



Drug Market Dynamics Reported by Adult Arrestees in San Diego County in 2003

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Cynthia Burke, Ph.D., Division Director



401 B Street
Suite 800
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 699-1900

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INTRODUCTION

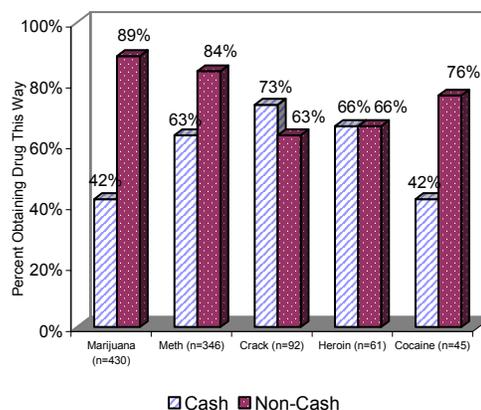
This is the third CJ Bulletin in a series from SANDAG summarizing data collected from local arrestees in 2003. As part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, adults arrested in San Diego County are interviewed in one of three local detention facilities about their past and current drug use¹. This current bulletin summarizes information shared by the arrestees about their drug purchasing behavior in the past 30 days. This information is useful to law enforcement and service providers in better understanding local drug market dynamics and creating effective interventions.

WHAT DRUGS DID ARRESTEES OBTAIN?

Overall, 61 percent of the arrestees interviewed in 2003 reported that they had obtained at least one illegal drug (marijuana, crack, powder cocaine, heroin, or meth) in the past 30 days. Marijuana and meth were the most frequently obtained (44% and 35% of the arrestees, respectively), with less than 10 percent obtaining one of the other three substances (9% crack, 6% heroin, and 5% cocaine). These proportions were almost identical to the percentages of arrestees reporting illicit drug use in the past 30 days (not shown). Because of this, these arrestees are referred to as drug purchasers and drug users interchangeably.

As Figure 1 shows, arrestees were significantly more likely to report they obtained marijuana, meth, and cocaine *without* paying cash, while crack users were more likely to pay cash. Heroin users were equally likely to obtain it either way. These differences could be related to the cost of the drug, the financial status of the users, as well as the situations in which the drugs are used, as discussed later in this bulletin.

Figure 1
ARRESTEES MORE LIKELY TO GET SOME DRUGS WITHOUT PAYING CASH



NOTE: Percentages based on multiple responses.

SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2003

How did the arrestees obtain drugs when they didn't pay cash? The most common way was that they received the drug as a "gift" (from 72% of heroin and meth users to 91% of cocaine users), most often when they were with the person at work or in a social situation. Others reported that they obtained the drug because they were somehow involved in the sale or transport of the drug (from 6% of cocaine users to 13% of heroin users), they traded merchandise or sex for it (from 1% of marijuana users to 10% of meth

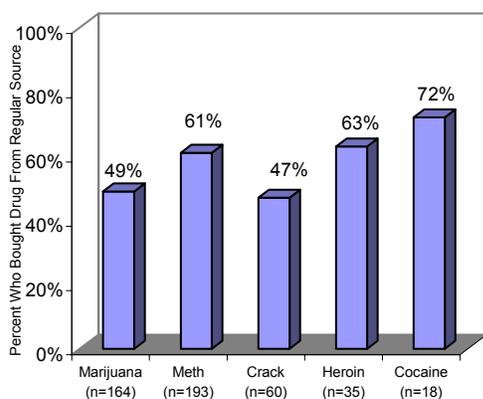
¹ More information about the SAM interview methodology is included in the first bulletin in this series which was released in September 2004.

users), or they obtained it some other way (not shown).

FROM WHOM DID THE ARRESTEES OBTAIN THE DRUGS?²

Arrestees were asked if they had obtained an illicit substance from their “regular source” the last time they got it. As Figure 2 shows, there was variation across the drugs with powder cocaine users most likely to report using a regular source (72%) and crack and marijuana users least likely (47% and 49%, respectively). When these arrestees were also asked how many dealers they had used in the past 30 days, the average was lowest for marijuana (1.80, range 1 to 10) and heroin (1.98, range 1 to 10), and was highest for crack (3.17, range 1 to 30) (not shown).

Figure 2
CRACK USERS LESS LIKELY TO HAVE A REGULAR DRUG SOURCE



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.
SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2003

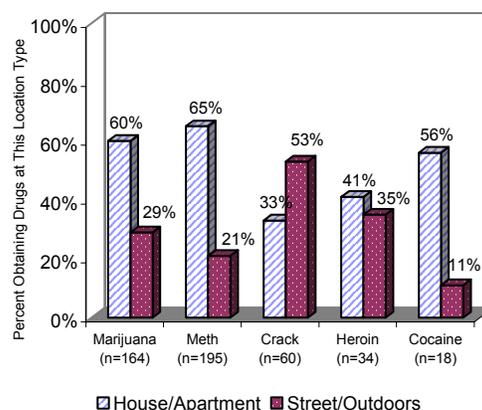
FOR WHOM DID THE ARRESTEES OBTAIN THE DRUGS?

More than four out of every five arrestees reported they only obtained the substance for themselves (from 82% for crack to 95% for cocaine) the last time they got it (not shown).

WHERE DID THE ARRESTEES OBTAIN THE DRUGS?

Arrestees reported obtaining drugs in a variety of venues, including a house or apartment and on the street. As Figure 3 shows, these locations varied by the substance being bought. Arrestees buying marijuana and meth were more likely to report they most recently got it at a house or apartment (60% and 65%, respectively) and crack users were more likely to report they had obtained it from someone on the street (53%). Other places, not shown in Figure 3, included public and abandoned buildings.

Figure 3
CRACK USERS MOST LIKELY TO GET THE DRUG FROM SOMEONE ON THE STREET



NOTES: Cases with missing information not included.
Percentages do not equal 100 because all response choices are not shown.
SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2003

² The remainder of this information pertains to cash drug transactions, unless otherwise noted.

When asked if they purchased drugs in their own neighborhood or went to another one, there was no significant difference across drugs. A little more than one-third (39%) of cocaine users got the drug in their own neighborhood, as did 44 percent of heroin users, 47 percent of meth users, 51 percent of marijuana users, and 54 percent of crack users (not shown).

HOW DID THE ARRESTEES OBTAIN THE DRUGS?

Arrestees reported a variety of means of contacting their dealer prior to conducting a cash transaction. Arrestees were consistently more likely to call the person, but there was variation, with marijuana (32%) and crack users (34%) least likely to use this mode of communication, compared to 47 percent of meth users, 56 percent of cocaine users, and 59 percent of heroin users. Rather, marijuana and crack users were more likely to report just seeing the person in public (21% and 31%, respectively). Cocaine (6%) and meth (13%) users were least likely to connect with a person in public and heroin users were more likely to page their dealer (15% versus 0% to 5% for other drug users). Cocaine, meth, and marijuana users were more likely to connect with a dealer at work or in a social situation (11% to 17% versus 3% for the other two) (not shown).

HOW OFTEN WERE ARRESTEES UNABLE TO BUY DRUGS?

About one in three of the arrestees reported that there was at least one time in the past 30 days that they tried to obtain a particular substance but were unable to do so for some reason (e.g., the dealer did not have any). These percentages ranged from 27 percent for heroin to 34 percent for marijuana and crack. The exception was cocaine, with only five percent (1 in 19) reporting this situation had occurred in the past month (not shown).

HOW MUCH MONEY DID THE ARRESTEES PAY FOR THE DRUGS?

Arrestees were asked how much money they had spent the last time they obtained a particular substance, as well as how often they had bought the drug in the past 30 days. As Figures 4 and 5 show, heroin, meth, and cocaine purchasers spent the greatest amount of money per transaction and were also among those who bought the drug with the greatest frequency. For heroin, the median buy was \$30 (range \$10 to \$700) and the drug was purchased about every other day (15 days, range 1 to 30). Meth users spent an average of \$40 (range \$4 to \$2,600) per buy and purchased the drug a little more than once per week (5 times, range 1 to 30). The median amount spent for cocaine was \$50 (range \$5 to \$600) and the drug was purchased just under twice a week (7 times, range 1 to 30). While crack users spent less on each buy, they bought the drug with almost the same frequency as heroin users.

For non-cash transactions in the past 30 days, meth users reported receiving the drug more frequently than crack and heroin users at once a week (4.0 times, range 1 to 30). Cocaine users received the drug on a non-cash basis least frequently (1 time, range 1 to 12) (not shown).

Figure 4
COST OF MARIJUANA AND CRACK BUYS
AVERAGE LESS THAN OTHER DRUGS

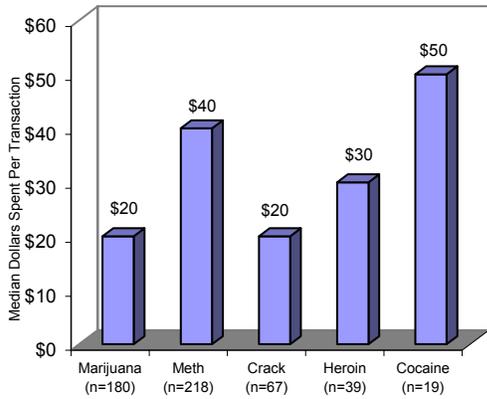
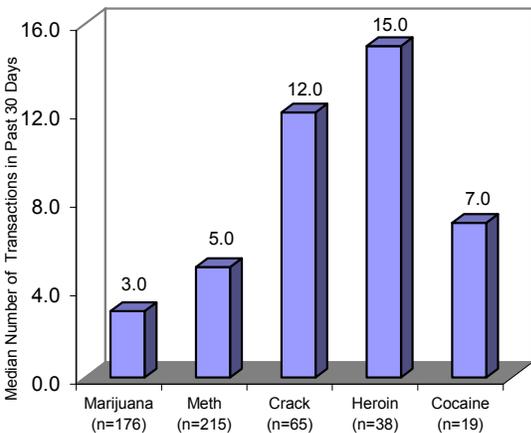


Figure 5
CRACK AND HEROIN USERS PURCHASE
DRUGS MORE FREQUENTLY



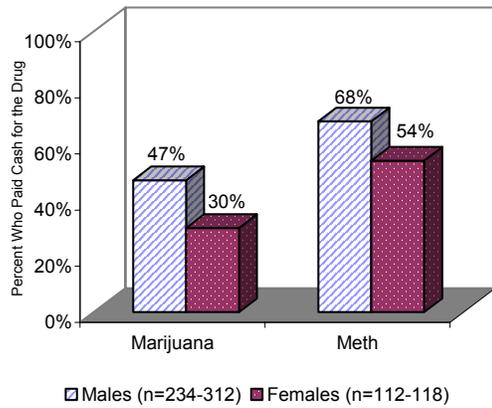
NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.
SOURCE: SANDAG SAM PROGRAM, 2003

WERE THERE ANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE ARRESTEES?

While there were no gender differences in drug use in the past 30 days for marijuana or meth, there were some differences in how arrestees reported obtaining drugs in this same timeframe. Specifically, females who obtained marijuana or meth were significantly less likely to get it by paying cash

(30% and 54%, respectively), as Figure 6 shows. In comparison, 47 percent of the males reported receiving marijuana by paying cash and 68 percent got meth this way.

Figure 6
FEMALE ARRESTEES LESS LIKELY TO GET
MARIJUANA AND METH BY PAYING CASH



NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.
SOURCE: SANDAG SAM PROGRAM, 2003

SAM BULLETIN SERIES

The fourth and final bulletin in the 2003 SAM data series will be available in February 2005 and will outline data from the meth addendum which is completed with adult and juvenile arrestees who report meth use in the past 30 days. If you have any questions or comments regarding the SAM data, please contact Lisbeth Howard in the Criminal Justice Research Division at SANDAG (619-699-1900). Thank you for your interest and support.