

Increasing Drug Arrests after 1980 had Disproportionate Effect on Women

by Jeffrey A. Butts

The number of drug-related arrests reported by U.S. law enforcement agencies increased sharply between 1980 and 1995, and for some groups the volume of arrests did not decline significantly between 1995 and 2010.

The largest relative growth in drug arrests occurred among adult women, especially those charged with drug possession offenses rather than sales or manufacture. Drug arrests involving male offenders still outnumbered those involving females in 2010, but arrests of women increased faster.

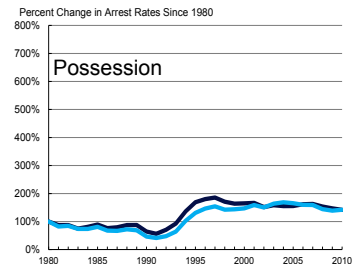
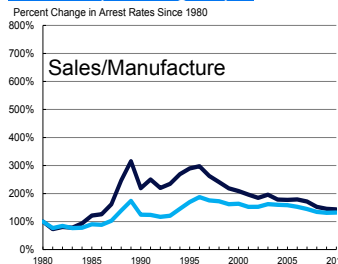
Between 1980 and 1995, possession arrests involving women over the age of 24 grew 638 percent, or nearly double the rate of increase among men the same age (326 percent).

The growth in female possession arrests outpaced the male rate among offenders ages 18-24 as well. Arrests of younger adult women increased 64 percent between 1980 and 1995, and continued to grow 101 percent between 1995 and 2010.

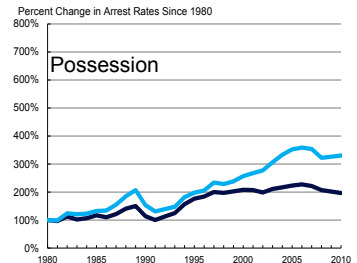
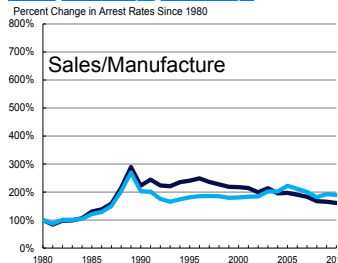
When arrests are viewed as rates — arrests per 100,000 — the relative growth in drug arrests among adult women is plainly visible, especially in arrests involving drug possession charges. In this way, the expansion of drug arrests after 1980 had a disproportionate effect on women.

Percent Change in Drug Arrest Rates Relative to 1980 Among Juveniles and Adult Offenders

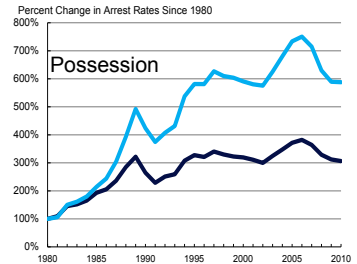
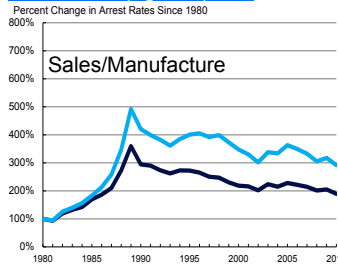
Juveniles (Under Age 18)



Young Adults (Ages 18-24)



Older Adults (Age 25+)



Female Male

Change in Arrests for Drug Offenses: 1980-2010

		Number of Arrests			Percent Change	
Juveniles (Under Age 18)		1980	1995	2010	1980-1995	1995-2010
Sale/manufacturing	Female	2,300	3,900	3,300	70%	-15%
	Male	14,000	40,500	22,100	189%	-45%
Possession	Female	15,900	20,600	24,700	30%	20%
	Male	77,500	130,800	120,900	69%	-8%
Young Adults (Ages 18-24)						
Sale/manufacturing	Female	8,300	12,600	15,800	52%	25%
	Male	51,900	107,300	86,600	107%	-19%
Possession	Female	26,300	43,200	87,000	64%	101%
	Male	199,800	303,000	407,900	52%	35%
Older Adults (Age 25+)						
Sale/manufacturing	Female	7,400	37,400	32,100	405%	-14%
	Male	45,900	162,500	136,500	254%	-16%
Possession	Female	17,100	126,200	150,700	638%	19%
	Male	114,600	488,200	551,100	326%	13%

Data source:

Snyder, Howard and Mulako-Wangota, J., Arrest Data Analysis Tool at www.bjs.gov. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice (1980-2009). Estimates for 2010 calculated directly using data from *Crime in the United States 2010*, Federal Bureau of Investigation. All estimates rounded to the nearest 100.