



brief B CJ

2021 Methamphetamine Use by San Diego County Arrestees

Data from the SANDAG Substance
Abuse Monitoring program

November 2022

Research findings from the Criminal Justice Clearinghouse

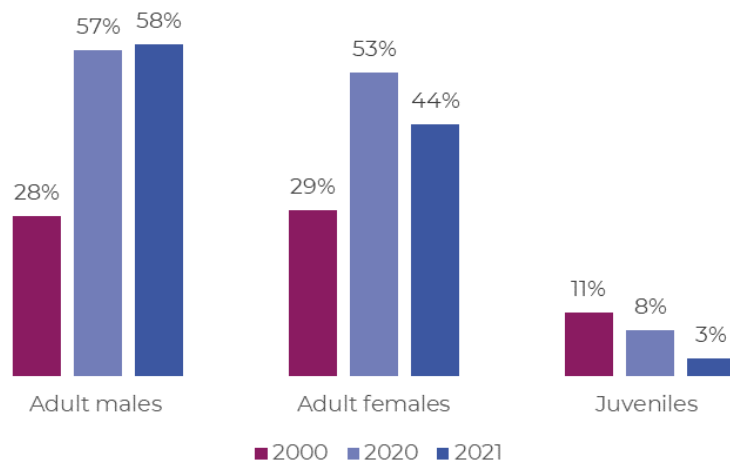
Introduction

Interviews with adult and juvenile arrestees regarding drug use and other risky behavior have been conducted by SANDAG since 1987. As part of this effort, all arrestees who are randomly selected to participate in the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program and report methamphetamine (meth) use in the past 30 days are asked to answer additional questions (i.e., the meth addendum). The meth addendum was added to the research protocol because meth has consistently been one of the most commonly used illicit drugs by arrestees in San Diego County and because of the risk the drug poses to the user, children in the household, and the community in general. This SANDAG CJ Brief summarizes what these individuals shared during their interview, including some quotes they provided at the conclusion of the conversation.

METH USE In 2021, the percent of adult males positive for meth was 58%, which was a slight increase from 2020 (57%) (Figure 1). For adult females, the percent positive decreased from 53% to 44% (Figure 1). The proportion of juveniles positive for meth decreased by more than fifty percent (3%) from 2020 (8%), however, this drastic change may be an effect of the smaller sample size that was used in 2021 (Figure 1).

“It’s horrible. I wish I never found it.”
-43-year-old male

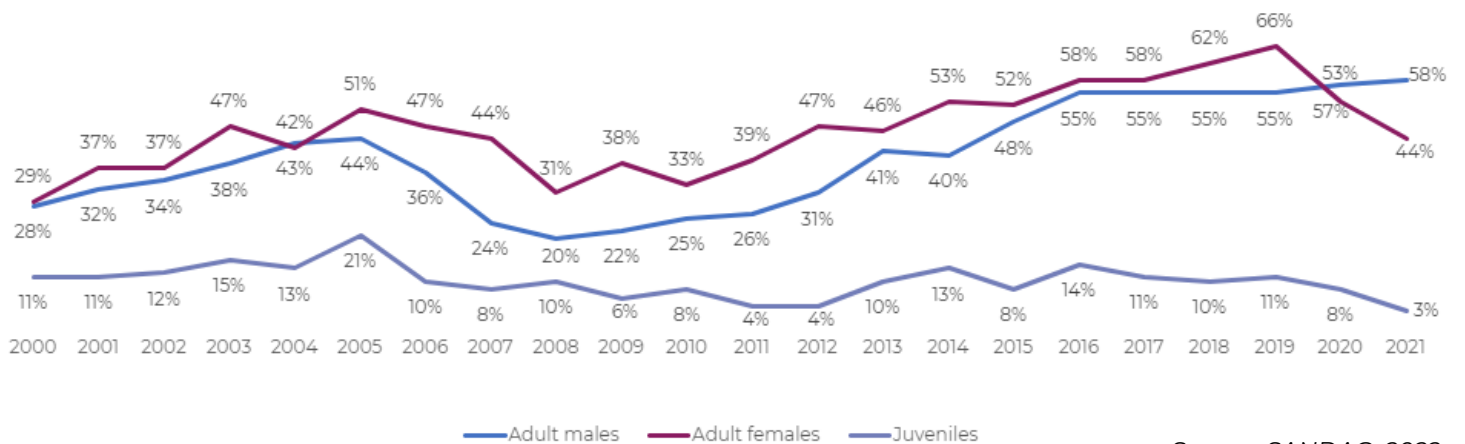
Figure 1
Percent of Arrestees Who Tested Positive for Meth in 2000, 2020, and 2021



Source: SANDAG, 2022

As seen in Figure 2, the percentage of juveniles who tested positive for meth in 2021 (3%) is a 22-year low. A similar trend of decline was seen in the percentage of adult females who tested positive for meth. However, the percentage of adult males who tested positive for meth in 2021 (58%) is a 22-year high (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Percentage of Arrestees Who Tested Positive for Meth in the Past Twenty-Two Years



Source: SANDAG, 2022

AVAILABILITY OF METH A 5-year comparison shows that a lower percentage of arrestees in 2021, compared to 2017, said that the quality of meth was worse this year; more said the price was lower; and around the same percent said it was more available (just under half) (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Meth-Using Arrestee Perceptions of Meth Availability, Pricing, and Quality



Source: SANDAG, 2022

Despite regional efforts to decrease meth use and availability, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)¹ reports that meth continues to be readily available with high purity and potency in the United States. To further probe the availability of meth, a series of questions asked interviewees to describe their daily and monthly usage. When respondents were asked how many times they used meth in a typical day of using, the average (mean) number of times was about 9 (Table 1). Interviewees were also asked what their longest usage streak was out of the typical 30 days in a month. The average (mean) streak of meth usage was around 18 days (Table 1).

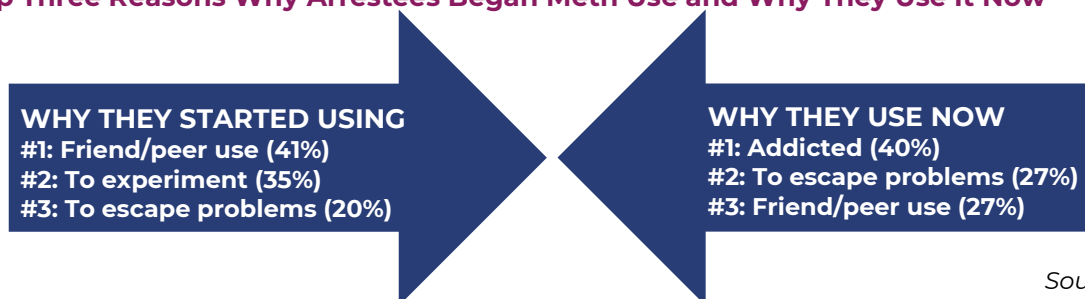
Table 1
Meth-Using Arrestees Report Using Meth on Average 9 Times A Day

Method for obtaining meth	Pattern of use (on average)	Mode of use
<i>How do "typical" meth-using arrestees get the drug?</i>	<i>How often and how much do they use?</i>	<i>How do they use it?</i>
95% purchased in San Diego County	Use 9 times in a day when they use	81% usually smoke it (alone or with another drug)
62% usually buy from someone else when main source not available	Use 18 days in a row during longest run in past 30 days	12% have also snorted it in the past year
59% have bought from someone they didn't know	Use 2 grams of meth each day they use	6% have injected it in the past year
47% have a main source		
39% have sold meth or acted as a middleman in last year		
34% have carried a weapon with them when they got meth		

Source: SANDAG, 2022

MOTIVE FOR METH USE When meth-using arrestees were asked why they first started using meth, the most common reasons included that their friends/peers were using, that they were experimenting, or they wanted to escape their problems. When asked why they use it now, the most frequent reason was being addicted, followed by using it to escape problems, and because of friend/peer use (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Top Three Reasons Why Arrestees Began Meth Use and Why They Use It Now

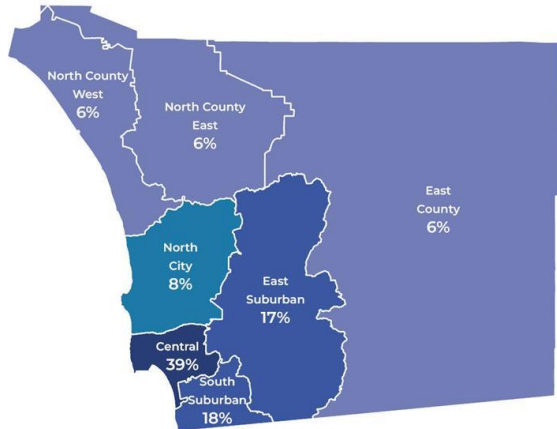


Source: SANDAG, 2022

¹Drug Enforcement Administration (March 2021). *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice. Available online: https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2021-02/DIR-008-21%202020%20National%20Drug%20Threat%20Assessment_WEB.pdf

LOCATION OF METH PURCHASE Most arrestees reported buying meth in either the Central, South Suburban, or East Suburban major statistical areas of the County in 2021.

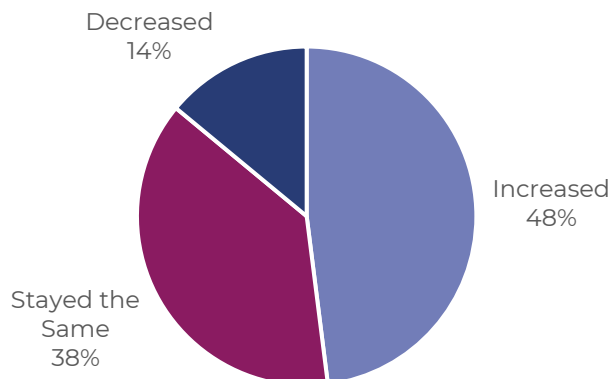
Figure 5
Most Meth Purchased in the Central Area of the County



Source: SANDAG, 2022

DEMAND FOR METH According to arrestees who engaged in distribution, 48% said the demand had increased in 2021 compared to the previous year.

Figure 6
Meth-Distributing Arrestees Perceptions of Its Demand



Source: SANDAG, 2022

54%

of those employed or who were a student reported using meth before going to work or school.

The most common job types reported by these arrestees were construction, food service, and mechanic.

“It ruined my life.”
 -42-year-old male

Study background

This SANDAG **CJ Brief, 2021 Methamphetamine Use by San Diego County Arrestees**, is part of a series of reports highlighting findings from data collected as part of the SAM program. As part of this program, adult and juvenile arrestees are approached within 48 hours of their arrest (and booking) to participate in an interview regarding their drug use and other recent behaviors. Additionally, because the number of youths booked into Juvenile Hall has considerably decreased in recent years, additional youth were interviewed at the San Diego Achievement Centers. In 2021, 227 male arrestees were interviewed at the Central Jail and 80 female arrestees at Las Colinas. Of these 307 arrestees, 305 (99%) completed the interview and provided a valid urine sample for analysis. Within this sample, 135 (44%) reported having used meth in the past 30 days, including 111 (82%) males and 24 (18%) females.

“Don’t do it. It’s the devil.”
-51-year-old male

Of the 55 juveniles interviewed at Juvenile Hall and San Diego Achievement Centers, 2 (4%) reported meth use in the past 30 days and both completed the addendum. These two youth included 1 boy and 1 girl.

Acknowledgements

This effort would not be possible without the cooperation of the San Diego County Sheriff’s and Probation Departments, and the funding support of the Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), County of San Diego, and SANDAG member agencies. To learn more about the SAM program and to access other current reports, as well as aggregate data from the meth addendum, please visit sandag.org/data-and-research/criminal-justice-and-public-safety/evaluation-services/drugs.

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