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**On Good Authority** is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice. This report was written by staff Research Supervisor Tracy Hahn. It is based on a study of the Drug Use Forecasting Gun Addendum by James A. Swartz, Ph.D., of Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC), Inc. Copies of the study are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

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## Chicago arrestees surveyed on use, prevalence of guns

A survey of arrestees in Chicago on the use and prevalence of firearms found that fewer than 20 percent had ever owned a gun, but 67 percent said there were "lots" of guns in their neighborhoods. More than half of the subjects said they had been threatened by a gun, and a fourth said they had been injured by gunshots.

The Chicago study indicated that being in a gang and selling illegal drugs was related to an increased likelihood of ever having owned a gun and of being in an environment where guns are common.

The findings are from a gun addendum to the national Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) study — now referred to as Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) — which is supported by the National Institute of Justice. The project surveys arrestees in 24 cities across the country for recent and past drug use. The survey is conducted using a self-report questionnaire and urine testing. The gun addendum sought additional information obtained from these arrestees regarding the use and prevalence of illegal firearms. The gun addendum study includes data from 22 of the 24 DUF sites.

Until the third quarter of 1996, gun addendum data were not collected at the Chicago DUF site, and therefore were not included in the national study. In 1997, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority contracted with Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC), Inc. to analyze the Chicago gun addendum data from the third and fourth quarters of 1996 and the first quarter of 1997. Data for this study were collected from the 630 adult male arrestees

interviewed in Chicago during the three collection quarters.

The study examines the percentage of Chicago adult male arrestees reporting ownership and use of firearms, the types of firearms possessed, whether firearms were used during the commission of current offenses, and the relationships between gun ownership, drug use, arrest charge, and gang membership. The study also analyzes DUF gun addendum results geographically to demonstrate in which of Chicago's 77 community areas the perceived availability of guns is highest.

### Background on DUF subjects

The average Chicago DUF subject is a 28-year-old single African-American male. About half of the DUF subjects indicated they were employed on either a full- or part-time basis. About 40 percent of the subjects said they did not have either a high school degree or a GED.

Almost all of the top arrest charges (99 percent) represented by the study sample were felony offenses. The most common top charge at arrest was drug possession (25.4 percent) followed by larceny/theft (25 percent), assault (13.7 percent), and weapons offenses, primarily for unlawful possession (12.9 percent). The majority of crimes committed fell into the category of income-generating crimes (38.7 percent), followed by violent offenses (33.3 percent), and drug-related offenses (25.6 percent).

In total, 83 percent of the sample tested positive for any drug including marijuana. When marijuana was not considered, 58 percent continued to test positive for other substances. The substances most commonly used by the



subjects were marijuana and cocaine, with half of the subjects testing positive for each. Opiates, most likely heroin, were used by 20 percent of the sample with the large majority of opiate users (78 percent) also testing positive for cocaine. The use of any other drugs was relatively low.

### Gun ownership and use

Analyses that focused on gun ownership and reasons for owning a gun were restricted to the subgroup of 115 subjects (18.3 percent) that reported ever owning or possessing a gun (Table 1). Approximately one-third (30 percent of the subgroup, 5 percent of the total sample) of gun-owning subjects said they had owned a gun within the past thirty days. Nearly 77 percent of the subjects reported being armed with a gun at the time they committed the crime. Of the few subjects who said they were armed at or just prior to the time they were arrested, the majority said they were armed with a handgun.

Among gun-owning subjects, the most common type of gun owned was a nonautomatic handgun (89 percent). Most of the arrestees who owned guns owned more than one. On average, gun-owning arrestees reported owning four guns, approximately three of which were handguns. Of the 103 subjects who said they had ever owned a handgun, the most commonly reported method of acquisition was a purchase for cash (62 percent). Handguns were purchased from three primary sources: from a friend or family member (36 percent), at a gun store (28 percent), or off the street (27 percent). More than two-thirds of the sample said the main reason they carried a gun was for self-protection or defense. Only a small percentage (4 percent) said they had ever used a gun to threaten or scare another person. The large majority of gun-owning subjects (81 percent) said they carried their gun only rarely or never outside of their homes.

### Perceived availability of guns and attitudes toward gun use

The gun addendum also asked all the respondents their perceptions of whether there are many guns in their neighbor-

**Table 1**  
Responses of the 115 Chicago arrestees who said they ever owned or possessed a gun

Characteristics of ownership/possession	
Fully automatic pistol or rifle	29.6%
Semiautomatic pistol or rifle	46.1%
Regular rifle or shotgun	40%
Handgun	89.6%
Owned or possessed a gun in the last 30 days?	30.4%
Armed at the time you committed the crime?	76.9%
Armed just prior to or at time of arrest?	11.3%
Principle reason for having a gun:	
Hunting or target shooting	12.2%
As part of a bona fide occupation	2.6%
Protection or self-defense	67.8%
To "get someone"	0
Status or to impress people	5.2%
Use in the drug trade	0.9%
Use in other criminal activity	0
Other	9.6%

hoods, what owning a gun signifies to others, and under what circumstances it is acceptable to use a gun. There were also a number of questions regarding the relationship between drug use, drug sales and gun use. The results indicate that subjects perceived guns as being very prevalent, that guns are needed for self-protection, and that there is a clear link between selling drugs and carrying a gun. Alternatively, subjects do not seem to feel that it is all right to use a gun just to gain respect, to enforce neighborhood territories, to prove toughness, or even necessarily to settle scores.

Although only 18 percent of the sample reported having ever owned a gun, and although only 17 percent said that most of their friends had guns, 67 percent said there were "lots" of guns in their neighborhoods. Further, 38 percent said they felt it was "important" to have a gun for protection and 27 percent said that owning a gun brought respect from people in their "crowd." Few subjects

though, thought it was "OK" to use a gun in circumstances where they had been shown disrespect (4 percent), where the other person did not belong in their neighborhood (2 percent), or just to get something done (2 percent). Only in the case of having been hurt by someone else, did an appreciable proportion of the sample (19 percent) indicate that it would be "OK" to use a gun.

The data on gun ownership and drug dealing, while somewhat inconsistent, indicate that a sizeable minority of subjects believe drug dealers carry guns (41 percent), that they are a source of guns (40 percent), and that drug dealers are always trying to get "bigger and better guns" (57 percent). However, only 24 percent said drug dealers "always" carry guns. The major inconsistency is that while 57 percent said that drug dealers were always trying to get bigger and better guns, only 24 percent said they thought drug dealers always carried a gun.



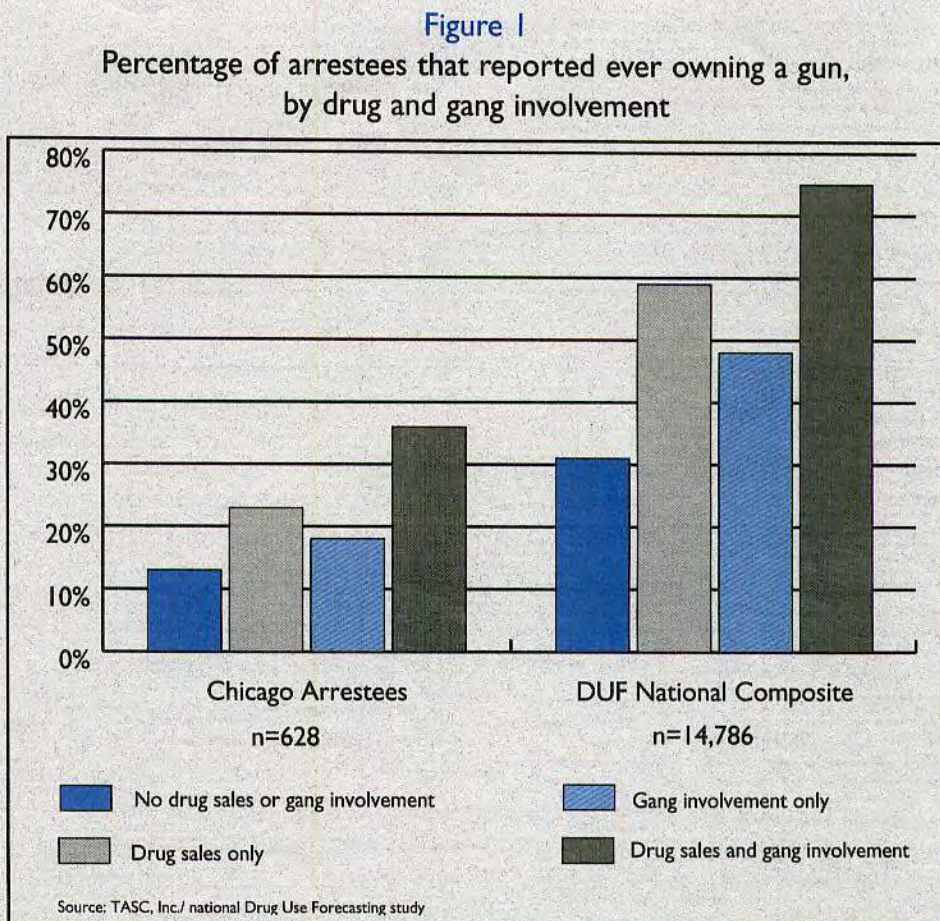
More than half of the subjects said they had been threatened by a gun (56 percent), with 13 percent saying this had occurred within the past month. Roughly similar proportions said they had been shot at (54 percent), beaten up (49 percent), or robbed (43 percent). One-fourth of the sample said they had been injured by gunshot, while almost one-third said they had been injured with some other weapon at some point in their lives.

### Perceived prevalence of guns in Chicago communities

The geographical distributions of Chicago communities where subjects perceived that there were “lots” of guns parallels to some extent the distribution of arrests. The percentages of subjects stating that there were “lots” of guns was restricted to only those communities with 5 or more arrestees. It appears that guns are perceived as being fairly prevalent in many of Chicago’s communities. In almost half (36) of the 77 Chicago communities, at least 50 percent of the subjects reported there were “lots” of guns.

For the Chicago subjects in this particular analysis, being in a gang and selling illegal drugs was related to an increased likelihood of ever having owned a gun, as well as being in an environment where guns are common. There were, however, some differences of degree between these two overlapping but still distinct groups. Being in a gang was moderately related to ever owning or possessing a gun, with gang members somewhat more likely to say they had ever owned a gun (24 percent) than non-gang members (16 percent).

There was a stronger relationship between being in a gang and having ever been threatened by a gun (68 percent, compared to 52 percent of non-gang members). There was no relationship between being in a gang and perceiving that there were lots of guns available in the neighborhood. These findings for current gang membership were also compared with those for selling illegal drugs. Among those who said they had sold any illegal drugs in the past year, 32 percent reported ever owning a gun



compared with about only 15 percent who said they had not sold any illegal drugs. Those who sold illegal drugs in the past year were also more likely to report that they had been threatened by a gun and that there were lots of guns in their neighborhoods. Thus, while being in a gang had some bearing on gun ownership and living in an environment where guns are prevalent, selling drugs had an even stronger relationship.

With regard to offense type, those subjects arrested for violent offenses were more likely than other subjects to report having ever owned a gun (28 percent), compared to those arrested for a drug-related crime (9 percent), or for an income-generating crime (14 percent).

### Comparisons of Chicago and national gun addendum data

To further explore the relationship between the likelihood of owning a gun, selling illegal drugs, and being a gang member, subjects in the Chicago sample and the adult subjects in the national sample (less the Chicago subjects) were

categorized into one of four groups: 1) no involvement in drug sales or gangs; 2) drug sales only; 3) gang involvement only; and 4) involvement in both selling drugs and in gangs (Figure 1).

Although the proportion of subjects reporting they had ever owned a gun is much higher in the national sample than in the Chicago sample, the basic pattern of the relationship is the same for both groups. Subjects involved in both selling illegal drugs and being in a gang were much more likely than other subjects to have ever owned a gun. Next most likely to have owned a gun were those involved in selling illegal drugs, followed by those in gangs. These results support the finding that drug sales are a more important determinant of gun ownership than gang membership, however, joint involvement in gangs and in selling illegal drugs further increases the likelihood a subject will own a gun. These findings, and those of the national study, underline the fact that gangs and illegal drug sales provide much of the context for possessing guns and consequently, one can conclude, for using guns as well.



The study also compares a sample of 484 Chicago arrestees with arrestees from the other DUF sites. The comparison looked at four factors related to gun prevalence and use: gun ownership, the perceived prevalence of guns in the neighborhoods, the perceived ease of gun procurement, and the percentages of arrestees who said they were armed when arrested.

#### ■ Reported gun ownership

On the average, 38 percent of the DUF respondents across the 22 sites reported lifetime gun ownership or possession of a gun (i.e., pistol, rifle or shotgun). The highest percentage of respondents reporting ever owning or possessing a gun were in Indianapolis (58 percent), St. Louis (45 percent), and Portland (48 percent). Chicago and Washington, D.C., at 20 percent each, were among the lowest cities in terms of respondents' reporting gun ownership and possession.

#### ■ Perceived prevalence of guns

Overall, 58 percent of DUF respondents agreed that "in [their] neighborhood[s],

there are lots of guns on the street[s]." In nearly half of the DUF sites, 60 percent or more of the participants agreed with that statement. In Chicago, 68 percent agreed with that statement, ranking it sixth among all sites. Whereas a relatively low percentage of Chicago DUF participants report ever owning a gun, a relatively high percentage of them report that guns are prevalent in their neighborhoods.

#### ■ Perceived ease of gun procurement

Across the 22 DUF sites, more than 58 percent of the respondents agreed that "it is easy for people in [their] neighborhood[s] to get a gun illegally." Chicago was among the bottom third of the cities with regard to perceived ease of gun procurement. Therefore, although a relatively high percentage of Chicago DUF respondents believe there are a lot of guns in their neighborhoods, far fewer of them think guns are easy to obtain and even fewer say they themselves have ever owned a gun. Nevertheless, despite Chicago's relatively low ranking on this measure, nearly half of the respondents

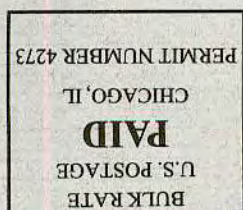
said it would be easy to get a gun illegally within their own neighborhood.

#### ■ Proportions armed when arrested

In general, an average of only 3 percent of the DUF participants reported that they were armed with a gun when they were arrested. Two percent of the participants in Chicago stated that they had been armed at arrest.

#### Conclusion

This study and the national DUF data show that being in a gang and selling drugs is perceived as greatly increasing the likelihood of owning a gun. Moreover, many of the Chicago subjects reported that drug dealers frequently carry guns, that drug dealers can supply guns, and that drug dealers are often trying to obtain more powerful weaponry. Although not all gangs are involved in drug sales, and many gang-related homicides originate over non-drug matters, such as territorial disputes, gun availability and use appears to increase when gangs are involved in selling drugs.▼



ILLINOIS  
CRIMINAL JUSTICE  
INFORMATION AUTHORITY  
120 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 1016  
Chicago, Illinois 60606-3997  
Phone: 312-793-8550  
TDD: 312-793-4170

