



# Methamphetamine Use by Adult and Juvenile Arrestees in 2006

September 2007

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# METHAMPHETAMINE USE BY ADULT AND JUVENILE ARRESTEES IN 2006

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## INTRODUCTION

This CJ Bulletin is the third in a three-part series presenting Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) data collected in calendar year 2006. Information collected from the SAM project provides useful, objective indicators regarding drug use trends over time, as well as other information regarding treatment access, distribution, and other risky behaviors of concern. As part of this effort, all arrestees randomly selected to participate in the SAM project who report methamphetamine (meth) use in the past 30 days are asked to complete a meth addendum. Questions on the addendum, which are described in the following sections, pertain to how the arrestees obtain meth, use it, their involvement in distribution, the effect it has on their lives, and their involvement in treatment services.

In San Diego County, law enforcement, community-based organizations, and other prevention and treatment agencies and coalitions are continuing to focus efforts toward the issue of meth use in our communities. How did San Diego do at addressing meth use in 2006? As described here, and consistent with other measures compiled by the Methamphetamine Strike Force as part of its annual report card ([www.no2meth.org](http://www.no2meth.org)), local comprehensive and coordinated efforts may be associated with recent decreases in a variety of indicators related to meth availability and use to levels seen prior to 2005. However, it is important to note that continued efforts are necessary, as use remains a primary concern in western states<sup>1</sup>.

## BULLETIN HIGHLIGHTS 2006 METH USE

- Around half of arrestees who used meth recently reported it was more expensive in the past year and a greater percentage reported it was harder to obtain, compared to 2005.
- As in prior years, both adults and juveniles reported they first tried meth because their friends were using it or they just wanted to experiment. However, one in three now say they are addicted.
- The typical arrestee reported smoking meth about three times a day, consuming almost one gram overall.
- Two-thirds of adult arrestees reported going to work after using meth.
- Sleeplessness, weight loss, legal problems, and family problems were among the most common problems reported by these meth users.
- One in every two arrestees participated in meth distribution in the last year, either selling it or acting as a middleman.
- Half of the arrestees had not previously tried to get treatment – most often because they did not think they needed it or they did not want to quit. Most who tried to access treatment were able to enter a program.

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<sup>1</sup> Community Epidemiology Working Group (2006). Epidemiologic Trends in Drug Abuse – Advance Report, June 2006. Available online at <http://www.drugabuse.gov/PDF/CEWG/AdvReport606.pdf>.

## METH ADDENDUM RESPONSES

### How Long Have Arrestees Been Using Meth?

On average, the adults interviewed as part of this study reported using meth for a median<sup>2</sup> of 9.0 years (range 0 to 36 years) and the juveniles reported a median of 3.0 years of use (range 0 to 6)<sup>3</sup> (not shown).

### What Names Do Arrestees Use for Meth?

Arrestees use a variety of different names to refer to meth. According to those interviewed in 2006, the most common included “shit” (48%), crystal (39%), dope (25%), and tweak (13%). When comparing responses of adult and juvenile males to those of adult and juvenile females, males were more likely than females to refer to the drug as speed (15% compared to 5%) (not shown).

### Why Do Arrestees Start and Continue to Use Meth?

The number one reason arrestees reported first trying meth was because their friends were using the drug (44%) (Table 1). This reason was followed by they were experimenting (34%), wanted to get high (13%), and wanted to escape problems (11%). When asked why they continued to use meth, the most common reasons given were they were

*“It’s horrible. It changes your whole life. You don’t care. You have no goals. You forget everything and have no memory. Bad things can happen. It’s very addictive, very depressing, and lonely.”*  
- Meth using arrestee, 2006

<sup>2</sup> The median is used as the measure of central tendency when a distribution is either positively or negatively skewed.

<sup>3</sup> Responses are collapsed by arrestee age (adult and juvenile) and gender and presented together unless significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

addicted (30%), wanted to get high (30%), and wanted to escape (22%).

**Table 1**  
**REASONS ARRESTEES START AND CONTINUE TO USE METH**

	Start	Continue
Friends/peers use	44%	12%
Experiment	34%	0%
Get high	13%	30%
Escape problems	11%	22%
Stay awake	9%	10%
Get more energy	7%	15%
Replace another drug	3%	3%
Lose weight	2%	1%
Addicted	N/A	30%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>226</b>

NOTES: Cases with missing information not included. Percentages based upon multiple responses.

SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2006

There were no significant differences in the reasons adults and juveniles gave for starting or continuing to use meth. However, males were significantly more likely to report continued use in order to stay awake (14% versus 4% of females), which may be related to the fact that they also were more likely to be employed (62% compared to 33%) (not shown).

### What Are Arrestees’ Patterns of Use?

Questions are included on the addendum regarding how much and how often arrestees use meth, as well as the most common mode of use. In 2006, a “typical” arrestee who used meth:

- smoked the drug (77%), as opposed to snorting it (14%) or injecting it (9%);
- reported using a median of .9 grams (range .01 to 5) per day;

- used meth a median of 3.0 times per day (range 1 to 60 times); and
- used a median of 4 consecutive days out of the past 30 (range 1 to 30 days) (not shown).

### How Could Meth Use by Arrestees Affect Others?

When individuals in our communities use meth, they may be putting others at risk with their erratic and unpredictable behavior. This impact is demonstrated by the fact that two in every three arrestees (67%) reported using meth before going to work. When asked what their current job was, responses included construction, unskilled labor, food service worker, retail, and caregiver. In addition, five of the thirteen (38%) juveniles who were students reported using meth before attending school, and all but one of the six juveniles who worked went to their job after using (not shown).

*"Terrible problem...takes control of you and everything around it."  
- Meth using arrestee, 2006*

### What Effect Does Meth Have on Arrestees' Lives?

Meth results in a number of significant side effects for those who use it. As Table 2 shows, the four most common effects included sleeplessness (77%), weight loss (70%), legal problems (68%), and family problems (63%).

*You're so strung out that you can see it ruining your life, but you can't do anything about it."  
- Meth using arrestee, 2006.*

**Table 2  
METH ASSOCIATED WITH  
NEGATIVE EFFECTS FOR USERS**

Sleeplessness	77%
Weight loss	70%
Legal problems	68%
Family problems	63%
Financial problems	49%
Dental problems	43%
Work problems	37%
Paranoia	36%
Skin problems	28%
Hallucinations	27%
Violent behavior	23%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>232</b>

NOTE: Percentages based upon multiple responses.

SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2006

Though adults and juveniles reported negative consequences of meth use with similar frequency, there were some significant differences by gender. Specifically, males were more likely to report experiencing sleeplessness (82% versus 69% of females) and hallucinations (34% versus 17% of females) as a result of their use (not shown).

### Do Arrestees Try to Get Treatment for Meth Use?

According to 2007 statistics from the County of San Diego, the percent of local substance abuse treatment admissions reporting meth as their primary drug of choice increased to 46 percent in Fiscal Year 2006-2007, up from 37 percent five years before (W. King, Personal Communication, September 13, 2007). In 2006, about half (51%) of arrestees who completed the meth addendum reported they had tried to get drug treatment for meth in the past. Additional analysis revealed that these arrestees who had tried to get treatment were younger at the time they first tried meth (19.6 compared to 22.2 years old) and had been using it longer (12.2 compared

to 9.3 years), compared to those who had never sought treatment.

When arrestees who had not sought treatment services were asked why, the most common reasons were that they thought they could quit on their own (55%) or they did not want to quit (35%). Other reasons for not trying to get treatment included being unable to afford it (2%) or not knowing how to access it (2%). Six percent reported that although they have not received treatment, they have a current desire to do so (not shown).

Of the 117 arrestees who had sought treatment, most (85%) said they had been successful in getting into a program. For almost two-thirds (62%) of these individuals, treatment was in-patient. Another 16 percent were involved in an out-patient program, and less than one in ten in a detox (9%), jail/prison (6%), or NA/AA (6%) program. About two in five respondents (42%) who reported entering treatment also said they completed the program. Those who did not complete treatment were asked why and the most common responses included they wanted to use again or they were kicked out (not shown).

When the 23 individuals who said they did not get into a program were asked why, they gave a number of reasons, including they were placed on a waiting list, they changed their mind, the program was too expensive, they were arrested, or transportation was an obstacle (not shown).

## How Do Arrestees Obtain Meth?

To gather information about individuals involved in drug distribution, arrestees are asked a series of questions about the people who supply their meth<sup>4</sup>. Nearly half (48%) reported having a main source for obtaining the drug. When asked to provide specific information about that person/people:

- 56 percent reported their main source was Hispanic and 38 percent that the individual was White; 64 percent reported buying meth from someone who was the same ethnicity as they were;
- 91 percent reported their main source was male, 8 percent female, and 2 percent a couple;
- on average (median), the arrestees had been using their main source for about one year;
- 75 percent said the only drug they bought from this main source was meth; and
- 51 percent reported that they would buy from someone else if their main source did not have meth available and 39 percent said that they have previously bought meth from someone they did not know.

Other questions related to obtaining meth revealed that 17 percent committed a crime in the last 30 days to get meth, and 23 percent reported carrying a weapon with them when they went to get meth, with males more likely than females to do so (31% compared to 12%) (not shown).

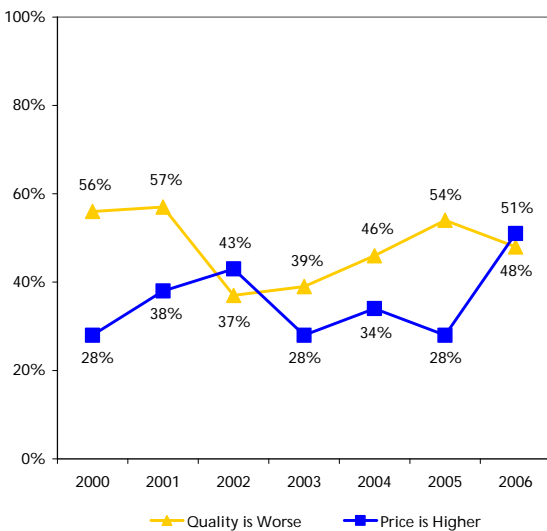
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<sup>4</sup> Drug market information questions are included as part of the adult SAM instrument, as well as the meth addendum. Meth market information presented here may vary from previously reported statistics because these questions were only asked of the meth addendum sample and not the larger SAM sample overall.

## Do Arrestees Perceive Meth Quality, Price, and Availability Have Changed Over Time?

Since the project's inception, arrestees have been asked if the quality of the meth they have used in the past year has changed (become worse, the same, or better) and if the price has changed (become lower, the same, or higher). From a supply point of view, one would want to see the price increase while the quality decreases. From 2005 to 2006, a larger percentage of adult arrestees did report an increase in the price (28% to 51%), but the percent of respondents who thought quality was worse between the two years declined (from 54% to 48%) (Figure 1)<sup>5</sup>. Juvenile arrestees shared similar perceptions to adults in 2006, with 41 percent saying the quality was worse and 50 percent that the price was higher (not shown).

**Figure 1  
ADULT ARRESTEES REPORT METH PRICE WAS UP BUT LESS LIKELY TO SAY QUALITY DOWN**

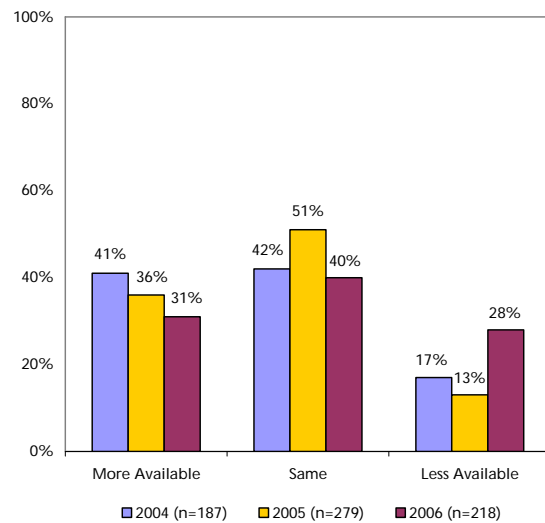


SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2006

<sup>5</sup> On average, those who reported the quality was worse in 2006 reported longer meth use compared to those who thought the quality had improved (12.7 years versus 9.2 years).

When arrestees in 2006 were asked if they thought the availability of meth had changed in the last year, more than one-quarter (28%) reported it was less available in 2006, a larger proportion than in the previous two years (Figure 2). Forty percent (40%) thought it had stayed the same and around one-third (31%) thought it was more available.

**Figure 2  
MORE ARRESTEES SAID METH WAS LESS AVAILABLE IN 2006**



NOTE: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding.

SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2006

## How Many Arrestees Are Involved in Dealing Meth?

Almost half (47%) of the arrestees reported that they had either sold meth or acted as a middleman in the past year. For most of these individuals, this involvement was limited to San Diego County (77%) and did not progress outside the region, state, or country. When asked if they were still involved in distribution, 47 percent of those who reported any prior involvement said they were (not shown).

Respondents who reported they were no longer involved in distribution of meth were asked their reasons for discontinuing. Fifty-

four (54) of these 56 individuals provided one of a variety of responses, including they did not participate in distribution regularly, they were tired of the lifestyle, they were in jail, or it was too risky (not shown).

The 131 arrestees (which included 122 adults and 9 juveniles) who reported involvement in drug distribution in the past year were asked to further describe what this entailed. As shown in Table 3, more than four in five (83%) had held meth and over half acted as a middleman (62%), transported the drug (56%), or directly sold the drug (52%).

**Table 3**  
**LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN METH DISTRIBUTION IN LAST 30 DAYS**

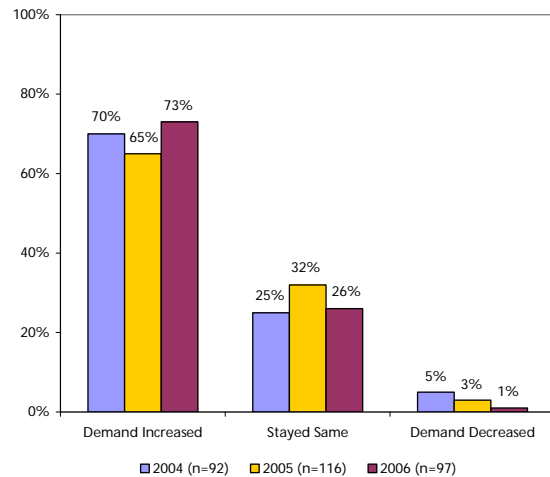
Held meth	83%
Acted as a middleman	62%
Transported meth	56%
Sold meth	52%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>131</b>

*NOTE: Percentages based upon multiple responses.*

*SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2006*

On average, those who reported selling meth in the past month said they had sold to an average (median) of three people in the past week (range 0 to 140) and that they had made \$75 (range \$0 to \$30,000) in the past 30 days (not shown). When asked if they thought demand for the drug had increased, nearly three-quarters (73%) responded affirmatively, one-quarter (26%) thought it was the same, and only one percent thought it had decreased (Figure 3). These 2006 percentages were not significantly different from those reported in the previous two years.

**Figure 3**  
**MOST ARRESTEES WHO SELL METH THINK THAT DEMAND IS INCREASING**



*NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.*

*SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2006*

## How Many Arrestees Are Involved in Making Meth?

Fourteen percent (14%) of arrestees who completed the addendum reported being involved in the production of meth in the past. Of these 32 individuals, around three-quarters reported they had been involved in obtaining chemicals (78%) and/or packaging the drug (72%), while 69 percent obtained equipment and 66 percent had identified a cooking location. Forty-four percent (44%, or 14 individuals) of the 32 reported they had made the drug in the past year and 22 percent (or 7) had made it as recently as the past month. When asked how they learned to cook the drug, the most common response, reported by over half (55%), was from friends, while others reported learning from family members (28%), a dealer (7%), and three percent each from a spouse or significant other, the Internet, and some other way (not shown).



Most arrestees who obtained the necessary ingredients to make meth did so at some type of store (88%), such as a drug, home improvement, or grocery. The remainder reported getting them from another manufacturer (8%) or family and/or friends (4%). Over three-quarters (78%) reported it was harder to obtain the substances to make meth in 2006 compared to the year before (not shown).

Other information arrestees provided regarding the production process included:

- half made meth at a private residence (48%), while others made it outside (19%), in a motel (16%), or some other enclosed space (16%);
- over half (56%) made it less than once a month, while one in five (20%) reported making it as often as every other day;
- a typical batch resulted in a median of 454 grams of product at a street value of \$6,500 and cost of about \$250 to make; and
- the most common methods used by the 22 arrestees who provided information about disposing of waste from materials used to make meth included dumping it in an outdoor area (10), throwing it in the trash (8), or just pouring it down the drain (4) (not shown).

## COMPARISON OF METH USERS TO OTHER ARRESTEES

Of the 770 adult arrestees who completed a valid SAM interview, 493 either did not report meth use in the past 30 days or did not answer this question, 213 reported use and completed the addendum, and 64 reported

*"It's a one way street to losing everything quick. It brings the worst out in people."*

*- Meth using arrestee, 2006*

use but did not complete the addendum. Table 4 shows how adult arrestees who reported recent meth use, whether they completed the addendum or not, significantly differed from those who did not use meth in terms of demographic characteristics, prior justice system contact, and substance use history. With many of these individuals never having received treatment and with meth being the most common primary substance of use reported in publicly funded treatment programs in the county, this information may be useful in better understanding the background and needs of this population. Specifically,

- Meth users were more likely to be unemployed. Those who were employed were more likely to go to work under the influence or miss work because of alcohol or drug use.
- Meth users were more likely to have been arrested previously and to have served time in jail. They also were more likely to have a current drug offense and less likely to have been arrested for a violent offense or an offense in the "other" category<sup>6</sup>.
- Meth users were more likely to have tried marijuana, crack, cocaine, and heroin and to have first consumed five drinks of alcohol or more at an earlier age and tried crack and cocaine at an earlier age. They were also more likely to report recent marijuana and heroin use and were less likely to report crack use in the last 30 days.

<sup>6</sup> Other offenses include, but are not limited to, charges for parole and probation violations, public peace disturbances, failure to appear in court, and resisting arrests.

**Table 4  
ADULT METH USERS DIFFER FROM NON-  
METH USERS IN A NUMBER OF WAYS\***

	<b>Non- Users</b>	<b>Meth Users</b>
<b><i>Demographic</i></b>		
White	29%	48%
Black	30%	9%
Unemployed	44%	53%
Work under the influence of alcohol/drugs	18%	61%
Miss work because of alcohol/drug use	16%	32%
<b><i>Previous Justice System Contact</i></b>		
Ever arrested	71%	88%
Ever jailed	64%	85%
Current violent offense	25%	17%
Current drug offense	34%	48%
Current "other offense"	90%	81%
<b><i>Substance Use History</i></b>		
Ever marijuana	76%	94%
Ever meth	33%	100%
Ever crack	27%	43%
Ever cocaine	33%	65%
Ever heroin	14%	31%
Age first binge alcohol	17.3	15.8
Age first tried crack	24.0	21.5
Age first tried cocaine	20.1	18.4
Marijuana past 30 days	39%	64%
Crack past 30 days	14%	7%
Heroin past 30 days	3%	7%
Positive meth	16%	81%
Positive cocaine	20%	8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>129- 472</b>	<b>114- 272</b>

\*Significant at  $p < .05$ .

NOTE: Cases with missing information not included.

SOURCE: SANDAG SAM Program, 2006

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SAMPLE DESCRIPTION**

Interviews with adult and juvenile arrestees regarding drug use and other risk behaviors have been conducted in San Diego since 1987. As part of SANDAG's Criminal Justice Clearinghouse, these data are collected through a study now referred to as Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) and are reported on an annual basis, providing useful and timely information to policymakers, as well as law enforcement, prevention, and treatment professionals alike.

In 2006, this data collection effort was generously supported by the California Border Alliance Group (CBAG) and San Diego County Alcohol and Drug Services, and interviews were conducted in cooperation with the San Diego County Sheriff's and Probation Departments. Special thanks are extended to these entities, as well as members of the SAM Local Coordinating Council (LCC), especially those who regularly provided their input and insight regarding the data and this project, including Tom Bandy, Narcotics Information Network; John Byrom, Vista Community Clinic; Jackie Borboa, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA); Bill Crane, San Diego County Alcohol and Drug Services; Angela Goldberg, Methamphetamine Strike Force; Rebecca Hernandez and Judi Strang, San Dieguito Alliance; Tony Loya, National Methamphetamine Chemicals Initiative; Kevin McClure, San Diego Prevention Coalition; Toni McKean, East County Meth Solutions; Robin Pollini, University of California, San Diego School of Medicine; and Kathy Valdez, City of Vista.

In 2006, 266 adult arrestees admitted to using meth at least once in the past 30 days (of the 770 interviewed). Of these, 80 percent or 213 completed the additional meth addendum. Two hundred five (205) of these individuals were able to provide a urine sample and eight could/did not. For the juveniles, 20 admitted to meth use in the past 30 days and

provided a viable urine sample, and all but one (19 individuals or 95%) completed the addendum. There were no differences for adults in their willingness to complete an addendum based upon gender, age, race, highest educational level, work status, marital status, or current offense. However, adults who reported having received some type of drug treatment were more likely to participate in the meth addendum portion of the interview (55% compared to 33%) (not shown).

All addendum questions, along with aggregated responses by percent and raw numbers, are available on the SANDAG Web site at [www.sandag.org/cj](http://www.sandag.org/cj), as well as more information about the San Diego Association of Governments' (SANDAG's) SAM project. For additional information or responses to questions, please contact SANDAG's CJ Division at (619) 699-1900.