

## How much crime is drug related?

**When we think of the links between drugs and crime we usually think about dependent users of drugs like heroin and crack cocaine...**

... who commit crimes such as theft, burglary, fraud and shoplifting to get money to buy drugs. However, drugs and crime are also linked in a number of other ways including:

- People who use or supply illegal drugs getting caught see How many people are convicted of drug offences?
- People who commit violent offences while under the influence of drugs, particularly alcohol. Drunkenness is associated with a majority of murders, manslaughters and stabbings and half of domestic assaults.
- Alcohol and drug-related driving offences.
- Violence involving drug dealers who may clash with rival gangs or be violent towards drug users who owe them money.

Some research studies have found that a lot of acquisitive crime (stealing) is committed by dependent users of heroin and crack cocaine trying to pay for their drugs. Some show a high proportion of people arrested for a range of offences testing positive for drug use. It has been suggested that one third to over a half of all acquisitive crime is related to illegal drug use.

### Cost of drug-related crime

Examples of users needing 15,000 to 30,000 a year to fund drug habits have often been given. To make such amounts of money from stolen goods police often suggest multiplying by three on the basis that stolen goods will fetch about one third of their normal value. There are estimates of between 130,000 and 200,000 problematic drug users in the UK. That is a lot of theft, burglary, fraud or shoplifting if all are stealing to pay for things. This has led some people to suggest that well over half of all acquisitive crime is drug-related and that the market value of goods stolen involved could be between 2-2.5 billion each year.

This can all seem very frightening and has often been sensationalised in the media. The picture given may be exaggerated for a number of reasons:

- Many people who are dependent on drugs like heroin and crack cocaine were involved in criminal activity before becoming dependent on drugs, so the drug use may not be the cause of the crime.
- Poverty, unemployment and social exclusion are often underlying factors rather than the drug use itself.
- Many people commit crimes in order to feed, clothe and house themselves and their families.
- Some users have jobs, benefits or other forms of income that are used to purchase drugs.
- Many users do not use large amounts of street drugs all the time. Dosage and frequency of use may go up or down and they may also have access to other substitute drugs, such as heroin users being prescribed methadone.
- Most people who use illegal drugs (the majority are non-problematic users) do not commit crimes to get money to pay for the drugs.

Taking these factors into account researchers from DrugScope estimated that between one and 21 per cent of the total cost of acquisitive crime is associated with people who were dependent on heroin.

The fact that acquisitive crime is focused on poorer, inner city areas makes for a lot of stress and difficulty for people who live there. However, understanding the relationship between drugs and crime is about keeping matters in perspective rather than falling for media scare stories.

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### Related Links:



[Media guide - Drugs and crime](#) What are the links between drugs and crime?