



# CRIMINAL JUSTICE FAX



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## Abuse and Violence Cited as Top Challenges of At-Risk Youth and Families in San Diego County

A recent SANDAG survey shows that sexual abuse, childhood abuse, and domestic violence, are taxing the functioning and safety of families accessing governmental and community based services in San Diego County. In a continuing effort to address the needs of the community, the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) and the San Diego County Probation Department asked the Criminal Justice Research Division of SANDAG to survey community partners, service providers, and consumers in early 2005. More than 700 respondents revealed the complexity of issues youth and families are confronting, as well as the gaps that exist in services needed to address those issues.

Table 1 shows the challenges that respondents most often described as having a large negative impact on local families. Of importance to notice, 4 of the 5 top challenges (noted by 70 percent of respondents) were directly related to family dynamics (e.g. child abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and parent criminality). Other frequently mentioned challenges were related to alcohol and other drug use, delinquent peers, educational issues, and mental health.

**Table 1**  
**ABUSE IS THE LEADING CHALLENGE**  
**FOR AT-RISK FAMILIES**

Percentage of Respondents Who Believed These Were the Most Significant Challenges		
70% or More of Respondents	60% or More	50% or More
Sexual abuse	Gangs	Poverty
Drug/Alcohol use by youth	Poor parental supervision	Adult relationships
Child abuse	Chaotic family	Run away behavior
Domestic violence	Suicide	Delinquent friends
Parental criminality/ substance abuse	Education problems	Anger management
		Mental illness

SOURCE: SANDAG San Diego County Youth, Family and Community Survey (May 2005)

The results of the survey will help to inform HHSA and Probation Department decisions about service provision priorities to youth and families in their respective systems. The results also send a disturbing message to the larger community about the perceived prevalence of violence and dysfunction within these families' homes. This in turn, speaks to the importance of those interventions that are able to attend to the needs of the entire family and not just the individual identified as having a particular problem. This information is useful on many levels, including clarifying the paths that bring families to the doors of local government and community agencies in search of assistance and helping to appropriately direct funds to those areas that are most in need.