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## Race, Drug Use, and the Justice System

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## **RACE, DRUG USE, AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A great deal of research concludes that drug use is relatively similar across races for adults, and that men use more than women. The current study makes use of self-report delinquency surveys of students in a South Dakota State University Juvenile Delinquency course and a California State University, San Bernardino Juvenile Justice course to determine if these trends also apply to their past behavior as a juvenile. The current study will examine race and gender trends as they relate to illicit substance use in juveniles.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Race and police interactions have been frequently studied along the African American and White dichotomy (Schafer, et al., 2003), but Latinos are one of the least studied groups in criminal justice research (Schuck, et al., 2004). Overall, 80 percent of the public was shown to have favorable impressions of police (Schafer et. al., 2003); however, there are commonly found differences in race and perceptions of police. Whites have the most favorable impression of police followed by Hispanics and finally African Americans (Schuck and Rosebaum, 2005). These impressions and ideas about police are subject to variation in age, religion, ethnic identity, and actual contact with police. After interacting with police, African American and Hispanic attitudes toward law enforcement worsen, a finding not found with White citizens (Rosenbaum, et al., 2005). Carter (1985) found that as the frequency of contacts with the police increased, the satisfaction level with police decreased among Hispanic populations (Schafer et. al., 2003). Two of the most influencing factors in perceptions of police is neighborhood context and culture. These may be especially important for those who do not have frequent, direct contact with police because individuals may acquire their perceptions from the experiences of other people.

Research suggests that there may be a tendency for law enforcement to focus on minority drug users more often than they do on White users (Beckett, et al., 2006). This could be as a result of the differences in their socioeconomic background. According to Beckett, et al (2006):

[S]ocioeconomic (and hence racial-ethnic) groups possess different levels of access to private space. As a result, the (disproportionally nonwhite) poor are more likely to engage in deviant behavior outdoors; those who engage in illicit conduct in public places are more visible to the police and therefore more likely to be arrested (121).

This demonstrates the difference in the likelihood of being arrested may be due to visibility in addition to other factors.

Research shows that individuals of all races use illicit drugs at similar rates (Bates and Swan, 2014; SAMHSA, 2013); however, African Americans are much more likely to get arrested than White individuals (Beckett et al., 2006). This inequality could be as a result of variety of factors; but, when studying Seattle's "Narcotics Activity Reports," Beckett, et al. (2006) found that "the location and geographic distribution of arrests is inconsistent with citizen concern" (126). Some also argue that whites have access to more privacy.

Table 1. Percentages of illicit drug and alcohol use in juveniles ages 12-20.

Age	Illicit drugs (%)	Alcohol use (%)
12-13	2.6	2.1
14-15	7.8	9.5
16-17	15.8	22.7
18-20	22.6	43.8

Illustrates the national trends of juveniles in different ranges who report using illicit drugs or alcohol. According to the 2013 National Survey on Drug Use and Health drug and alcohol use steadily increase as juveniles age from middle to high school. However, in the same year, White individuals ages 12 and older were more likely to use alcohol than any other race (SAMHSA,2013).

Wallace and Bachman (1991) studied racial and ethnic differences in drug use while also looking at a student’s background as a factor. Through the Monitoring the Future project, they were able to compare information from about 77,500 high school seniors. This sample has a racial/ethnic breakdown of 77.5 percent White students, 11.9 percent Black students, 4.4 percent Mexican American students, 2.6 percent Asian American students, 2 percent Puerto Rican and other Latin American students and 1.6 percent Native American students (Wallace and Bachman, 1991). The coauthors found that there is not a large difference in drug use with a large variation in family background in African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Asian students as they still smoke cigarettes less than White students (p. 341). Similarly, the difference for heavy alcohol use is smaller when reduced for background factors only between Mexican American and White seniors (Wallace and Bachman, 1991). Overall, the racial/ethnic differences in substance use are generally not because of socioeconomic status, parental education, region of residence, or family structure except for the difference between Whites and Native Americans (Wallace and Bachman, 1991).

In addition, the differences in drug use and arrest also vary by the type of drug. Beckett, et al. (2005) found that while Whites were overrepresented in methamphetamine use in their Seattle study, African Americans were overrepresented in cocaine use while Latinos were

represented in accordance to the demographic information. Beckett, et al. (2005) suggested that between 61 and 69 percent of those using cocaine and heroin are White. It is estimated that 36 to 69 percent of Seattle crack cocaine users are White; however, White offenders constitute only a quarter (26.3 percent) of crack cocaine arrests in Seattle (Beckett, et al., 2005). This is the most notable disparity found by Beckett et al. and there are also racial and ethnic disparities among the arrest and use statistics of marijuana, heroin, methamphetamine, and cocaine (p. 428).

The considerable difference in the arrests for cocaine users who are Black and White may contribute significantly to the discrepancy of drug arrests among different races and ethnicities. Beckett, et al. (2005), reports that the Seattle Police Department had 3,058 arrests for crack cocaine possession while total arrests for possession of methamphetamine, ecstasy, and powder cocaine was only 384 (Becket et al, 2005, 429). In combination with the overrepresentation of African Americans in cocaine possession this contributes to the greater number of arrests of black individuals who possess drugs.

Bridges and Steen (1998) had noteworthy findings that occurred later in the justice process. Their study used narrative reports from probation officers to examine racial differences in disposition hearings and sentences. The study looked at the differences in White and African American youth and the relationship between race and characterization of the youth, their crime, the cause of their crime, and the threat of future crime according to justice officials and then the sentence recommendation (Bridges and Steen, 1998) and found that probation officers are more likely to report delinquency in youth who are African American as being caused by negative internal attributes and personality. Negative internal attributes are often seen as an individual being intrinsically bad or having criminal intentions while positive internal attributes are related to a positive disposition and a crime being accidental or immature. Conversely, they are more likely to categorize White youths' delinquency as a result of their external environment and social conditions, such as having negative peer pressure or having unsupportive parents.

Along similar lines, sentencing of youth is heavily dependent on the report of the probation officer and their report of internal attributes. The assessment of future crime potential is also determined on internal attributions more than the severity of the crime or previous criminal history. This overall assessment is heavily weighted by internal attributes and individuals that are seen as having negative internal attributes Black individuals are judged to be more dangerous. This factor in combination with blacks being more likely to have committed a serious crime and having a criminal history results in African American youth being given more severe sentences than White youth (Bridges and Steen, 1998).

This study will expand upon the literature by examining the relationship between demographic variables and substance use.

## DATA AND METHODS

### Research design

The goals of this research are to examine the juvenile delinquency of students enrolled in a Juvenile Delinquency course. Juvenile delinquency being defined as the extent to which students engaged in a variety of criminal offenses prior to age 18. This research also focuses on neighborhood, school, police, and family factors that may be relevant to juvenile delinquency. To achieve these goals, surveys were conducted in two juvenile delinquency courses at two universities.

### Sampling

Participants were selected through convenience sampling. All students enrolled in SOC 455 Juvenile Delinquency at South Dakota State University (SDSU) in the Spring 2016 semester and CJUS 580 Juvenile Justice Systems at California State University, San Bernardino (CSU-SB) in the Winter 2016 quarter were recruited for the study. After the drop/add date passed, students in each course were informed of the project, given a consent form, and given time in class to complete the surveys. Students were advised that the survey is voluntary. Attendance points were awarded on the designated survey day, but were given regardless of survey completion. All surveys were shuffled in a pile before being collected by the professor.

### Survey instrument

The survey was an 80 question document asking about a range of delinquent and related activities and attitudes to gauge student's behaviors prior to age 18. The survey asked about the frequency of substance use, general delinquency, and contact with police of the respondent. Questions about their friends' involvement and acceptance of delinquent activities were also included. The survey also included a set of questions about the safety and regular activities in their high school and neighborhoods. A few questions about parental oversight were included. The survey ended with a few demographic questions about the respondent.

### Confidentiality

For confidentiality purposes, any demographic variable where less than four students answered in a particular way were changed so that students could not identify classmates through the survey data.

### Sample characteristics

The sample included 55 students, 20 from SDSU and 35 from CSU-SB. Forty percent of SDSU students are male and 10 percent are White. Forty percent of CSU-SB students are male as well, but 85 percent are Hispanic, 6 percent are White, and 9 percent report their race as other. Interviews were coded and entered into SPSS by the primary researchers, Dr. Yingling (SDSU) and Dr. Norris (CSU-SB).

## RESULTS

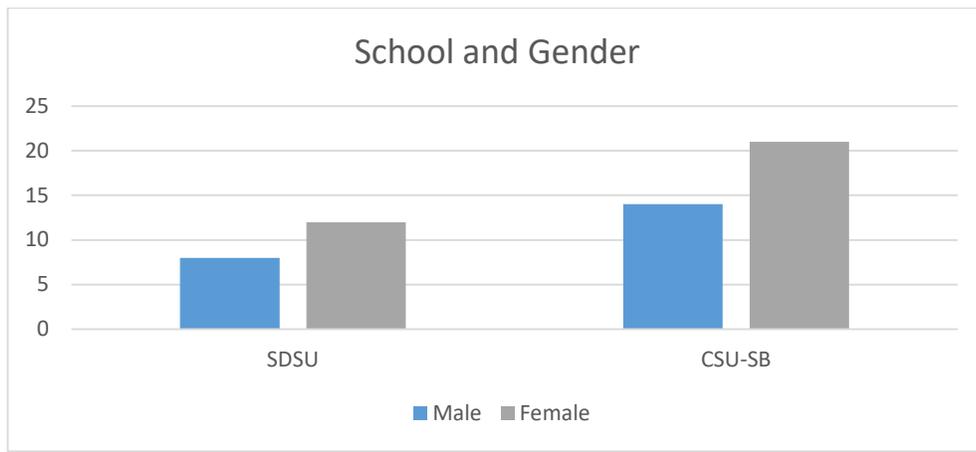


Figure 1: For the study, 55 students participate; 20 from SDSU and 35 from CSU-SB. Males made up 40 percent of the SDSU participants and 10 percent white.

Of the 22 males in the study, 13 of them were Hispanic (59%), 8 were White (36%), and one was other (5%). All of the SDSU males reported their race as White (Figure 1). The CSU-SB males all reported being either Hispanic or other. Of the 33 females in the study, 17 were Hispanic (52%), 14 were White (27%), and 2 were other (6%).

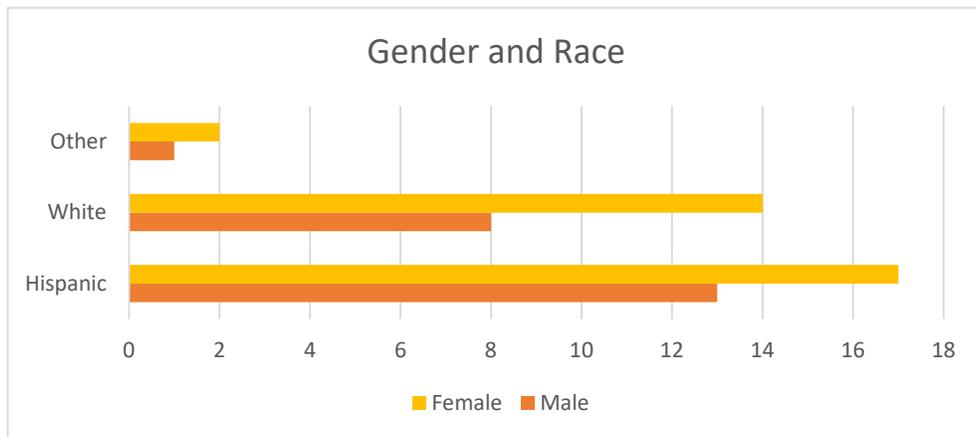


Figure 2: All the women from SDSU reported their race as White. Whereas at two students at CSU-SB reported their race as White, 17 reported their race as Hispanic, and two reported their race as other.

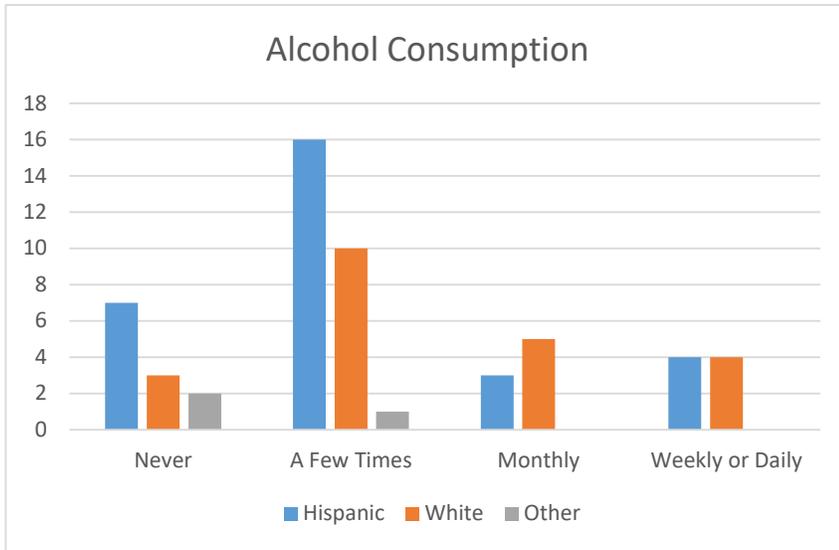


Figure 3: Over half of students reported using alcohol a few times or never.

All of the SDSU females reported their race as White (Figure 2). Two of the CSU-SB students reported their race as white while 17 reported being Hispanic and two reported their race as other.

Figure 3 displays the differences in alcohol consumption by juveniles in the sample by race. Over half of all students used alcohol a few times or never. More males reported drinking daily or weekly than females (22.7% vs. 9%) whereas more females reported never drinking alcohol than males (27.3% vs. 13.6%). Conversely, more females used marijuana monthly than males did. There was one male and one female who used marijuana weekly or daily.

Overall, Whites tended to drink more alcohol than Hispanics with 86.4 percent drinking at least a few times. Among Hispanics, 76.7 percent drank at least a few times. Along similar lines, 90 percent of the SDSU students drank alcohol at least a few times while 71.4 percent of CSU-SB students drank at least a few times.

Marijuana use varied differently; 43.3 percent of Hispanics used marijuana at least a few times while only 27.3 percent of Whites used marijuana a few times. Of SDSU students, 15 (75%) had never used marijuana while 21 (60%) of CSU-SB students had never used marijuana. Cigarette use among Hispanics and Whites was similar. Seventy percent of Hispanics never smoked cigarettes whereas 77.2 percent of Whites never smoked cigarettes. When comparing universities, the results varied slightly more. Of SDSU students, 80 percent had never smoked cigarettes while 71.4 percent of CSU-SB students had never smoked cigarettes.

Items on the survey also asked about police presence in neighborhoods. There are a variety of responses when students were asked how often police were seen in their neighborhoods when they were juveniles.

	Hispanic	White	Other
Never	2	3	2
A few times	18	10	0
Monthly	3	2	0
Weekly or daily	7	7	1
Total	30	22	3

Table 2. Police presence in neighborhoods by race.

Attitudes toward police were similarly measured by asking how often police were nice to kids in the neighborhood. While 59 percent of White students said police were nice to juveniles weekly or daily, only seven percent of Hispanic students reported the same. Conversely, 23 percent of Hispanic students said police were never nice to juveniles and only five percent of White students stated the same. Of the three students who identified their race as other, two responded that police were never present in the neighborhood and one disclosed that police were always present, at least on a weekly or daily basis.

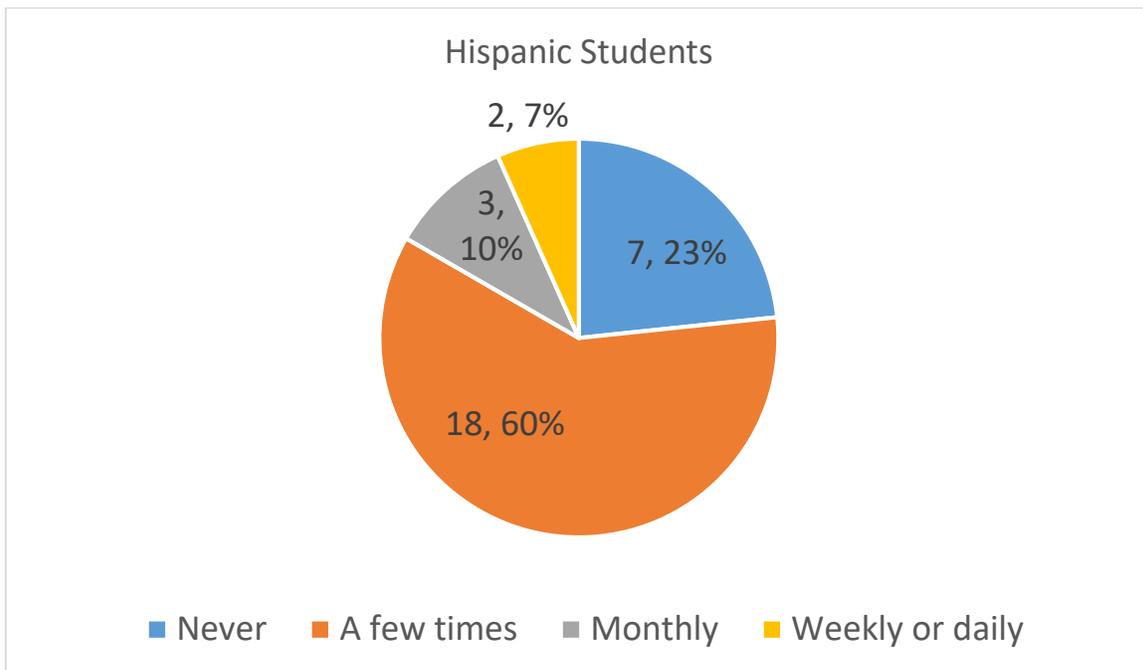


Figure 4: Hispanic student perceptions of how often police were nice to juveniles in their neighborhood.

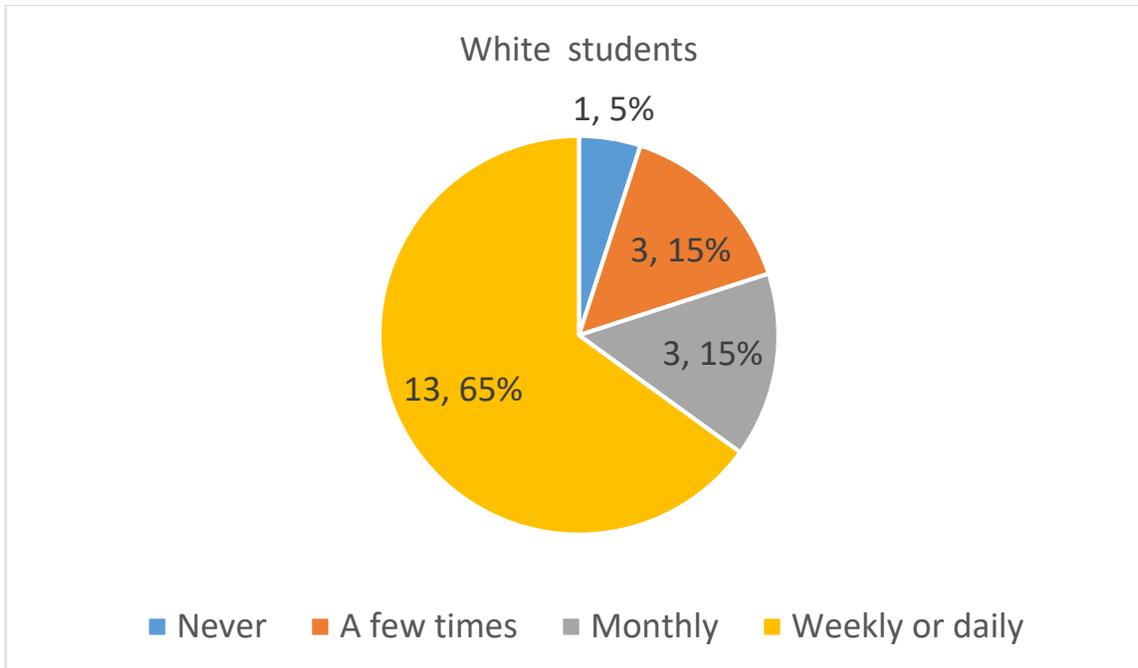


Figure 1: White student perceptions of how often police were nice to juveniles in their neighborhood.

The graphs above illustrate the differences between the responses of the Hispanic students and the White students to the statement, “Police in my neighborhood were nice to juveniles.” Out of all the respondents, 30 were Hispanic students and 20 were White students. Two White students did not respond to this item on the survey.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, substance use was comparable between the two groups. White students, in general, tended to use alcohol more frequently than Hispanic students, which is consistent with the literature. Hispanic students used marijuana slightly more than White students but the races were comparable in cigarette usage. This sample of Hispanic and White students had comparable substance usage to the literature that was previously mentioned. This appears to be evidence for the similarity of substance use among all juveniles regardless of race. Race does not appear to be a significant factor with a possibility of exception for White students and alcohol consumption.

Police visibility also appeared to be similar among Hispanic students and White students. White students have a slightly higher proportion of responses of seeing police weekly or daily in their neighborhood. This finding is more contradictory to the literature and does not show strong evidence for higher police presence in all neighborhoods that have minority juveniles. There are several additional factors that could contribute to this difference such as the small town size of many of the White students, that many of the Hispanic students lived in predominantly White neighborhoods, and/or many other factors.

Students' perceptions of police being nice to juveniles were varied by race. Consistent with other research, most White students found police to be nice to juveniles on a weekly or daily basis. Hispanic students had contrasting perceptions and found police to be nice to juveniles only a few times. More Hispanic students also found police never being nice to youth than did White students. These negative experiences of minority students relate to widespread mistrust in police that is present in today's culture. These negative interactions could be strongly rooted in racial relations but more research is needed in this area to make generalizations.

All in all, race appears to have a limited impact on substance use in general. White students tend to have used more alcohol while Hispanic students tend to have used more marijuana. These differences are relatively small. Police perceptions appear to be impacted much more by race. Hispanic students have witnessed or experienced police being nice to juveniles less frequently than White students.

## LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to the study. There were two main racial groups: Hispanic students and White students. These two groups were divided by race and location. All of the Hispanic students are attending CSU-SB while all of the SDSU students are White students. This may not be an accurate representation of all Hispanic students or all White students as the differences could be due to geographic location.

Additionally, because of the sample size and homogeneity of race the results may not be generalizable to a group. Changing demographic information due to confidentiality may have an impact on the survey results.

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