

## *Drug Selling: A Rational Choice*

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Social life in America depends on employment. We attend college, and then some attend professional schools, such as law or medical school or graduate school, to earn an advanced degree that will increase their opportunities for gainful employment and a lifetime of ever-increasing annual salary. Our postretirement social security benefits, medical benefits, private retirement funds, savings, and investment accounts whose funds send students to college; recreation, and vacations are all based on income.

In short, our entire way of life is predicated on a good income, and good income is determined by strong professional or vocational education. If you are reading this chapter, you are most likely in college and within a few years will be seeking employment. The boundary that separates college students from the employment community lessens in social distance as students mature and earn a higher education. A college job fair is symbolic of the integration between the "real world" and college campuses. Employable students need employers, employers need educated students, and the social boundary between is (we hope) virtually seamless. The community you want to enter is socially and economically linked to the college campus. Given this social and economic picture, committing serious crimes, such as violent acts like armed assault or convenience store robbery or selling sizable quantities of illegal drugs, would jeopardize your future over the rest of your life and would not be a rationale decision.

In this chapter, the facts and conditions in the optimistic scene we have just painted change. Instead of a bright employment future and its

lifelong benefits, what would your course of life be if you were born into a community socially and economically isolated from the community that has all of the good jobs? Adding to community isolation, let us propose you were in your early twenties and had a poor education (less than high school) or a low level of education (high school) and no opportunities to gain employment training or a job within your own community. If you could secure a job in the main community, it would be a low-paying, dead-end job with no benefits. Further, let us propose that you commonly use drugs like marijuana, belong to a youth gang, and have been arrested many times. Enhancing that dismal scene, your parents have drug and alcohol dependency and/or addiction, poor levels of education, poor to mediocre employment histories, are most likely unemployed at any time in the year, have convictions on a range of felonies, and have served prison terms. Still further, let us propose that all your friends were like you: poor and badly educated with families like yours, which means you can get no help from them in finding a job.

In this chapter, we will discuss how young women the age of college coeds cope with virtually insurmountable social and economic barriers in a poor community that has been socially and economically isolated for more than eighty years. We will show that selling illegal drugs to earn a living is a rational choice in such an isolated community. Finally, we will discuss solutions to these types of social problems so prevalent in modern America.

### **COMMUNITY RESEARCH**

The poor community we have just described exists on the north side of Champaign, Illinois. Local folks call this place the "north end." The north end looks like most poor communities, and the social processes we describe here are not visible as one drives through the north end. Chances are, if you were to drive all over Champaign's north end, you would not be able to recognize the research site and separate it from other poor areas.

The north end has changed over the past five years; high-crime-gang public housing projects have been replaced by modern housing available

to low-income families. Aggressive policing has closed many active drug houses and forced young drug sellers to move away from lawns and corners. Illinois state laws changed too, and now if someone is caught in possession of an illegal firearm, even if the firearm was not used in a crime, that person will serve many years in prison. Those who would have carried guns in the past have given up that practice in favor of a more cautious lifestyle. Nevertheless, men's and women's gangs are active, illegal drugs are sold, and north-end residents are very poor. One reason for such poverty is absence of full-time employment suitable to late adolescents and young adults in this community. There are only a few stores, and none have more than a few employees. If young residents want full-time employment, those jobs are sixty to ninety minutes away by community bus. The expense to commute costs about one hour of net pay per day.

The current study was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Grant 2000-JR-VX-0006). This research was a multiyear field study designed to analyse the multiple functions of women's gangs in a small black community with entrenched poverty. Many years of prior field research on the north end on other federally funded projects led to the observation that women's gangs have more prosocial than antisocial functions. A prosocial function means that social arrangements of women who claim a gang affiliation serve a purpose other than the commission of crime. That purpose may be to provide each other social and emotional support or to help care for one another's children. An antisocial function refers to the sale of illegal drugs or the commission of crime whose origin and purpose are directly related to gang activity such as organized drug selling. We will argue here that while selling marijuana is illegal, such activity serves a positive function in the specific context of social and economic life on the north end.

This research uses the term gang women to refer to the category of adolescent, young adult, and adult women who assert membership in one of the north end's three highest-membership gangs, the Gangster Disciples (GD), Vice Lords (VL), and Black P-Stones (Stones). We will distinguish between *active* and *inactive* gang members. An active gang member is an adolescent girl or young adult woman who identifies herself as spending a lot of time on the street hanging out with gang members. Hanging around the street signals gang affiliation and

symbolizes a lifestyle shift. Many gang women said that spending more time on the street and less time at home and school caused (or increased) a rift between them and their mothers. That conflict leads to more time away from home. Time on the street may or may not include the commission of crime. On the north end, a girl can be a gang member and never commit a crime. Time (a lot of time on the street versus a little time), location (street versus school or family houses), and degree of interaction (time spent with other gang members) are key elements in gang members' concept of what it means to be a gang member. An inactive gang member spends little or no time hanging on the street, preferring to spend time at home, and reduces her number of friends acquired in the active gang phase. In no case did an inactive gang member say she "quit the gang," meaning she abandoned her claim to be a gang member and severed relations to long-term gang friends. It seems, then, that quitting the gang means spending less time on the street and more time with a smaller cohort of good friends.

This chapter talks about female gang members (data were gathered from seventy-four gang women). Do not misinterpret what it means to be a gang member on the north side: These gang members are not crazed, drug-ridden teenagers who assault one another and engage in crime all day, every day. In fact, groups of gang friends do not commit crime continuously day after day. Self-report data (that is, interview data) on intracommunity social and instrumental support relations, in addition to observations of daily behavior, show that crime, such as drug selling, when it does occur—and it may occur infrequently, or occur over a few weeks and stop—occupies little time each day. A set of gang friends may spend ten times more time each day watching television or riding around together than all of them spend doing illegal things. It was the purpose of this study to understand the complexities of gangs' pro- and antisocial functions within the broad context of community life.

## THE NORTH END

Champaign's poor, black north end has a poorly documented history. Local residents on the north end say that the reason blacks are in Champaign is because their ancestors could not read, and when the St. Louis

**Table 12.1.** Comparison of the Study Site, Census Tract 2, to Census Tract 7, 1970 & 2000

	1970		2000	
	Tract 2: Study Site	Tract 7	Tract 2: Study Site	Tract 7
Total persons	2,740	3,794	1,583	3,479
Race				
White	5.4%	83.6%	8.5%	41.1%
Black	94.3%	15.7%	86.5%	43.4%
Education				
Less than 9th grade education	24.3%	16.9%	8.0%	11.1%
High school but no diploma	22.9%	29.9%	17.1%	18.5%
Median family income (1999 dollars)	\$25,798	\$37,584	\$24,107	\$30,142
Families below poverty level	31.5%	8.9%	35.7%	16.9%
Owner-occupied households	33.7%	36.8%	52.1%	56.8%
Renter-occupied households	66.3%	63.2%	47.9%	43.2%

(Source: U.S. Census Bureau website)

to Chicago train stopped in Champaign, they saw "Ch. . ." and thought they were in Chicago. Census data are marginally helpful in the history of the north end. For the years prior to 1960, there are no census tract data, leaving only a general idea of how the black population increased but no data on where blacks resided.

The north end is a socially well-integrated community with a cultural identity. Poverty has described for decades the north end's economic and physical conditions, but north end social life is rich in mutuality and social support. Outsiders see the black community as an area of disheveled wood-frame houses, rusted and junk cars, and youngsters hanging around corners and parks, and interpret these sights through the lens of north end gangs, drugs, and violence used by local media. Table 12.1 compares two adjacent census tracts with a high percentage of black residents. Tract 2 is the study site.

The culture of the north end black community has been emerging over decades and adapting to economic and social life on the margin of white society. Don't misunderstand what this statement means: The dominant Champaign community has not deliberately kept north end residents socially and economically isolated. Champaign is a community rich in social services and programs for poor families and children. The boundary between the white and black communities evolved over the

first seven decades of the twentieth century. The north end, like other large black communities, such as the South Side of Chicago, was home to blacks migrating from the South after the Civil War, and in the years since, race relations and class structure in America have kept poor black communities isolated from dominant communities. To be sure, the dominant middle-class community has many black residents whose life course has been different from the life course of gang women on the north end.

There is no fence or security checkpoint between the north-end research site and the dominant community. North end residents are as free to go into town as anyone else, but the fact is, they don't. Residents do not feel especially isolated—even though they are—nor do they say that racism (deliberate indifference to group because of skin color) or class-ism (middle- and upper-class deliberately ignoring the problems of lower-income classes) caused today's poverty. The separation between the dominant and minority communities occurred in the late nineteenth and first two-thirds of the twentieth centuries and has become institutionalized (that is, firmly established) in the social structure (usual patterns of interpersonal or intercommunity relationships) and social organization (normal patterns of how people interact and choices for interaction). Gang women have said overwhelmingly that their joblessness and lack of employment training are their own doing. They say they have not tried hard enough to get a job or job training and that they could have done better but didn't. This honesty is admirable. Nevertheless, such honesty is embedded in a social structure neither they nor the dominant community can effectively alter without deliberate efforts to initiate and prolong social change that might draw the two cultures together.

Social distance and social structure are not difficult to understand if we interpret these concepts of the gang women's world on a college campus. Every college clearly and unmistakably, though without deliberate effort, separates faculty from undergraduates, undergraduates from graduate students; even within the ranks of faculty, there are stratifications (divisions) that carefully sort assistant, associate, and full professors, according rights, privileges, and income by rank. In this social context, educational services are delivered to students. But education is a mutual decision: Professors have to try their best, and so do students. How many college students do not attend class and then wonder why they received

a poor grade? How many students never use a professor's office hours to get assistance? How many students choose to hang out with friends instead of studying and then wonder why their grades are poor? Absence, hanging out, and apathy are personal choices, but those choices are made and interpreted within the social system of the college community.

College students, like gang women, live with the consequences of their own decisions. But there is a critical difference between the context—community social structure and organization—of north end gang women and of college students: A college is designed to provide education and help to students. Professors' tenure and livelihood (income) depend on service delivery. Campuses try hard to create an open system of social interaction between students and professors. Students do not (or should not) feel alien on campus; professors' office doors are (or should be) open; professors teach students many times each week, and over the course of a semester, the social distance between students and professors may likely diminish as these social groups get to know one another.

The "real world" has no such rules of social engagement. Community police departments may facilitate an increase in social distance by using aggressive drug and other crime suppression strategies. Social service agencies are available to provide opportunities (job training) and material goods (food, housing), but the physical and social distance between the "haves" and "have-nots" is great, and if the system of service delivery is not geared for people who cannot read and write well, social distance is enhanced, to the point that the have-nots do not even try to get service. These patterns of social structure and organization between the community with resources and the community without resources has a history and is influenced by race, class, and attitudes and values about racial groups. In a social system where social distance has been great over a long time, such distance will likely remain that way. Have-nots cannot change the patterns of interaction to assist themselves.

We can measure the patterns of social isolation on the north end by asking gang women about their ties to the dominant community. Table 12.2 details the results of asking gang women about their contacts with the dominant community.

Less than 30 percent of the sample report leaving the north end to participate in social activities. Few girls (4.1 percent) belong to any

**Table 12.2.** Community Involvement

	Total (N = 74)	
	Number	Percent
Do you attend church?		
Every week	4	5.4
2/3 times a month	14	18.9
Once a month or less	23	31.1
Never	33	44.6
Do you belong to any clubs, community organizations, or volunteer groups?		
No	71	95.9
Yes	3	4.1
Over the past 3 months, how many times have you left your neighborhood to participate in social activities with people who do not reside in or near your neighborhood?		
0	52	70.3
1-3	11	14.9
4 or more	11	14.9
Has anyone in the community offered you job placement services, child care, health care for your children, or any similar type of service?		
No	52	70.3
Yes	22	29.7
Types of services		
Child care	15	68.2
Other	7	31.8

Champaign community organizations or groups other than those linked directly to children (informants thought of subsidized day-care centers, for example, as community organizations). Similarly, most girls (70.3 percent) report never having offers of job placement services, childcare, health care, or similar services inside their community. The seeming exception to the lack of involvement lies around church attendance: A slight majority of girls (55.4 percent) do report church involvement; however, more than half of the attending girls go once a month or less.

In summary, gang girls report a stable history of poverty and community isolation. The current sample is drawn from families who felt the results of early racial bias that contributed to the formation of what is today a racially segregated, isolated portion of the main city. Gang women in this study grew up together on the north end in residences, such as public housing apartments, that were close to one another. In a

real sense, gang membership represents social ties among gang women who shared childhood experiences.

### DAILY LIFE AMONG GANG WOMEN: ROUTINE ACTIVITIES

How many times have we (college-educated men and women) heard that rising early and working hard are necessary prerequisites to adult work life? A college course schedule may begin at 7:45 in the morning and continue until 5:00 in the afternoon. Students are expected to live that routine and are told that their high school routine supplemented with part-time and full-time jobs in adolescence prepared them. When college graduation comes, students become employees and now may have to begin a commute to work at six in the morning, work eight or nine hours, and then commute home at six or seven in the evening. The point is that preparation for full-time employment began in childhood and has been institutionalized into the fabric of social life in America.

On the north end, the patterns of daily social life are different because work is not a dominant influence on people's lives for the reasons we just outlined. To be sure, north end residents do not want to be poor and jobless, they do not want to be poorly educated, they do not want to be economically distant from entry-level jobs that lead to good-paying jobs that can support a family. But the fact is, they are poor, jobless, isolated, and have no access to jobs except dead-end, low-paying jobs that lead nowhere. They cannot change the facts of their social world. Table 12.3 describes routine activities among active and inactive gang women.

These data show a lifestyle that is not centered on rising early and working all day. We have explained why the north end lifestyle looks the way it does, but if gang women are going to change what they do, there should be an inducement greater than working for six dollars an hour, eight hours a day, and then losing 50 percent to taxes. That economic situation does not solve their economic problem anymore than it would solve the same problem in the dominant community. Remember too that the sampled gang women are college-age. We ask rhetorically, "How many college students rise at seven to attend all of their classes or spend the days reading and studying in the library?" "How many college students do not drink alcohol or use illegal drugs, such as marijuana?"

**Table 12.3.** Routine Activities

	Total (N = 74)		Active (N = 33)		Inactive (N = 41)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Weekday bedtime						
Before 10 pm	16	21.6	7	21.2	9	22.0
11-12 pm	24	32.4	8	24.2	16	39.0
After midnight	34	45.9	18	54.5	16	39.0
Weekday wake-up						
Before 8 am	26	35.6	13	40.6	13	31.7
8-10 am	28	38.4	9	28.1	19	46.3
After 10 am	19	26.0	10	31.3	9	22.0
Days per week drink alcohol						
0	28	37.8	9	27.3	19	46.3
1-3	24	32.4	11	33.3	13	31.7
4-7	22	29.7	13	39.4	9	22.0
Days per week smoke weed						
0	28	37.8	8	24.2	17	41.5
1-3	24	32.4	5	15.2	7	17.1
4-7	22	29.7	20	60.6	17	41.5
Average hours on a typical Saturday for the following actions (top 10 responses):						
Look for job, if you have no job	7.24		6.21		8.07	
Listen to music while standing around	7.15		5.61		8.39	
Drink beer/smoke weed	6.70		8.94		4.85	
Watch TV	6.35		5.45		7.07	
Ride around with friends	6.08		7.12		5.24	
Talk about getting a job	5.93		5.88		5.98	
Stand around corner/ lawn/porch with gang friends	4.66		6.73		2.95	
Do your laundry	4.50		2.55		6.07	
Sell drugs	3.23		6.09		.93	

We ask the reader to compare your daily lifestyle on comparable issues (for the term "gang," substitute your group of closest friends) during the regular semester, between semesters, over summer break, and on spring break to the activities of north end gang women and see how similar the lifestyles may be.

## SCHOOL TO WORK: OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

The single most significant difference between college students and the sampled gang women is education and the process of acquiring education from preschool to high school graduation and beyond. We think the link between education and income is indisputable: High school graduates over their life course earn millions of dollars less than college graduates. Educational achievement opens economic doors that have attached income levels. The GED was designed specifically for young men without high school diplomas returning home after World War II. High school graduates in the 1950s could work in factories and related industries linked to the post-World War II industrialization of America. Factory work earned a living sufficient to modestly support a family. In today's economic world, a GED or high school diploma opens no doors to economic prosperity or to jobs whose pay is sufficient to buy a house and support two children who aim to attend college.

Sampled gang women are caught in this social and economic bind. Even if community isolation and race were removed from our analysis, these women still have a poor education that leads them to only low-paying jobs. General observations for the total sample are listed below.

- Most gang women have had full-time jobs but did not have one at the time of the interview.
- Median self-reported weekly income was \$250. That is a projected annual income of \$13,000 per year for legitimate employment (assuming that women work full-time for an entire year). This annual income estimate contrasts sharply with the much lower annual income reported on federal income tax returns.
- Most women have never had assistance with obtaining full-time employment.
- For those women who did have help, it was black friends who helped them. This finding reinforces the social isolation of the north end black community from mainstream ties to employment.
- Full-time employment is frequent, short-term, and low-income (making it virtually identical to part-time employment).

**Table 12.4.** Full-Time Employment of Active versus Inactive Gang Women (N = 74)

	Total (N = 74)		Active (N = 33)		Inactive (N = 41)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
How many full-time jobs have you had?						
0	13	17.6	11	33.3	2	4.9
1	13	17.6	6	18.2	7	17.1
2-3	20	27.0	8	24.2	12	29.3
4 or more	28	37.8	8	24.2	20	48.8
Do you have a full-time job right now?						
No	51	68.9	28	84.8	23	56.1
Yes	23	31.1	5	15.2	18	43.9
What type of job do you have?						
Food service	7	30.4	1	20.0	6	33.3
Telemarketing	6	26.1	1	20.0	5	27.8
Other	10	46.5	3	60.0	7	38.9
Median weekly income	250		375		225	
Median duration of job in months	5.5		9		4	
Median highest hourly income	8		8		8	
Median duration of longest-held full-time job in months	8		6		12	
Did anyone ever help you get a full-time job?						
No	53	71.6	22	66.7	31	75.6
Yes	21	28.4	11	33.3	10	24.4
Who helped get full-time job?						
Friend	10	47.6	4	36.4	6	60.0
Family	7	33.3	5	45.5	2	20.0
Other	4	19.0	2	18.2	2	20.0
What race was that person?						
Black	21	100.0	11	100.0	10	100.0
Other	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
How many people do you know who now have a full-time job?						
Median	6		4		8	
What is your relationship to those people?						
Friends	50	67.6	18	54.5	32	78.0
Mom	27	36.5	8	24.2	12	29.3
Dad	20	27.0	13	39.4	14	34.1
Other relative	47	63.5	21	63.6	26	63.4

continued

**Table 12.4.** Continued

	Total (N = 74)		Active (N = 33)		Inactive (N = 41)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
What are the races of those people?						
Black	57	98.3	24	96.0	33	100.0
Other	1	1.7	1	4.0	0	0.0
Among the people you know with full-time jobs, have any offered to help get you one?						
No	44	59.5	16	48.5	28	68.3
Yes	30	40.5	17	51.5	13	31.7
What was your relationship to them?						
Friend	9	30.0	4	23.5	5	38.5
Family	20	66.7	12	70.6	8	61.5
Other	1	3.3	1	5.9	0	

Table 12.4 shows the full-time employment of sampled gang women by active versus inactive gang status.

The items below summarize differences between active and inactive gang women.

- Active women are much less likely to have had full-time employment or to have had full-time employment at the time of the interview.
- If they did have a job, they earned more than inactive women.
- Inactive women were much more likely to say they had filed a federal income tax return.
- Even though women reported filing a federal income tax return, most of them were unsure what a federal income was, when they last filed a return, and their adjusted gross income (AGI). No women knew the meaning of AGI.
- Inactive women were more likely to believe their lack of education was the main cause of their money problems.
- Inactive women were weakly attached to the full-time job market.
- The median time inactive women held full-time employment is approximately 50 percent shorter than active women. This time reduction is likely linked directly to childcare problems.
- A majority of inactive women had no assistance finding employment.

**Table 12.5.** Full-Time Employment of Gang Women with and without Children (N = 74)

	Total (N = 74)		Children (N = 48)		No Children (N = 26)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
How many full-time jobs have you had?						
0	13	17.6	2	4.2	11	42.3
1	13	17.6	8	16.7	5	19.2
2-3	20	27.0	16	33.3	4	15.4
4 or more	28	37.8	22	45.8	6	23.1
Do you have a full-time job right now?						
No	51	68.9	27	56.3	24	92.3
Yes	23	31.1	21	43.8	2	7.7
What type of job do you have?						
Food service	7	30.4	7	33.3	0	0.0
Telemarketing	6	26.1	6	28.6	0	0.0
Other	10	43.5	8	38.1	2	100.0
Median weekly income	250		260		200	
Median duration of job in months	5.5		5.5		6.5	
Median highest hourly income	8		8		8	
Median duration of longest-held full-time job in months	8		12		6	
Did anyone ever help you get a full-time job?						
No	53	71.6	34	70.8	19	73.1
Yes	21	28.4	14	29.2	7	26.9
Who helped get full-time job?						
Friend	10	47.6	5	35.7	5	71.4
Family	7	33.3	6	42.9	1	14.3
Other	4	19.0	3	21.4	1	14.3
What race was that person?						
Black	21	100.0	14	100.0	7	100.0
Other	0	0	0	0.0		

- Active and inactive women were linked to employment markets through blacks. This is another strong measure of the lack of bridging social capital between the black and the white community.

Table 12.5 shows the full-time employment of sampled gang women by whether they have or do not have children.

The items below summarize differences between gang women with and without children.

- Women with children were more likely to have had full-time employment.
- Women with children are weakly attached to full-time employment.
- Women with children were much more likely to have had a full-time job at the time of the interview.
- Women with children held jobs longer (median months of employment).
- Women with children were more likely to have filed a federal tax return.

A key fact emerges in these data: The median weekly income of gang women is \$250, assuming they work continuously all year. Let's assume their take-home pay is \$150 per week, or \$600 per month, or \$7,200 per year. A \$600 income may be sufficient if someone lives at home full-time and has financial support for food, clothing, and niceties of daily life. Relatively few gang women have such support. Fleisher and Krienert (forthcoming) found that these sampled gang women are financially and socially independent from their households by age fourteen. This fact is significant because it means that gang women must find additional forms of income, especially when they begin to have children at age seventeen. After having one child, sampled gang women establish their households, and that requires sufficient and regular income. Low income (\$600 per month) is insufficient to care for two, three, or four children.

These data show that the main cause of leaving employment is difficulties finding, keeping, and paying for childcare. If a mother has no relatives who are able to care for her children full-time each day, daycare costs will absorb a large portion of her net income. Soon, given such costs, full-time, dead-end employment becomes an irrational economic decision if there are other ways to earn as much or more income.

The friends of gang women provide access to illegal drugs and drug customers. When girls affiliate with a gang at age fourteen, the number and type of their friends and acquaintances dramatically increases (Krienert & Fleisher, 2001). These social ties give access to acquiring illegal drugs like marijuana and also provide access to drug customers such

**Table 12.6.** Drug Selling

	Total (N = 54)		Active (N = 24)		Inactive (N = 30)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Which drugs have you sold?						
Weed	41	75.9	19	79.2	22	73.3
Cocaine	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rock	40	74.1	19	79.2	21	70.0
Heroin	1	1.9	0	0.0	1	3.3
Median days each week you sell:						
Weed		7		4.5		7
Rock		7		7		6
Median weekly drug income:						
Weed		500		400		600
Rock		750		500		1000
Median cash for busiest drug week		1300		1150		1300
Median cash for slowest drug week		250		135		400
Have you saved any drug cash?						
No	23	42.6	6	25.0	17	56.7
Yes	31	57.4	18	75.0	13	43.3

as friends, friends of friends, and parents of friends (also see Fleisher, 1998). When gang women get pregnant (median age, seventeen) and stop hanging around the street, the number and type of friends decreases to approximately half of the number they had when they were active gang members. That reduction limits opportunities for drug and other crimes, which in turn forces inactive women, especially those with children, to find full-time employment. As we have seen, however, full-time employment is an insufficient source of income. Our moral objections to illegal drugs notwithstanding, women's economic response to end full-time employment and sell drugs or combine legal part-time employment with drug selling is a rational option available on the north end. Table 12.6 presents drug-selling data on active and inactive gang women.

Our data show that inactive gang women sell drugs more frequently per week (median days of marijuana selling is 7, versus 4.5 days for active women) and earn more money. Combined income per week for

**Table 12.7.** Drug Selling: Comparison between Women with and without Children

	Total (N = 54)		Kids (N = 34)		No Kids (N = 20)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Which drugs have you sold?						
Weed	41	75.9	25	73.5	16	80.0
Cocaine	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Rock	40	74.1	24	70.6	16	80.0
Heroin	1	1.9	0	0.0	1	5.0
Median days each week you sell:						
Weed		7		7		5
Rock		7		6		7
Median weekly drug income:						
Weed		500		500		375
Rock		750		1000		500
Median cash for busiest drug week		1300		1400		1150
Median cash for slowest drug week		250		300		185
Have you saved any drug cash?						
No	23	42.6	20	58.8	3	15.0
Yes	31	57.4	14	41.2	17	85.0

inactive women selling marijuana and rock cocaine is \$1,600, and \$900 for active women. This makes sense because inactive gang women have greater economic needs inasmuch as they live on their own. As detailed in Table 12.7, gang women with children have a median weekly drug income of \$1,500, versus \$875 for gang women without children.

Drug selling on the north end is relatively risk free unless it is done on street corners or a seller operates a drug house where customers come and go all day and night. Illegal drugs are obtained from people sellers know and sold inside of homes to people sellers know. What's more, drugs are sold continuously all day every day. Drugs are sold when gang women need money, and money can be obtained over a relatively short period of a few days. Gang women have said that when they need a lot of money quickly, they sell cocaine, but they do not like that, because cocaine selling has serious penalties. Selling small quantities of marijuana daily, say, six "bags" at \$20 earns \$120 per day, or \$1,600 per month. This money is earned at home and without the hassle of

commuting and finding childcare arrangements. In the context of the north end, a community that has been economically isolated for nearly one hundred years, drug selling versus dead-end legal employment is a rational economic decision.

### ASSESSMENT OF THE DATA: COMMUNITY CHANGE

By the time we get our first or second full-time job, we have a structure built around us that supports employment. We leave home, get into our car, drop off children at day care, and drive to work. Our household may have two full-time or a full-time and a part-time employee who earn sufficient income to maintain a household, plan for the future, and pay for day care.

Our research has shown that the north end offers few if any opportunities of gainful full-time or part-time employment that fits the qualifications of potential employees. What's more, even if there were close-by full-time jobs, sampled gang women are not prepared for more than entry-level, low-paying jobs. Employment data show that gang women have had many full-time jobs; these jobs used in sequence pay more per hour than a long-term part-time job. It makes sense, then, that women take full-time jobs one after another.

Employment outside the north end creates problems for gang women, especially those with children and who do not have families willing to support their children all day, every day. Day care outside the community is expensive and mothers need transportation; most do not have a car. Solving these problems requires more than a desire to work. Solutions require cash, planning, and a variety of assistance that north end gang mothers cannot provide for themselves.

Median household income in the north end (\$21,728) is half of the median income for the United States (\$41,994) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). It seems, however, that north end gang women, despite their poverty and lack of employment and an economic future that would surely displease us, aren't especially unhappy, nor do they wish to live lives like ours. None of them ever said they wanted to enter drug rehabilitation or try to find job training. None ever asked for our help to get community services that were outside their reach. None ever said they wanted lives like ours.

We are not suggesting that poor north end residents would rather be poor than rich, but these residents have adjusted to poverty's conditions and live with them in the same way that we adjust to the most uncomfortable and undesirable elements that support our lifestyles. Commuters spend hours on the road each way to sit in an office all day and work two, three, or four months or more simply to pay their local, state, and federal obligations.

Poor communities need a range of help, but such help has to be offered with the cooperation of the people in those communities. Threatening mothers with the loss of government benefits if they do not hold full-time employment is suppressive and, given our understanding of the north end, would not result in positive long-term change. Women have learned how to share and help one another, and as long as there is a means to acquire a little extra cash each month, life can be sustained. Full-time work yields full-time problems: Work requires day care, but day care is expensive; work requires travel, but travel is time consuming and expensive; work also requires leaving a community where one feels comfortable and entering a community where one may not be entirely welcome.

College students are tomorrow's community leaders. The solution to poverty is not and will never be found in the suppression of poor people; that only adds to their problems. Solutions can be found if we, the keepers of community resources, work in collaboration with residents of poor communities. That collaboration should begin by asking these people what they want! It then becomes our obligation to provide it in a way that is suitable to them.

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