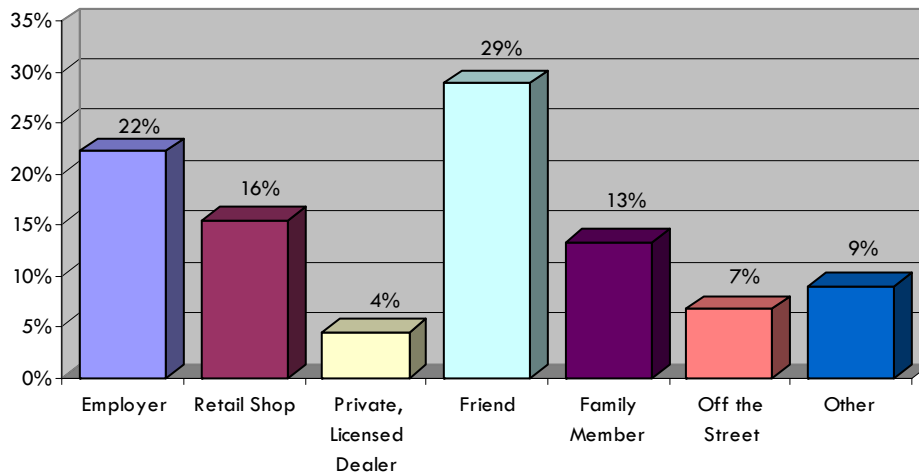
- In 2003, 56% (63) of the arrestees who ever possessed a firearm reported owning, using, carrying, or possessing a rifle. This represents 29% of the total sample.

2003: How Did You Obtain the Rifle?
n=63



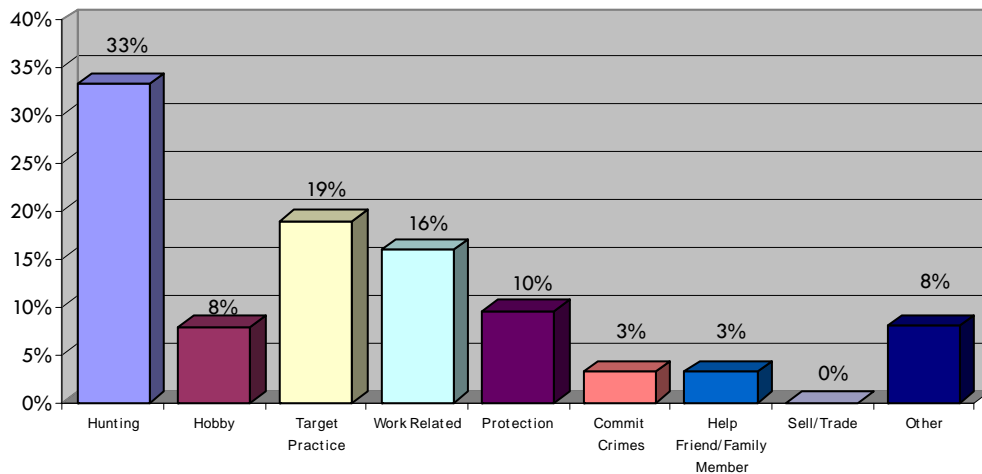
- More than half of those who possessed a rifle bought it with cash or received it as a gift.

2003: Where Did You Obtain the Rifle?
n=63



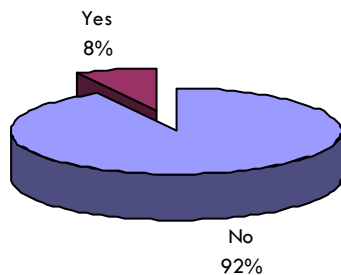
- Arrestees most frequently reported obtaining the rifle from a friend.

2003: Primary Reason for Having the Rifle?
n=63



- In 2003, 10% of those who possessed a rifle said they had the rifle for protection.
- Seventy-three percent of rifle users stated that it had been over a year since they last fired the rifle.
- Although 10% had reported possessing a rifle for protection, only 2% reported that they had fired the gun for protection.

2003: Do You Still Have the Rifle?
n=63



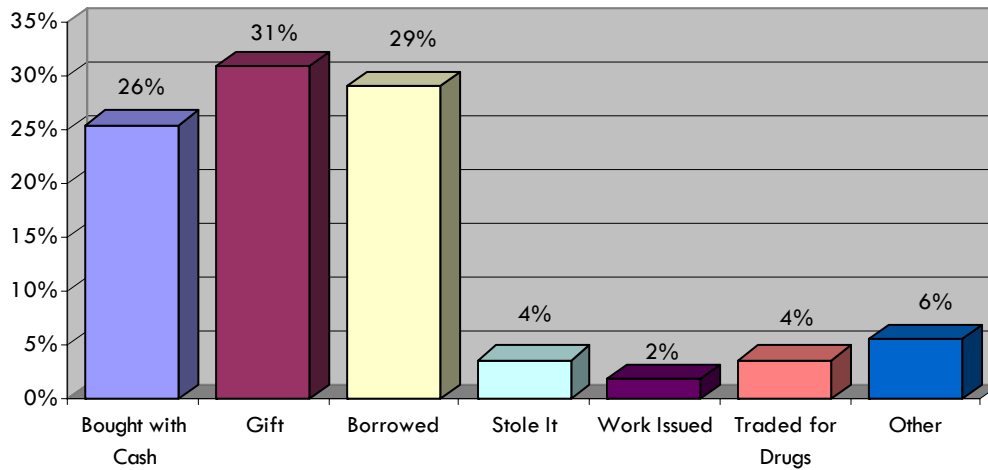
2003 arrestees that did not have rifle anymore said the following:

- 30% gave the gun back to the original owner.
- 26% sold it.
- 18% gave it to a friend or family member.
- 7% reported the rifle was confiscated by police (2% turned it over to the police voluntarily).
- 7% said the rifle was stolen from them.
- 2% threw the rifle away.
- 10% other.

Shotguns

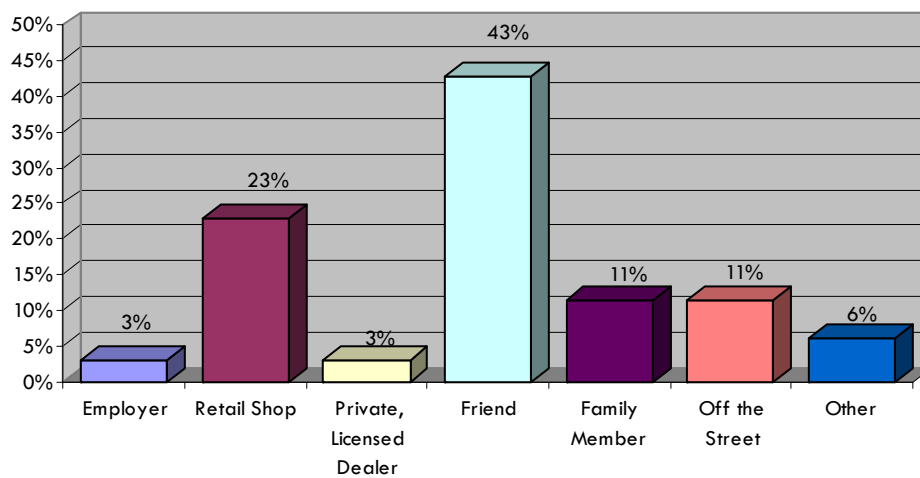
- Forty-nine percent (55) of those who ever possessed a firearm, at one time, possessed a shotgun. This constitutes 25% of the entire sample.
- Out of those 55 people that possessed a shotgun, 35% (19) of them had shortened or sawed off the shotgun to make the barrel less than 18 inches.

2003: How Did You Obtain the Shotgun?
n=55



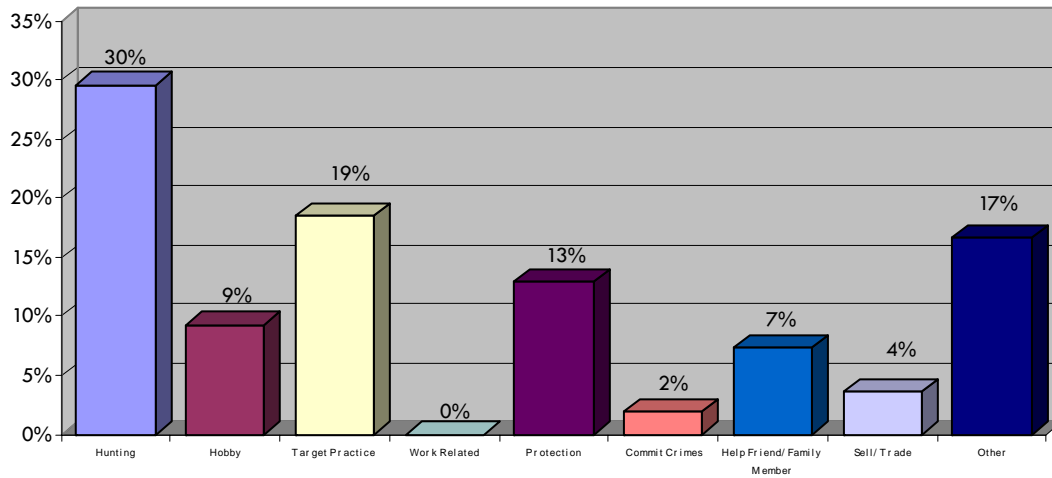
- Nearly one-third of the arrestees (31%) said they received the shotgun as a gift.

2003: Where Did You Obtain the Shotgun?
n=55



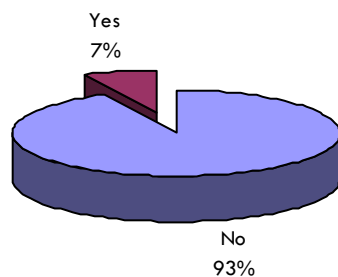
- As with handguns and rifles, arrestees reported most frequently obtaining the shotgun from a friend.

2003: Primary Reason for Having the Shotgun?
n=55



- In 2003, 13% of arrestees who possessed a shotgun stated that the primary reason for having the gun was for protection.
- Most (59%) of shotgun users stated that it had been at least a year since firing the gun. This is consistent with handguns and rifles.
- Although 13% had reported possessing a shotgun for protection, only 5% reported that they had fired the gun for protection.

2003: Do You Still Have the Shotgun?
n=55



2003 arrestees that did not have shotgun anymore said the following:

- 18% gave the gun back to the original owner.
- 30% sold it.
- 33% gave it to a friend or family member.
- 2% reported the shotgun was confiscated by police.
- 6% said the shotgun was stolen from them.
- 6% threw the shotgun away.
- 5% other.

PRIOR FIREARM THREATS AND INJURY

Threats

- In 1998, almost half (47%) of the arrestees said that they had been threatened with a gun at least one time (not including military combat).
- In 2003, half (51%) of the arrestees said that they had been threatened with a gun at least one time (not including military combat).
- In 1998, 63% of those threatened possessed a firearm.
- In 2003, this increased to 67% of those threatened possessed a firearm.
- Handguns were the most frequently reported weapon used in threats.

Of those threatened with a gun, the most recent threat came from:

- A stranger (44%)
- Gang members (23%)
- A friend (13%)
- A spouse/significant other (6%)
- A family member (5%)
- The police (5%)

Reasons for the most recent threat included:

- Being Robbed (26%)
- Fighting/arguing with a shooter or the person being angry (32%)
- Drug deal gone wrong (8%)
- Person was drunk (9%)
- Mistaken identity (9%)
- Other (16%). (This included gang affiliations, revenge, and cheating).

Table 2

	1998		2003	
	Never Threatened with a Gun	Threatened with a Gun	Never Threatened with a Gun	Threatened with a Gun
Never Possessed a Gun	147 (61%)	96 (40%)	70 (66%)	37 (35%)
Possessed a Gun	39 (37%)	66 (63%)	37 (33%)	76 (67%)

- Table 2, shows that individuals who possessed a gun were twice as likely to get threatened with a gun as those who did not possess a gun.
- In 1998 and 2003, firearm ownership, use, and/or possession were found to be significantly associated with ever being threatened with a firearm and ever being shot at.

Shot At

- Nearly 50% of arrestees who possessed a firearm were shot at, at least one time.
- In 1998, individuals who never possessed a gun were half as likely to be shot at than those who possessed a gun.
- In 2003, individuals who never possessed a gun were a third less likely to be shot at than those who possessed a gun.

Table 3

	1998		2003	
	Never Shot At	Shot At	Never Shot At	Shot At
Never Possessed a Gun	187 (77%)	56 (23%)	89 (83%)	18 (17%)
Possessed a Gun	53 (51%)	52 (50%)	57 (50%)	56 (50%)

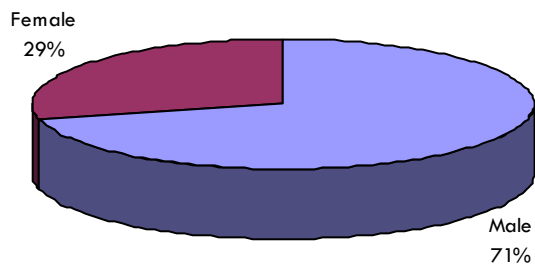
- Nineteen of the individuals who were shot at were actually shot (at least once).
- Of those 19 who were shot, 12 went on to be treated for the injury in an emergency room or clinic by medical personnel.

METHOD OF STUDY AND DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE: 1998 STUDY

➤ 348 arrestees participated in the drug, alcohol, and firearm study.

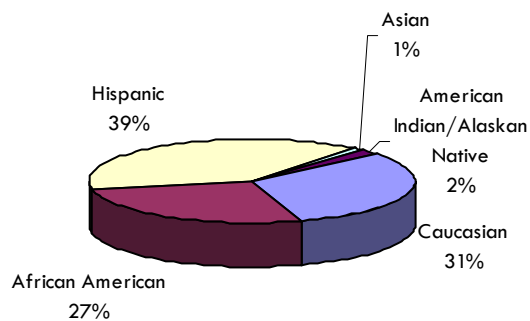
Demographics

1998: Gender of Arrestees
n=348



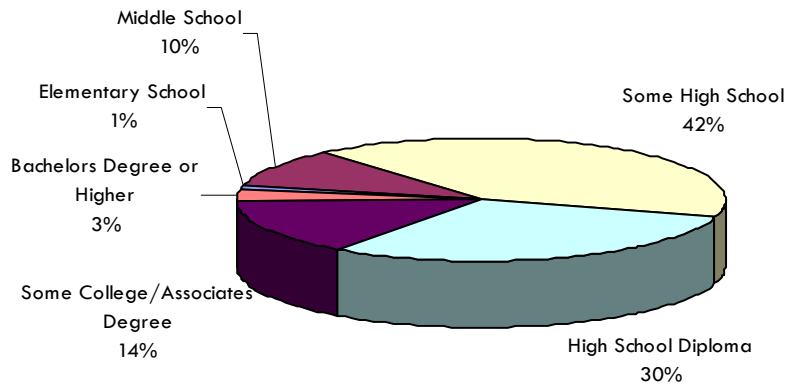
- Most (71%) of the sample were males.

1998: Ethnicity of Arrestees
n=348



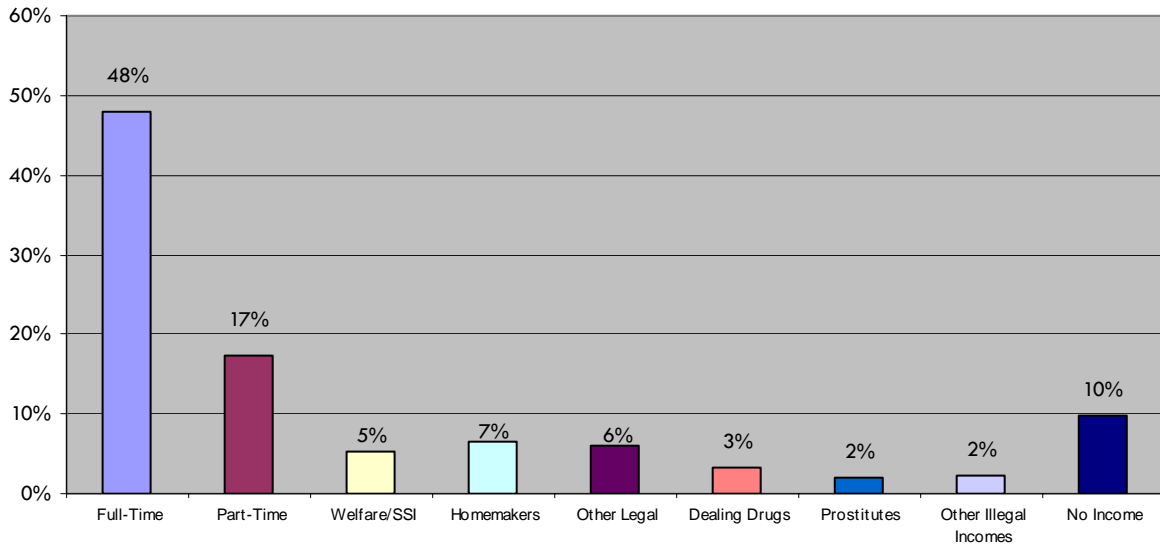
- Of the 348 individuals, 135 (39%) reported they were of Hispanic origin.

1998: Highest Grade Completed
n=348



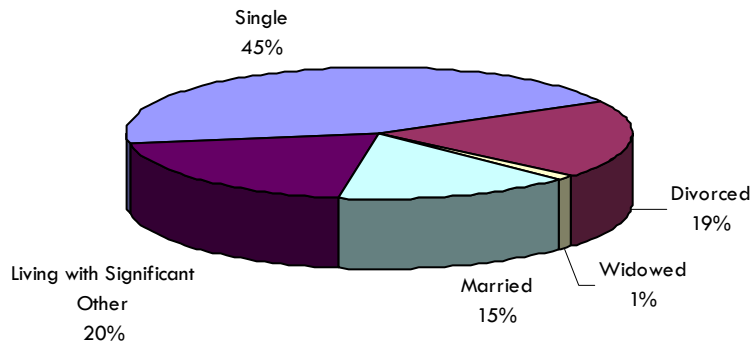
- Fifty-three percent of the arrestees had not completed high school.

1998: Employment Status
n=348



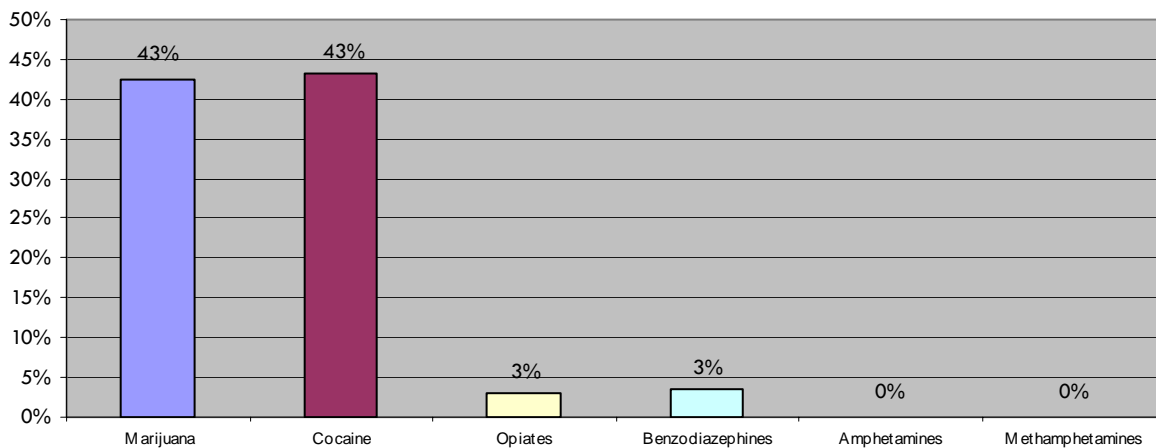
- Nearly half of the arrestees worked full time.

1998: Marital Status
n=348



- Nearly half of the arrestees were single.

1998: Current Drug Use Determined from Urinalysis Screen
n=348



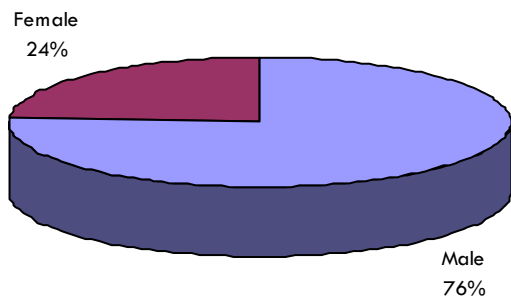
- Seventy-two percent (250) tested positive for any type of drug.
- Twenty four percent (83) tested positive for more than one type of drug.
- Arrestees who were clean were less likely to ever own or possess a gun (30% of non gun owners compared to 24% of gun owners were negative for all drugs).
- There was little difference in the type of drug used between those who owned guns and those who did not. Forty-seven percent of gun owners compared to 41% of non-gun owners tested positive for marijuana, 44% to 40% for cocaine, and 4% to 3% for opiates.

METHOD OF STUDY AND DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE: 2003 STUDY

- Of the 253 arrestees in 2003, 221 (87%) participated in the study and provided a urine specimen.

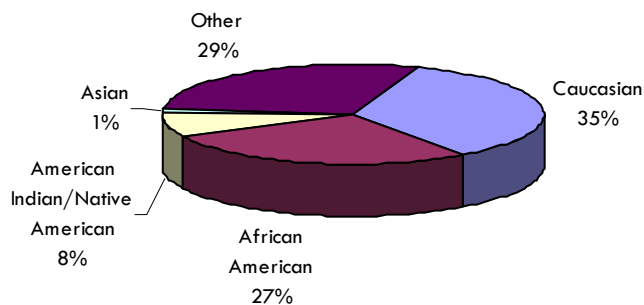
Demographics

2003: Gender of Arrestees
n=221



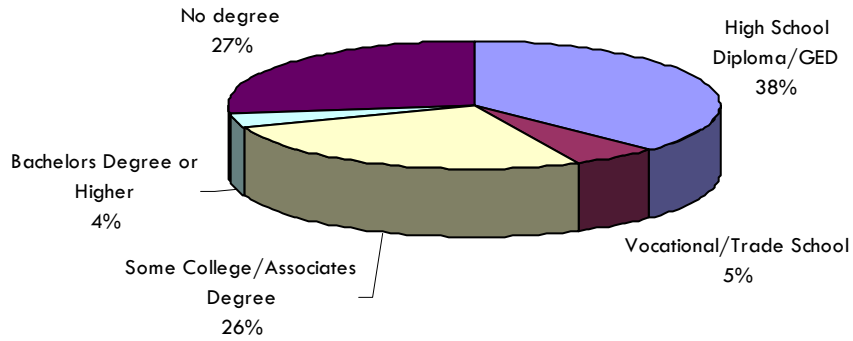
- Most of the survey participants were men.

2003: Ethnicity of Arrestees
n=221



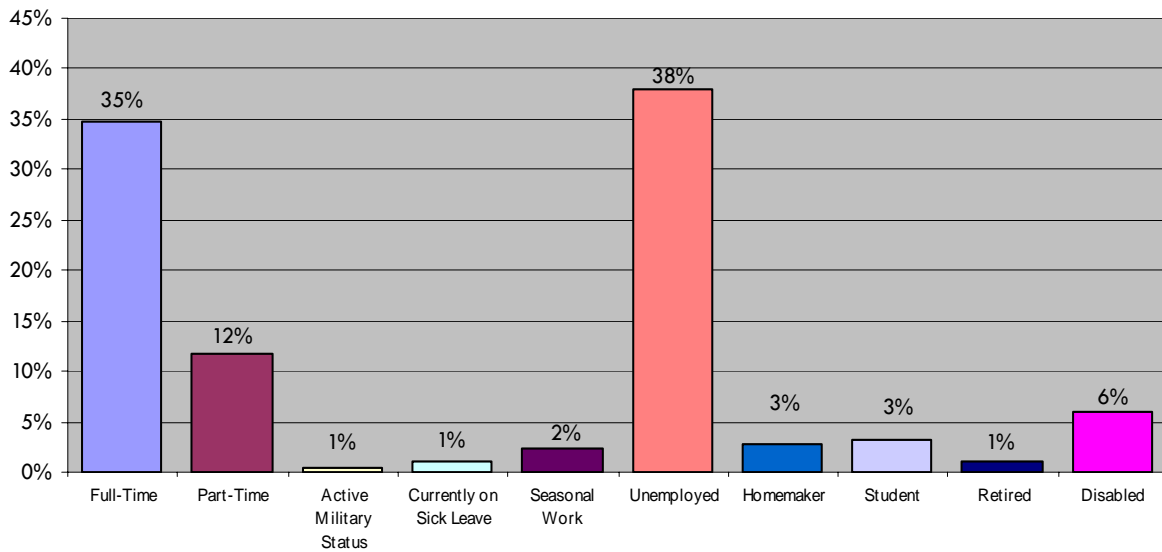
- During the interview, arrestees were asked if they were of the Hispanic origin. Of the 221 arrestees, 79 (36%) reported they were of Hispanic origin. From there they were asked to identify their race.

2003: Highest Grade Completed
n=221

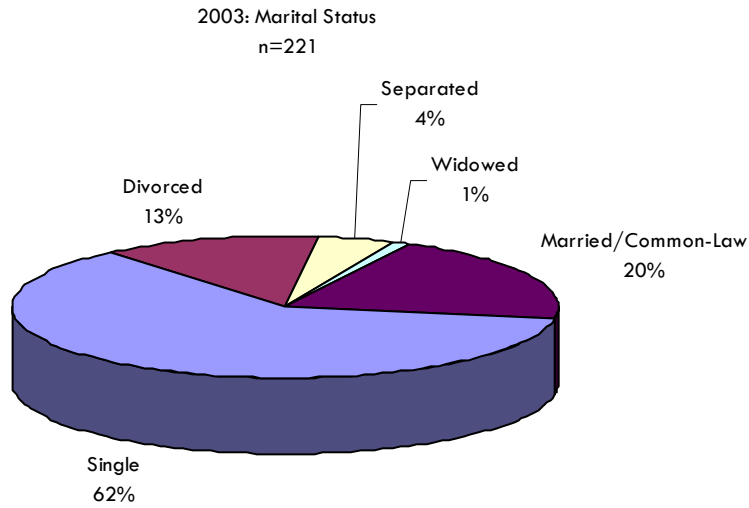


- Most (38%) arrestees reported receiving their high school diploma or GED.

2003: Employment Status
n=221

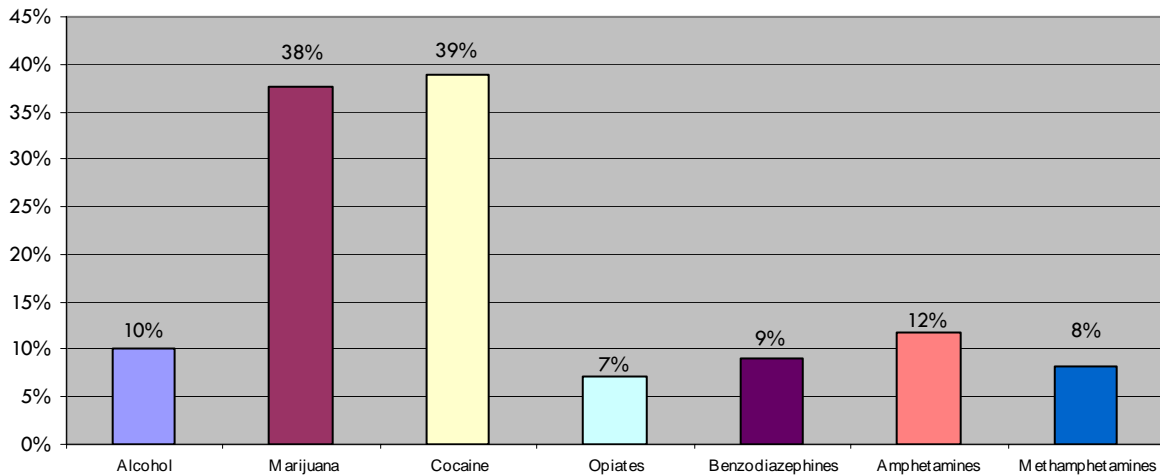


- More than one third of the arrestees were unemployed, while another third of the sample worked full time jobs.



- More than half (62%) of the arrestees were single.

2003: Current Drug Used Determined by Urinalysis Screen
n=221



- Seventy-one percent (157) tested positive for any type of drug.
- Twenty-eight percent (62) tested positive for more than one type of drug.
- Arrestees who were clean were less likely to ever own or possess a gun (32% of non gun owners compared to 26% of gun owners were negative for all drugs).
- There was little difference in the type of drug used between those who owned guns and those who did not. Eleven percent of gun owners compared to 9% of non-gun owners tested positive for alcohol, 40% of gun owners compared to 35% of non-gun owners tested positive for marijuana, 40% to 38% for cocaine, and 9% to 6% for opiates.