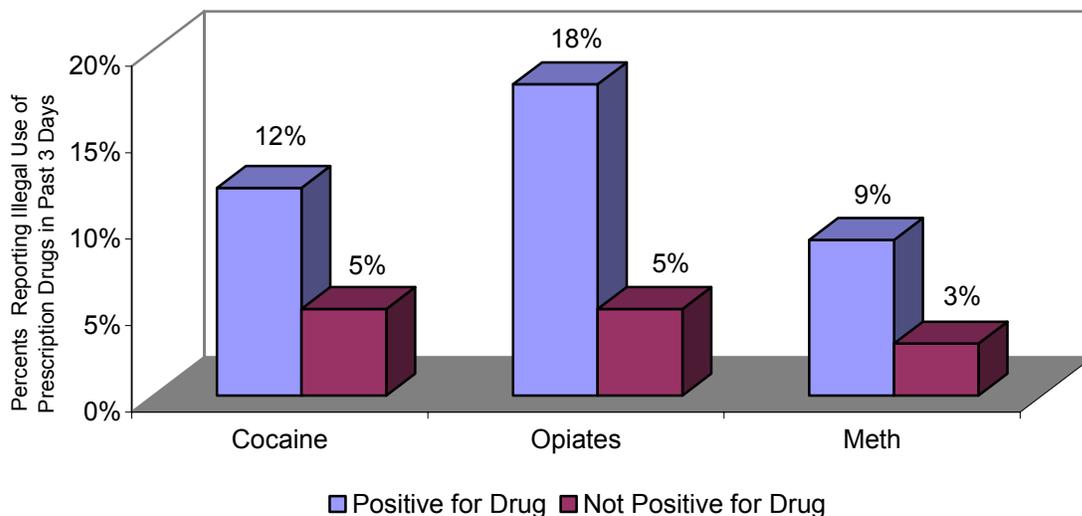


## Illegal Prescription Drug Use Among San Diego Arrestees

The increasing number of individuals who are illegally using prescription drugs has gained attention from law enforcement, prevention, and treatment groups alike. According to the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health<sup>1</sup>, approximately 6.2 million individuals (representing 2.6% of the population ages 12 and older) were *current* users of psychotherapeutic drugs taken non-medically and among young adults ages 18 to 25, the lifetime non-medical pain reliever prevalence had increased from 6.8 percent in 1992 to 22.1 percent in 2002. Other statistics show that emergency room visits resulting from narcotic pain reliever abuse have increased 163 percent since 1995<sup>2</sup>.

As part of interviews conducted by SANDAG in local detention facilities (through the Substance Abuse Monitoring, or SAM program), arrestees are asked about their use of non-prescribed medications in the past 72 hours. Overall, five percent of the 993 arrestees interviewed in 2003 reported using at least one drug (barbiturates, tranquilizers, painkillers, Darvon, Demerol, or anti-depressants) without a prescription. While use did not vary by gender or race, a number of other individual characteristics were predictive of use. Specifically, individuals who used illicit prescription medicine were more likely to also use other illegal drugs. As Figure 1 shows, arrestees who tested positive for cocaine, opiates, or methamphetamine were more likely to report non-prescribed medication use than those who did not test positive for these substances. In addition, individuals who reported previously receiving some type of drug treatment were more likely to illegally use prescription drugs (8% versus 4%), as were those who had previously been arrested (6% versus 2%), and those between the ages of 40 to 49 (9% compared to 4% to 6% for other age groups) (not shown).

**Figure 1**  
**ARRESTEES WHO USE ILLEGAL DRUGS ALSO MORE LIKELY TO USE NON-PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS**



*SOURCE: SANDAG 2003 SAM Data*

<sup>1</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2003). Results From the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings. Rockville, MD: Office of Applied Studies.

<sup>2</sup> Office of National Drug Control Policy (2004). U.S. Drug Prevention, Treatment, Enforcement Agencies Take on "Doctor Shoppers," "Pill Mills". Available on-line at [www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov](http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov).