

Prescription Drug Use and Overdoses Among Youth in 2022

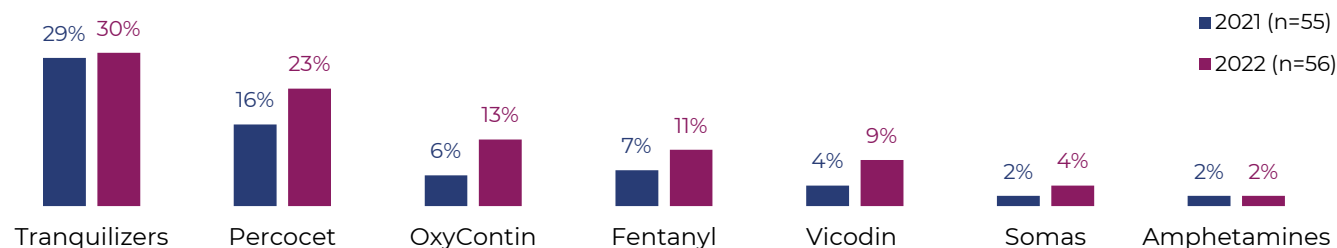
As part of the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program, youth complete a confidential and anonymous interview regarding their drug use history and other risk factors. In 2022, youth completed SAM interviews at East Mesa Detention Facility and in San Diego County Achievement Centers.¹ Following the release of data from the youth interviews and the growing concern of deaths related to prescription drug and opioid overdoses in the County,² this CJ Flash highlights key findings from the Juvenile Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region report related to prescription drug use and overdoses.

Highlight 1

Nearly half (48%) of the youth interviewed in 2022 reported using prescription or over-the-counter drugs illegally, reflecting a 12% increase from 2021. The most commonly abused prescription drugs included tranquilizers, followed by Percocet, OxyContin, and fentanyl. The prescription drugs most often abused in 2022 were consistent with the pattern seen in the previous year, however, higher percentages of youth reported trying most of the substances in 2022.

Figure 1

Youth reported higher percentages of prescription and over-the-counter drug use in 2022



Highlight 2

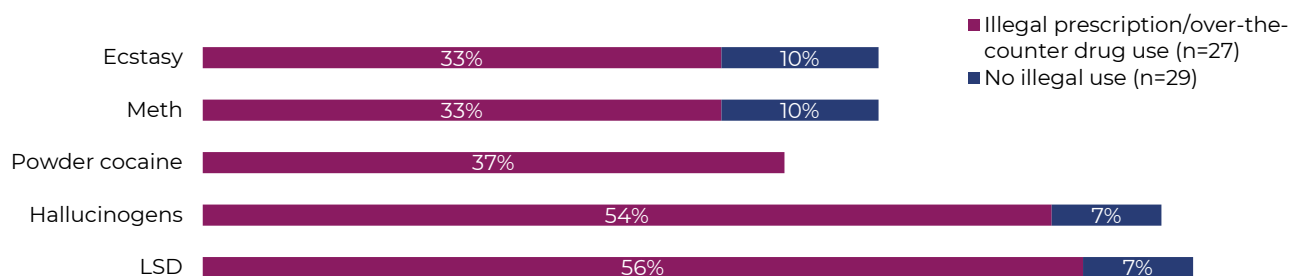
Youth who reported abusing prescription or over-the-counter medications were significantly more likely to have tried other illicit drugs as seen in Figure 2.

¹ Achievement Centers were launched by the County of San Diego in Fiscal Year 2020. The purpose of Achievement Centers is to provide at-risk youth and youth on probation after-school programming that provides opportunities to engage in prosocial and rehabilitation services in the community and divert them from detention. In 2022, 14 youth were interviewed at San Diego Achievement Centers.

² San Diego County Overdose Quarterly Report. Available online at https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/od2a/Overdose%20Quarterly%20Report_April%202023.pdf

Figure 2

Youth who abused prescription and over-the-counter drugs are more likely to use other illicit drugs



Highlight 3

When youth who reported prescription or over-the-counter drug use were asked how they obtained these substances without a prescription, most reported they were given the drugs by another person (83%), bought them (48%), or stole them (30%). Friends (74%) and acquaintances (32%) were the parties most commonly reported to have given the youth prescription type drugs, and family (57%), friends (43%), and acquaintances (43%) were who youth most commonly reported stealing prescription type drugs from. Of the youth who reported buying prescription drugs, nearly half of them (45%) believed the drugs may have been counterfeit.

Figure 3

Youth reported obtaining prescription and over-the-counter drugs multiple ways



Highlight 4

Thirteen percent (13%) of interviewed youth reported ever having an overdose. Of the seven youth who had overdosed, all seven (100%) had used prescription or over-the-counter drugs illegally. None of the youth who overdosed had Naloxone, also known as Narcan, administered to them.

While information from the SAM project is not reflective of the general population, these data provide valuable information on current and past illegal prescription drug abuse in some of our most vulnerable youth. These data may be useful in raising awareness of the challenges this population may be grappling with and can also inform targeted interventions.

