



# CRIMINAL JUSTICE FAX



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RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESEARCH DIVISION

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## POLYDRUG USE: A HEALTH AND TREATMENT CHALLENGE

There is a growing concern across the nation about the consequences associated with polydrug use (e.g., the use of multiple drugs). Data indicate that polydrug users face increased health risks and place an additional burden on substance abuse treatment providers<sup>1</sup>. Although, the actual health consequences of combining drugs are still unknown, polydrug use has been associated with lethal overdoses, drug-related emergency room visits, and intravenous drug use<sup>2</sup>. In addition, treatment of polydrug users has been reported to be more difficult. In 2002, over half (56%) of admissions to publicly funded treatment programs throughout the nation were for abuse of multiple substances, with alcohol being the most common, followed by marijuana<sup>3</sup>. Locally, two-thirds (65%) of admissions to county-sponsored drug treatment programs were for polydrug use<sup>4</sup>.

Recent data collected by SANDAG through the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program of adults booked into local detention facilities revealed that nearly one in four (24%) of the sampled respondents tested positive for multiple drugs in their system at time of booking (not shown). The most common two drugs found were marijuana and methamphetamine, with 14 percent of all arrestees testing positive for both. This was followed by one percent each testing positive for methamphetamine and cocaine or for methamphetamine and heroin. In addition, although arrestees are not tested for the presence of alcohol in their system, two in five (40%) arrestees who tested positive for at least one drug also reported having consumed five or more drinks on one or more of the past three days (not shown). This indicates that an even larger number of the arrestees could be polydrug users.

These data provide valuable information to both policy makers and service providers when reviewing alcohol and drug strategies as they pertain to providing effective treatment to a diverse population.

For additional information on adult and juvenile arrestee drug use patterns in San Diego County please visit the SANDAG Web site at [www.sandag.org/cjc](http://www.sandag.org/cjc).

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<sup>1</sup> Korper, S.P., & Council, C.L. (Eds.) (2002). *Substance Abuse by Older Adults: Estimates for Future Impact on the Treatment System*. (DHHS Publication No. SMA 03-3763, Analytic Series A-21). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies.

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. Drug Abuse Warning Network, 2004: *Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, and Polydrug Use 2002*. DAWN Report July 2004, Rockville, MD, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies. Drug and Alcohol Services Information System, 2005: *Polydrug Admissions: 2002*; The DASIS Report March 25, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> San Diego County Health and Human Services, Alcohol and Drug Services FY 2005 - 2006