



DRUG USE AMONG SAN DIEGO COUNTY ADULT ARRESTEES IN 2020

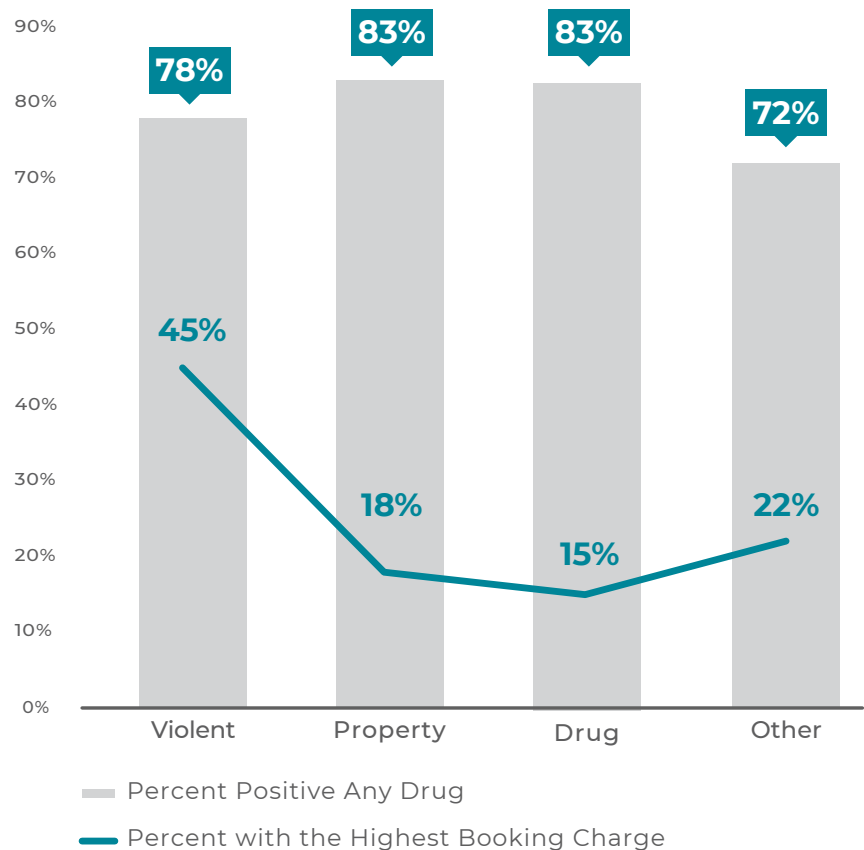
For over two decades, SANDAG has conducted voluntary and confidential interviews with adult arrestees regarding their drug use and other life histories as part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program. The SAM program¹ also provides one of the only valid measures of drug use patterns over time through drug testing that is conducted on samples that are provided. While this study was able to continue with enhanced safety protocols in 2020, including shortening the interview instruments, it is important to note that regional booking policies also changed, and as a result, the sample of those interviewed may be different than in previous years. With the recent release of 2020 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region, this CJ Flash highlights some of the key findings.

Highlight 1

The individuals interviewed as part of SAM in 2020 included a greater proportion of males (74%, versus 64% in 2019), as well as those booked for a felony-level charge (79% versus 56%) and for a violent offense (45% versus 29%). However, similar to previous years, the percent positive for any drug (marijuana, opiates, cocaine/crack, methamphetamine, and PCP) did not differ significantly. That is, regardless of why someone was booked, around three-quarters or more (72% to 83%) were positive for at least one substance.

Figure 1

Percent of Adult Arrestees Positive for Any Drug by Highest Booking Charge, 2020



¹ For more information about the SAM program, please visit sandag.org/sam



Highlight 2

Meth remains the drug of choice for San Diego County arrestees with 56% of adult arrestees positive for it in 2020 (57% of males and 53% of females). As Figure 2 shows, 83% of arrestees who said they had ever tried meth also reported using it in the past year (a greater percentage than any other drug) and the average number of days used in the past month was 17.9 (also the most frequent use of those who used). Eighty-four percent (84%) said it was “very easy” or “easy” to obtain meth in 2020.

Figure 2

Meth Use by San Diego County Arrestees, 2020

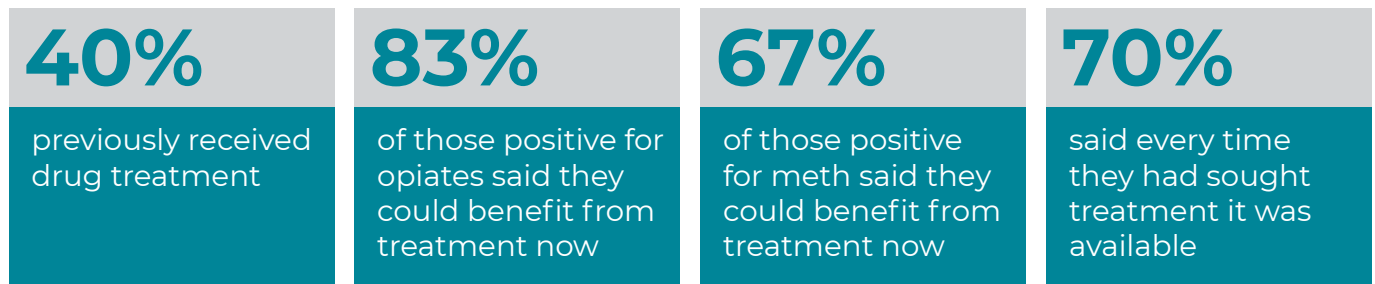


Highlight 3

Two in every five (40%) arrestees reported that they had received drug treatment previously, with those who had a prior arrest more likely to report treatment than those who said this was their first arrest (44% versus 14%). Overall, 55% of those interviewed said they felt they could benefit from drug treatment now, with those who tested positive for opiates most likely to say they could (83%), followed by those testing positive for meth (67%), marijuana (58%), and cocaine (41%). Seventy percent (70%) of arrestees reported every time they sought treatment it had been available.

Figure 3

Drug Treatment History and Need Reported by San Diego County Arrestees, 2020



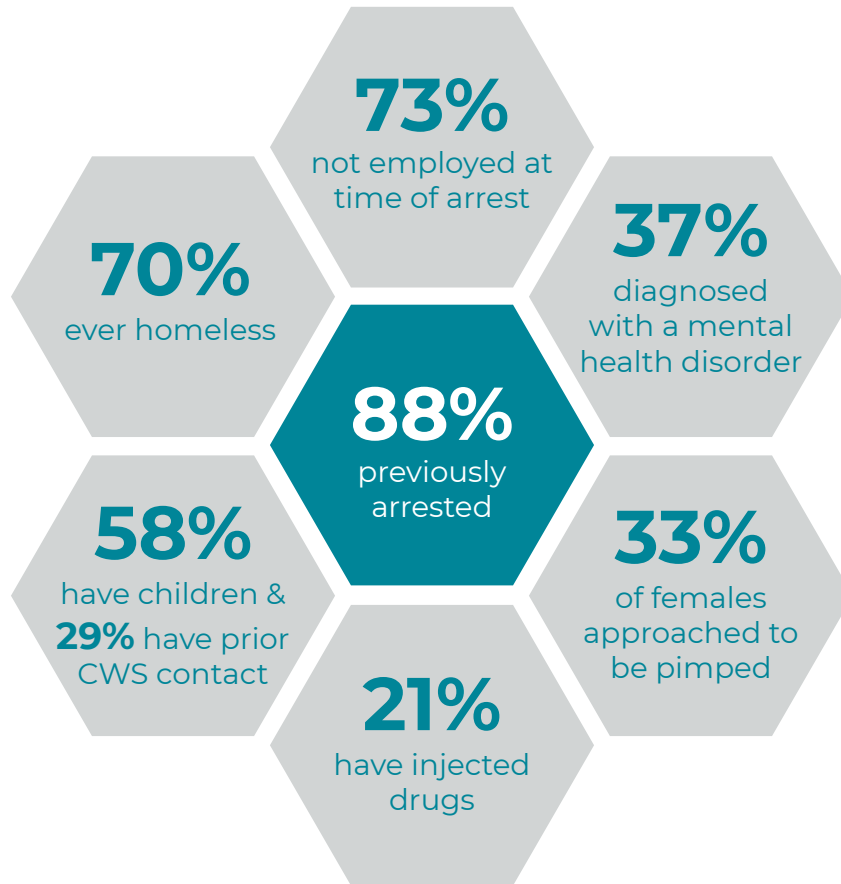


Highlight 4

In addition to the need for drug treatment, the individuals interviewed for this study shared histories that highlighted other areas of need. These included a history of homelessness, mental illness, repeated contact with the justice system, sexual exploitation, and unemployment.

Figure 4

Characteristics and Risk Factors Reported by San Diego County Adult Arrestees, 2020



Takeaway

Substance use is an issue for the majority of individuals with justice system contact in San Diego County, regardless of the type of charge an individual is booked into jail for. With legislative changes that have made court-ordered treatment less likely and many involved with the justice system acknowledging the need for treatment and other underlying needs, it is more important than ever for community stakeholders to continue to work together to support programs and collaborations that address underlying needs and engage clients where they are.