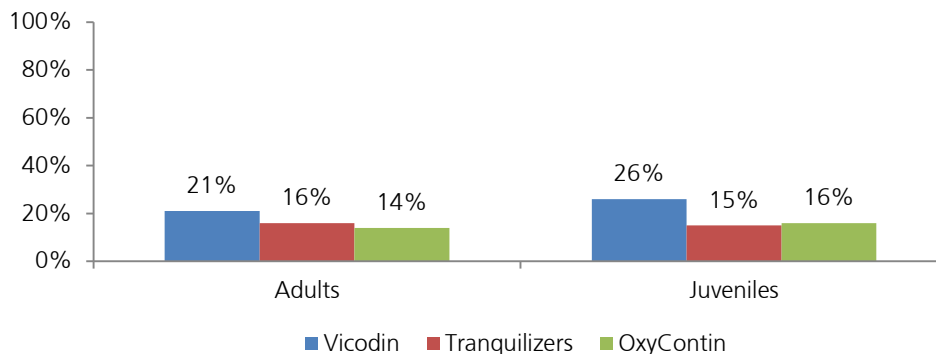


PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE IS COMMON AMONG LOCAL ARRESTEES

Drug abuse typically brings to mind the use of illegal street drugs, such as methamphetamine, heroin, and cocaine. However, prescription drug abuse ranks second, behind marijuana, as the most common illegal drug problem in the U.S.¹ and is increasing, possibly due to accessibility and the “normalization” of use.² Prescription drug abuse can compromise health and public safety. Specifically, San Diego County has seen a steady increase in prescription drug-related deaths over the past five years,³ and according to the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, pharmacy robberies in San Diego have climbed from an average of 5.3 per year from 2005 to 2007 to 18 per year from 2008 to 2010 and 16 in the first eight months of 2011. Due primarily to prescription overdoses, drug deaths in 2009 outnumbered traffic fatalities for the first time in the U.S.⁴

Tracking prescription drug abuse can be useful in designing prevention and intervention strategies. One such effort is SANDAG’s Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) program which entails interviews with recently arrested and booked adults and juveniles in local detention facilities. Results from 2010 revealed that 40 percent of the 802 adults and 31 percent of the 131 juveniles reported ever misusing prescription drugs. The top three most frequently abused prescription drugs were Vicodin (21% and 26%), tranquilizers (16% and 15%), and Oxycontin (14% and 16%) (Figure 1). While the majority of arrestees said they were either given or sold prescription drugs by someone else (96% adults and 85% juveniles), juveniles were more likely to report they stole the drugs from a person (18% versus 2%) or pharmacy (8% versus <1%) (not shown).

Figure 1
TOP THREE PRESCRIPTION DRUGS ABUSED BY ADULT AND JUVENILE ARRESTEES



Source: SANDAG Substance Abuse Monitoring Interviews, 2010⁵

As prescription drug-related deaths increase in the region and throughout the nation, it is important to recognize the efforts being made by experts to promote recovery from drug addiction. September is “National Recovery Month” and many local events can be found at <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>. For more information about the SAM research, including special topics about meth use and gang involvement, visit the SANDAG Web site at www.sandag.org/cj.

¹ Office of National Drug Control Policy (no date). Retrieved August 25, 2011, from www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov.

² National Institute on Drug Abuse. 2005. Prescription Drugs Abuse and Addiction. [Available Online]: <http://www.nida.nih.gov/ResearchReports/Prescription/Prescription.html>.

³ San Diego County Medical Examiner. 2010. Unintentional Deaths Due to Medications, Alcohol, and Illicit Drugs. 2010 Annual Report.

⁴ Girion, L., Glover, S., and Smith, D. (2011, September 17). *Drug deaths now outnumber traffic fatalities in U.S., data show*. *The Los Angeles Times*. [Available Online]: <http://www.latimes.com/health/la-me-drugs-epidemic-20110918,0,3886090.story>

⁵ 2010 SAM adult data will be available to the public on-line in October 2011.