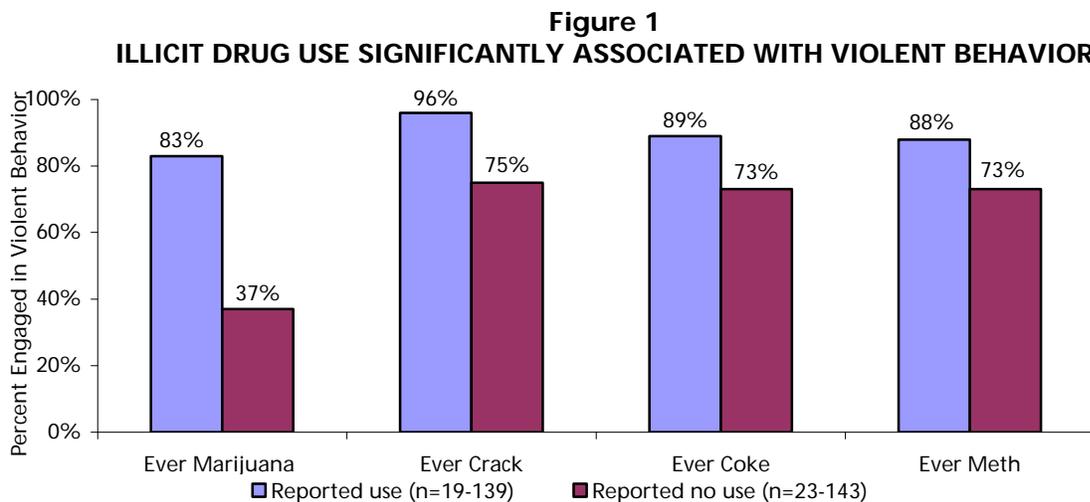


A Nexus Exists Between Juvenile Illicit Drug Use and Violent Behavior

Recently released national data have highlighted the association between juvenile drug use and violent behavior. For example, nationwide youth who had ever used an illicit drug were twice as likely to have previously engaged in a violent act (i.e., engaged in a fight, carried a handgun in last year, or attacked others with the intent of harming them) as youth who had not used illicit drugs¹.

Locally, interviews with youth booked into San Diego County Juvenile Hall revealed a similar pattern among a higher risk population². As Figure 1 illustrates, eight out of every ten youth or more who reported ever using an illicit drug also reported engaging in some type of violent act³. This was significant when compared to those youth who had never used each of the drugs (37% to 75%).



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM program, 2006

NOTES: Significant at $p < .05$.

While the exact nature of this relationship is not clear from these data alone (e.g., whether drug use precedes violence or vice versa, and what factors could be related to this relationship), the data do lend support to prevention and intervention programs that buffer youth from using drugs. Specifically, research has shown that youth who participate in after school activities, volunteer in the community, and/or have support of family members are less likely to use drugs⁴. For more information on local youth drug trends, visit the SANDAG Web site at www.sandag.org/cj.

¹ Results from 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Detailed Tables (Tables 24-29), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), 2006. Available at <http://www.oas.samhsa.gov>

² The national survey was a sample of noninstitutionalized youth ages 12 to 17, whereas SAM was a sample of detained youth in San Diego County.

³ Violent acts include assault, bringing a weapon to school, possession of a weapon, fighting, robbery, and homicide.

⁴ **Teens, Drugs, & Violence A Special Report**. Office of National Drug Control Policy, June 2007. Available at <http://www.mediacampaign.org/pdf/TeensDrugsandViolence.pdf>