

# Drug Violations in the City of Pittsburgh



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This brief presents an analysis of drug violations in the City of Pittsburgh from January 2005 through July 2015. It begins with a study of trends in the Pittsburgh drug violation rate, followed by an examination of the data on drug offense categories and drug types. Next, this reports analyzes the times of the day, week and year when drug violation reports are most prevalent as well as the geographic distribution of drug violations throughout the city. It concludes with an examination of the differences between adult and juvenile arrestees, according to drug category and drug type.

### Drug Violations Defined

The violation of laws prohibiting the production, distribution and/or use of certain controlled substances. The unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance. Arrests for violations of state and local laws, specifically those relating to the unlawful possession, sale, use, growing, manufacturing and making of narcotic drugs. The following drug categories are specified: opium or cocaine and their derivatives (morphine, heroin, codeine); marijuana; synthetic narcotics—manufactured narcotics that can cause true addiction (demerol, methadone); and dangerous non-narcotic drugs (barbiturates, benzedrine).

— *The FBI Uniform Crime Report*

This document offers four broad conclusions about drug violations in the City of Pittsburgh:

1. Drug violation rates have decreased in the City of Pittsburgh since 2005, accompanied by reductions in adult and juvenile arrest.
2. As drug violations decline, marijuana makes up a larger share of all drug offenses as compared to drugs in the opium/cocaine category.
3. The highest drug violation rates are reported near Downtown Pittsburgh, the South Side Hilltop neighborhoods, the Southside Flats and the North Side.
4. Nearly all reported drug violations culminate in an arrest, with nearly 20 times as many adults arrested as juveniles.

## 2. DATA

### 2.1. Sources

#### **City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police Offense Data**

The analysis in this report is drawn, largely, from incident data collected by the City of Pittsburgh Bureau of Police and reported under the FBI Uniform Crime Report. These data are available for incidents that occurred from January 2005 through July 2015, and include information about the location, date, time and clearance status of each incident. These data also include victim information, including age, race and gender, for the period January 2009 through July 2015.

#### **Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report (UCR)**

The Federal Bureau of Investigation collects crime data from police agencies nationwide. This brief uses data from the UCR to compare Pittsburgh's drug violation categories to national data.

#### **United States Census Bureau**

The analysis in this brief incorporates population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 Population Estimates Program to compute drug violation rates for the City of Pittsburgh.

#### **PGHSNAP, City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning**

The analysis of drug violation rates by neighborhood incorporates data from the City of Pittsburgh's Department of City Planning data tool, PGHSNAP. PGHSNAP offers population and demographic statistics derived from the 2010 U.S. Census.

### 2.2 Period of Study

Much of the analysis in this report is derived from incident records collected from 2005 through 2014, the most recent years for which complete and reliable City of Pittsburgh data are available. In comparing Pittsburgh to other U.S. cities and national statistics on drug violations, this report draws on data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program, which has released national statistics through 2014. Comparisons of drug violation rates or clearance rates, therefore, include comparisons to Pittsburgh's 2014 data.

### 3. ANALYSIS

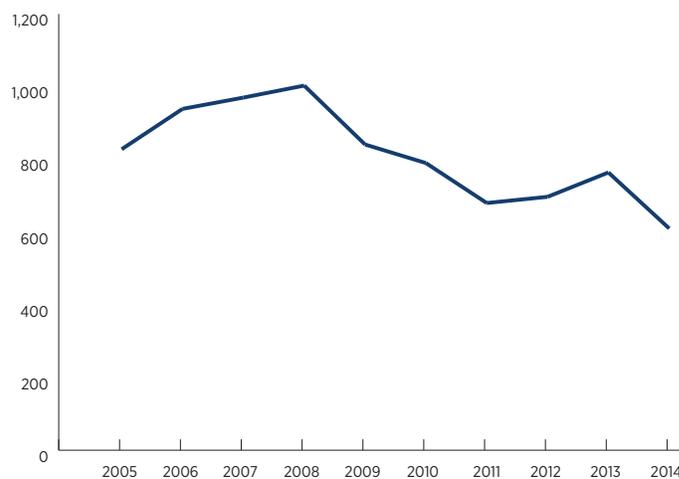
#### 3.1 Trends in Drug Violation

In 2014, Pittsburgh Police reported 1,864 drug violations across the city, for a rate of 610 drug violations per 100,000 city residents. Since 2005, the rate of drug violations has generally decreased, falling 26 percent over 10 years. **Table 1** details the year-over-year percent change in the drug violation rate across this 10-year period. **Figure 1** plots the drug violation rate for the same period.

**TABLE 1: Year-over-year percent change in the rate of drug violations in Pittsburgh, 2005 through 2014**

YEAR-OVER-YEAR PERCENT CHANGE	
2005	-
2006	13%
2007	3%
2008	3%
2009	-16%
2010	-6%
2011	-14%
2012	3%
2013	10%
2014	-20%
Ten-Year	-26%

**FIGURE 1: Drug violation rate in Pittsburgh, 2005 through 2014**

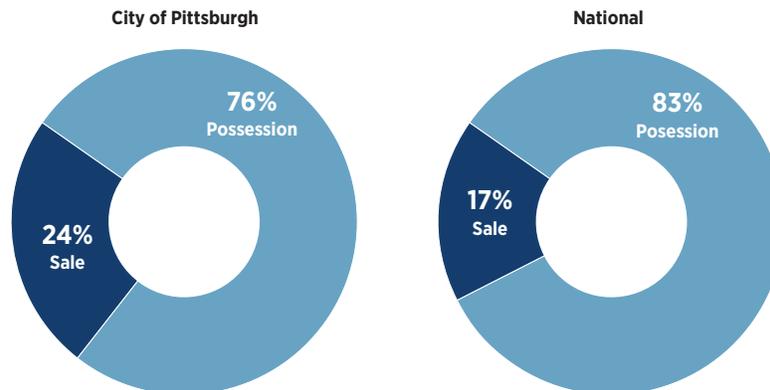


### 3.2 The Nature of Drug Violations

To effectively measure and track crime throughout the city, the Pittsburgh Bureau of Police collects data on the circumstances and methods of each reported crime. Officers who report a drug violation make note of the time and location of the offense, the type of drug involved and whether the violation involved drug possession or sale.

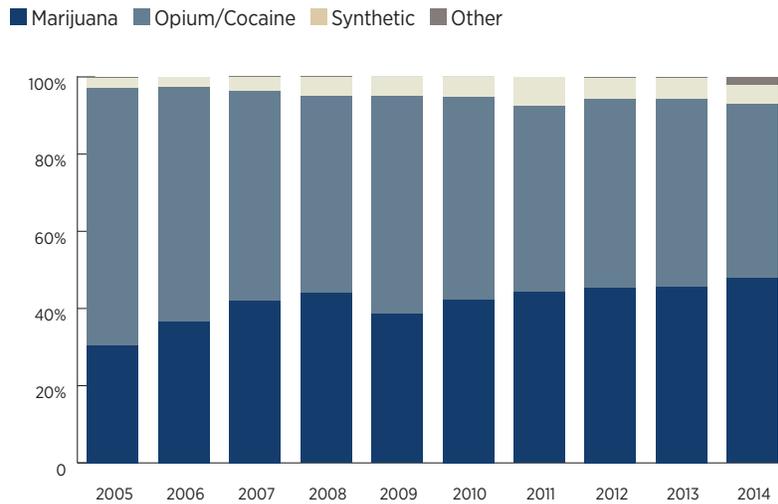
In the City of Pittsburgh, there are a greater number of drug possession violations than drug sales. In 2014, for example, 24 percent of drug violations were categorized as sales offenses, while 76 percent involved drug possession. Similar ratios of sales-to-possession are observed in police agencies nationwide. **Figure 2** compares Pittsburgh to all agencies across the U.S. As shown, drug possession constitutes a larger share of all drug violations nationally than it does in Pittsburgh (83% compared to 76%).

FIGURE 2: Percentage of drug violations, by category, 2014



Officers also report on the type of illicit drug involved in each drug violation case. **Figure 3** displays trends over 10 years in the percentage of total offenses attributed to each drug type. Although drug violations, overall, have decreased, a growing percentage of cases involve marijuana. This shift in drug proportions is due to rapid declines in the total number of offenses involving opium, cocaine, or a derivative, accompanied by modest, fluctuating declines in marijuana offenses.

**Figure 3: Trends in drug violations by drug type, 2005 through 2014**



### 3.3 Where Drug Violations Occur

A study of citywide drug violation rates can mask the variations in crime that exist across communities. Despite declines in the citywide drug violation rate, select neighborhoods and police zones of the City of Pittsburgh continue to experience high rates of drug violation offenses. **Figure 4** illustrates these disparities by comparing the rates of drug offenses across all City of Pittsburgh neighborhoods in 2014.

This map draws attention to several areas of the city with particularly high drug violation rates, including Homewood, the North Side, the Strip District, the Hill District and Downtown. Examining neighborhood-level rates, adjusted for residential population, allows for straightforward comparisons across neighborhoods and provides a more accurate assessment of the risk posed by illicit drugs to members of each community.

FIGURE 4: Drug violation rate, by neighborhood, 2014

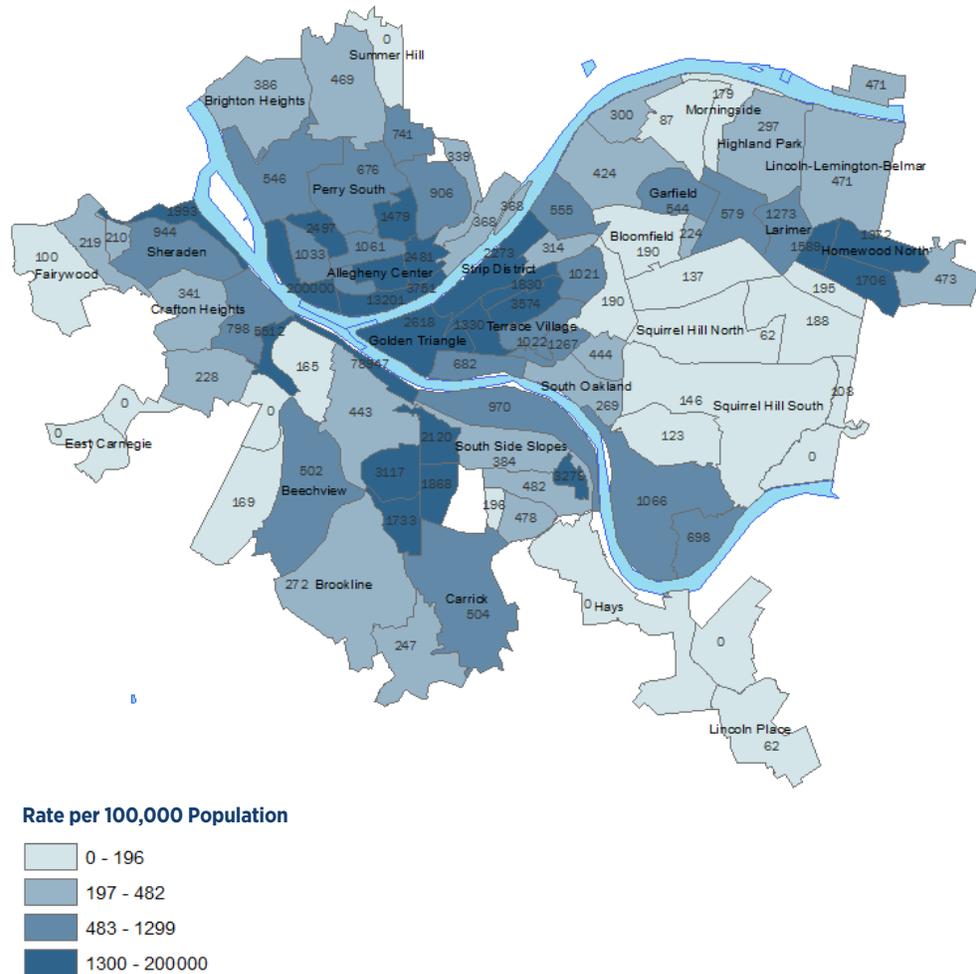


Table 2 lists the 10 City of Pittsburgh neighborhoods with the greatest number of drug violations in 2014 and their corresponding violation rates. In this table, as in the map of drug violation rates, we observe high levels of drug violation offenses in neighborhoods within the North Side and the South Side Hilltop neighborhoods, and near Downtown Pittsburgh.

TABLE 2: Neighborhoods with the greatest number of drug violations, 2014

NEIGHBORHOOD	DRUG VIOLATIONS	DRUG VIOLATION RATE
Central Business District	95	2,618
Knoxville	70	1,868
South Side Flats	64	970
Middle Hill	61	3,574
Beltzhoover	60	3,117
East Allegheny	53	2,481
Allentown	53	2,120
Carrick	51	504
Sheraden	50	944
Hazelwood	46	1,066

Due to variation in neighborhood crime rates, there are accompanying disparities in the number of drug violations within multi-neighborhood police zones. **Table 3** lists the number of drug violations, the share of violations and the drug violation rate of each City of Pittsburgh police zone. In 2014, the greatest number of offenses were reported in Zones 1, 2 and 3, which, together, contained 64 percent of all drug violations. Zone 3, which includes the South Side, had a particularly high number of violations, recording 415 violations in 2014 at a rate of 868 per 100,000 residents. By contrast, drug violations in neighboring Zone 6 occurred at a rate of just 434 per 100,000.

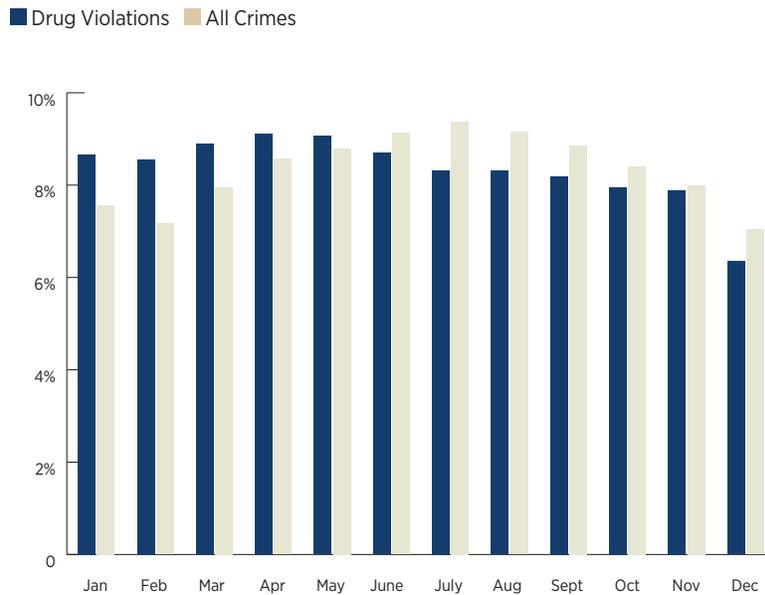
TABLE 3: Drug violations and drug violation rates within each City of Pittsburgh Police Zones, 2014

	DRUG VIOLATIONS	PERCENT OF TOTAL	RATE PER 100,000
<b>Zone 1</b>	401	22%	979
<b>Zone 2</b>	365	20%	1138
<b>Zone 3</b>	415	22%	868
<b>Zone 4</b>	213	12%	239
<b>Zone 5</b>	261	14%	519
<b>Zone 6</b>	197	11%	434

### 3.4 When Drug Violations Occurs

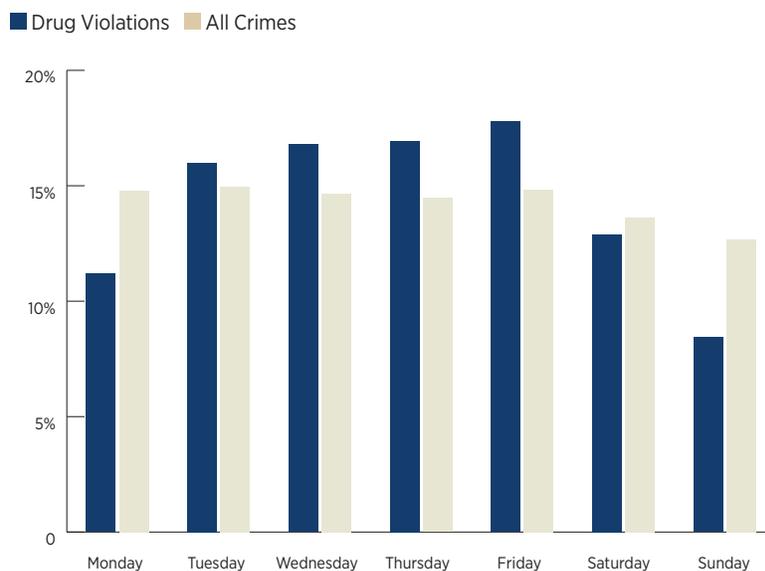
The prevalence of drug violations also varies depending on the month of the year, day of the week and time of day. **Figure 5** shows the share of drug violations that occurred in each month from 2005 through 2014, and contrasts that distribution with all crimes in the City of Pittsburgh. In the last 10 years, police have documented relatively higher rates of drug violation in January through June, with a much smaller share of violations reported in December.

**FIGURE 5: Percent of drug violations occurring each month of the year, 2005 through 2014**



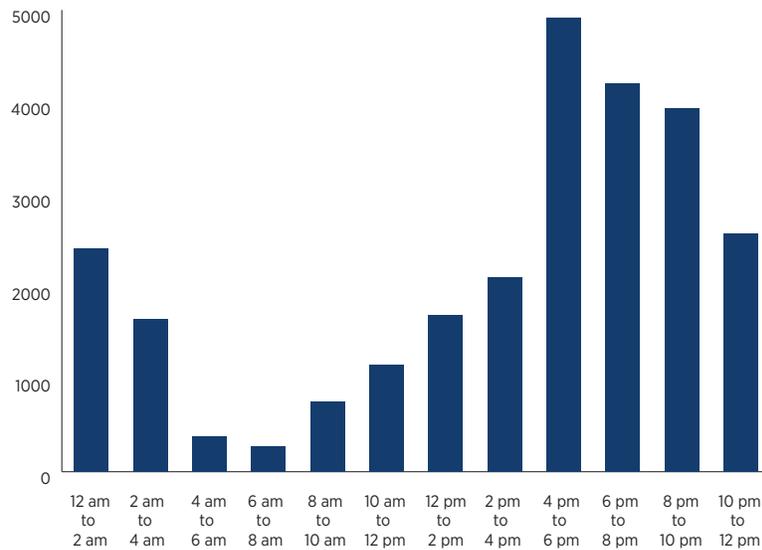
Reports of drug violations can also vary across a single week. **Figure 6** shows the share of offense that occurred on each day of the week from 2005 through 2015. This distribution is compared to the percentage of all crimes that took place each day throughout this 10-year period. While crime in general tends to be lower on the weekends, drug violations are particularly infrequent on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

**FIGURE 6: Percent of drug violations occurring each day of the week, 2005 through 2015**



Drug violations also fluctuate over the course of a day. **Figure 7** shows the distribution of violations across 12 two-hour time increments, as observed from 2005 through 2015. Drug violations are reported most frequently in the late afternoon and evening, with the largest share reported between 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm. These offenses occur least frequently in the early morning, particularly in the hours between 4:00 am and 8:00 am.

**FIGURE 7: Drug violations by time of day, 2005 through 2015**

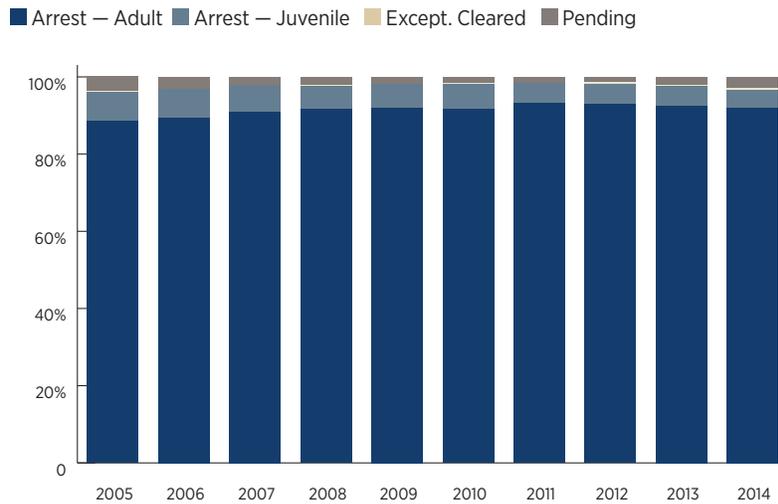


### 3.5 Drug Violation Arrests

When police learn of a crime, either through patrol activity or a victim report, they aim to quickly apprehend a suspect and close the case. Crimes vary, however, by the share of incidents that culminate in an arrest and case clearance. Many property crimes, for example, can be difficult to solve, particularly in the absence of any witnesses to the crime. By contrast, known drug violations produce very high clearance rates. This is because many drug cases are officially recorded as crimes upon the arrest of a suspect. For example, if police officers, in conducting a search, discover that a suspect is in possession of illicit drugs, they will arrest the suspect and, simultaneously, generate a new drug violation report.

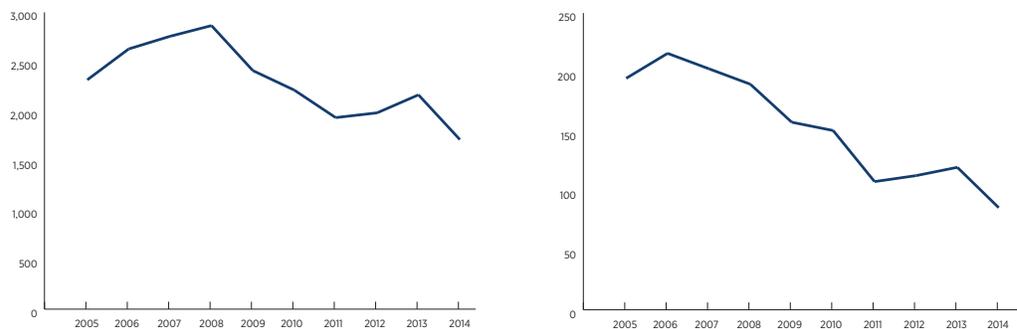
**Figure 8** shows the distribution of outcomes among drug violation cases over the past 10 years. While the share of pending cases has remained low, the ratio of adult arrests to juvenile arrests has increased. In 2005, seven percent of drug violation cases resulted in a juvenile arrest, compared to just five percent in 2014.

**FIGURE 8: Drug violations, by clearance status, 2005 through 2014**



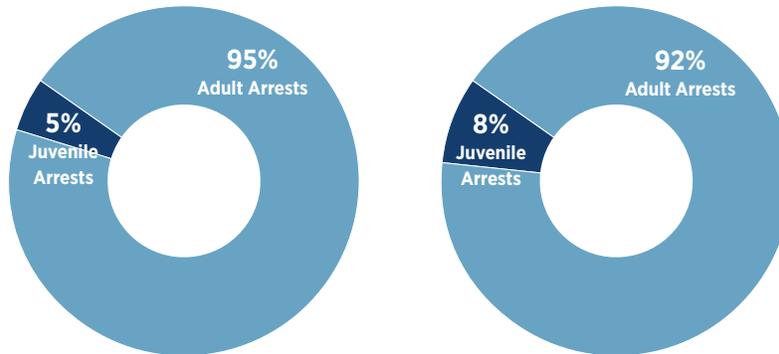
Although adult arrests have increased as a share of all drug violation outcomes, the total number of yearly adult arrests has actually declined. This shift in the percentage of adult arrests is due to more rapid reductions in the other case outcomes, including juvenile arrest. **Figure 9** compares the change in the number of adult and juvenile arrests from 2005 through 2014. Although both categories of arrest have declined, juvenile arrests have fallen by 56 percent, compared to 26 percent among adult arrestees.

**FIGURE 9: Trends in drug violations, by age category, 2005 through 2014**



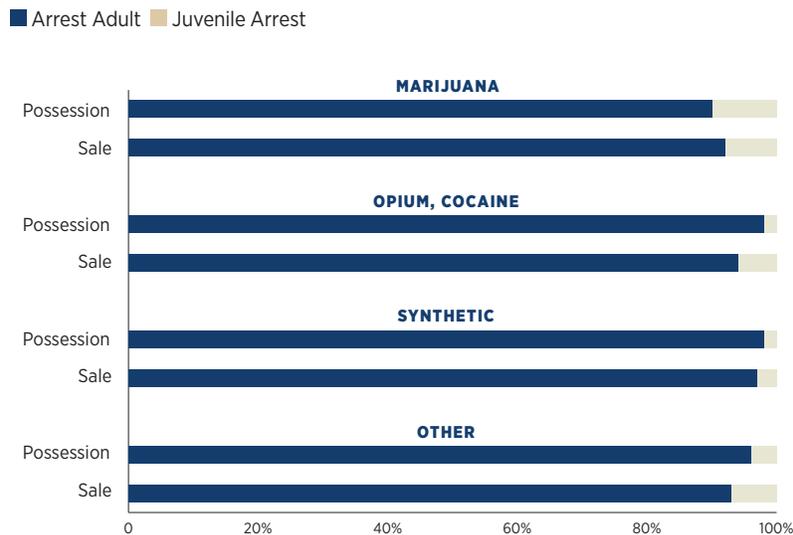
The sharp decline in the number of juvenile drug arrests has effectively lowered the ratio of juvenile to adult arrests in the City of Pittsburgh. As a result, Pittsburgh juveniles now constituted a smaller percentage of total arrestees than juveniles in cities across the United States (**Figure 10**). Just five percent of drug arrests in Pittsburgh involve a juvenile, compared to eight percent nationwide.

FIGURE 10: Percentage of drug arrests, by age category, 2005 through 2014



Juveniles arrested for drug violations tend to differ from adults in the types of drug offenses they commit. **Figure 11** compares the percentage of juveniles and adults associated with each category of drug violations from 2005 through 2014. As shown, the ratio of juvenile to adult arrestees is highest for marijuana possession, meaning that a larger share of marijuana possession arrestees are juvenile compared the share of juveniles arrested under every other category of drug violation. Interestingly, the ratio of juveniles to adults is higher for opium/cocaine sales than it is for the possession of these drugs.

FIGURE 11: Percentage of juvenile and adult drug arrests, by drug type and category, 2005 through 2014



**Figure 12** compares the most common drug violation categories for juvenile and adult arrestees over the last 10 years. Marijuana possession constituted the largest share of juvenile arrests for drug violations, with more than half of all juvenile arrests attributable to this offense. There are also a large number of juvenile arrests associated with opium, cocaine and their derivatives. While 24 percent of both adult and juvenile arrestees were arrested for selling opium/cocaine, a larger percentage of adults were arrested for possessing opium/cocaine than were juveniles (31% compared to 10%).

**FIGURE 12: Juvenile and adult drug arrests, by drug type and category, 2005 through 2014**

