

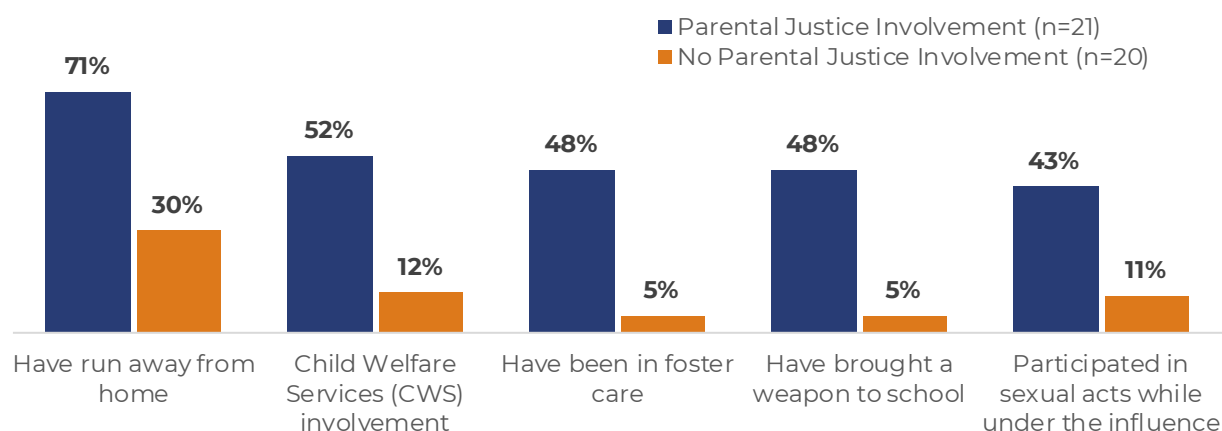
## Juvenile Arrestees with Justice-Involved Parents Report Higher Behavioral and Health Risks

As part of the Substance Use Monitoring (SUM) program, justice-involved youth in the San Diego region are interviewed about their drug use histories and associated risk factors.<sup>1</sup> In 2024, nearly all respondents reported using at least one illicit substance. Additionally, nearly half also reported that a parent or guardian had previously been arrested and booked. Findings revealed correlations between parental involvement in the justice system and elevated behavioral risks, higher rates of substance use, and increased prevalence of mental health challenges. This CJ Flash highlights the links between intergenerational justice involvement and overlapping challenges that often lead to adverse outcomes for youth. Additional findings are discussed in detail in the [SANDAG 2024 Juvenile Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region Bulletin](#).

### Highlight 1: Youth with justice-involved parents have a higher likelihood of facing behavioral, psychological and systemic risks

Youth who reported parental involvement in the justice system (i.e., parents or guardians who have been arrested and booked) showed significantly higher rates of behavioral and psychosocial risk factors compared to their peers who did not report such histories. Specifically, these youth were more likely to have had contact with child welfare services and foster care, and to engage in high-risk behaviors such as running away from home, bringing weapons to school, and engaging in substance-related sexual activity.

**Figure 1: Correlation Between Parental Justice-Involvement and Various Risk Factors\***



\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Notes: Caution should be used when interpreting findings, given that correlations do not imply causation and potential confounding variables were not accounted for.

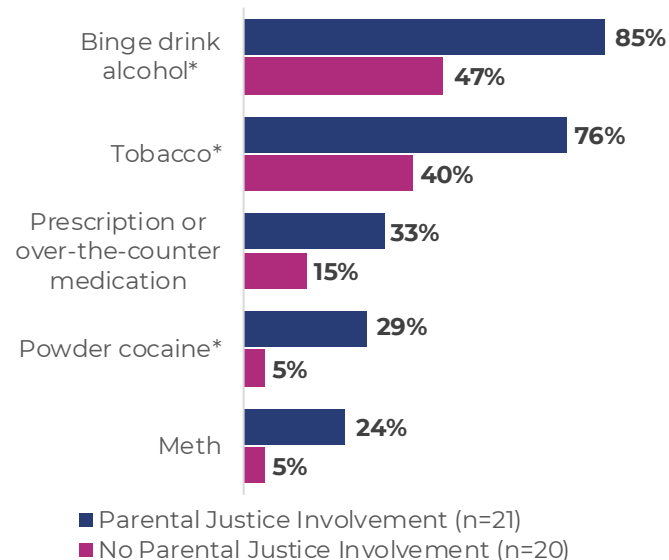
Source: SANDAG, 2025

<sup>1</sup> In 2024, a total of 41 youth participated in the study, including 19 from San Diego Achievement Centers, 15 from the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility, and 7 from the Youth Transition Center (YTC).

## Highlight 2: Youth with justice-involved parents reported higher rates of substance use

In addition to increased systemic and behavioral risks, youth who reported having justice-involved parents were significantly more likely to report binge drinking (85% vs. 47%), tobacco use (76% vs. 40%), and powder cocaine use (29% vs. 5%) compared to peers without such histories. They also reported higher rates of misusing prescription or over-the-counter medications (meth), though these differences were not statistically significant. Notably, 80% of youth with justice-involved parents also reported parental substance use histories (not shown), suggesting confounding risk factors. Together, these findings highlight the critical need for family-centered prevention and intervention strategies.

**Figure 2: Substance Use by Parental Justice Involvement Among Interviewed Youth**



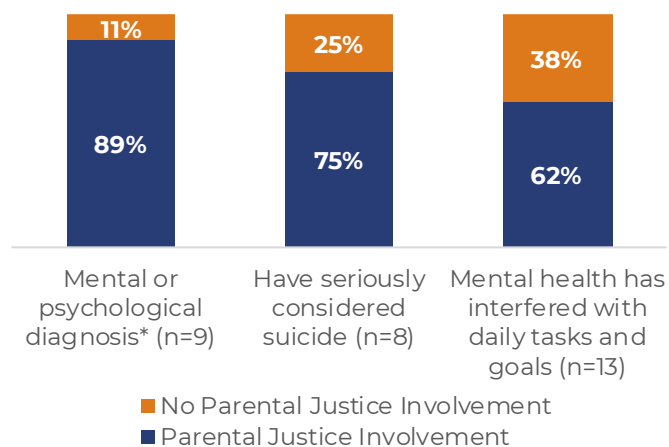
\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Source: SANDAG, 2025

## Highlight 3: Parental justice involvement was more common among youth facing mental health challenges

Youth with justice-involved parents also reported higher rates of mental health challenges across key indicators. Among youth with a formal mental or psychological diagnosis, 89% had a parent involved in the justice system. Similarly, a majority of those who had considered suicide (75%) and of those whose mental health interfered with daily functioning (62%) also reported parental justice involvement. Gender differences were also evident: females were more likely to report suicidal ideation (45% vs. 10%) and to say their mental health interfered with accomplishing tasks and goals (64% vs. 20%) than males, suggesting that gender may influence both the experience and reporting of these challenges (not shown).

**Figure 3: Mental Health Challenges by Parental Justice Involvement**



\* Significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Note: Findings should be interpreted with caution due to small sample sizes.

Source: SANDAG, 2025

