

Santa Cruz County

Methamphetamine Snapshot: Executive Summary

Prepared by Applied Survey Research



Executive Summary

Background/ Previous Studies

Methamphetamine is a growing problem in our Nation, State, and in the County of Santa Cruz. In 2005, the National Association of Counties (NACo) conducted surveys of law enforcement and county child welfare officials in order to determine the impact of methamphetamine on government services and their communities.¹ Data was gathered from 500 counties in 45 states. Results from these surveys revealed that 87% of the 500 law enforcement agencies surveyed reported increases in methamphetamine-related arrests over the past three years. California reported a 100% increase. Santa Cruz County Jails have also been experiencing a rise in inmate populations, especially in female inmates. Seventy percent (70%) of the counties surveyed reported that methamphetamine-related burglaries, robberies, domestic violence, assaults, and identity thefts have increased. In Santa Cruz County, property-related crimes have increased with this rise in methamphetamine use.

The NACo study also found that methamphetamine use is greatly related to child abuse and neglect. The results of the NACo survey of child welfare officials revealed that 71% of the child welfare officials from counties in California who were surveyed reported an increase in out-of-home placements due to methamphetamine between 2000 and 2004.

Introduction and Methodology

Santa Cruz County communities and government services have been seriously impacted by the rise of the use and distribution of methamphetamine within California and Santa Cruz County. The Santa Cruz County Drug and Alcohol Abuse Task Force (D&AATF) was formed to reduce alcohol and drug use in Santa Cruz County. The task force includes various government and nongovernmental agencies. In 2006, D&AATF took notice of the increasing use of methamphetamine in Santa Cruz County. In order to more fully understand the impact of this growing problem in the County, the D&AATF decided to collect data on the County service agencies' methamphetamine-involved clients. Limited methamphetamine-related data was available in Santa Cruz County, however. The D&AATF therefore agreed to conduct the Methamphetamine Snapshot study during the one month period of February 2007.

The purpose of the Methamphetamine Snapshot of Santa Cruz County was to compile data from a range of impacted service departments, agencies and providers in Santa Cruz County, including providers in the Criminal Justice, Health, and Treatment fields. The data provide an illustration of the number and scope of impact of methamphetamine on services in our community. Each service area agreed to collect data about the "person" contact, which they determined to be associated with the manufacture, sale, use, or as a result of methamphetamine. Participating agencies determined independently what constituted a methamphetamine-related service incident. Agencies were also to capture information about the profile of methamphetamine users in Santa Cruz County based on age, ethnicity, gender, and area of residence.

¹ *The Meth Epidemic in America: Two Surveys of U.S. Counties (The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities Survey & the Impact of Meth on Children Survey)*, National Association of Counties, 2005.

Summary of Key Findings

Criminal Justice Agencies

Santa Cruz County District Attorney

The Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office is responsible for filing criminal charges, appearing in court in all felony and misdemeanor cases, and representing the People of the State of California in all trials and sentencing proceedings in the Superior Court of Santa Cruz. For the month of February 2007, data was collected on felony methamphetamine cases filed by the Santa Cruz District Attorney's Office. These cases included those in which the charges were either "possession of methamphetamine for personal use," "possession of methamphetamine for the purpose of selling it," or "sales of methamphetamine."

- Of the 44 cases involving methamphetamine filed by the Santa Cruz District Attorney's office in February, 84% were charged with possession of methamphetamine for personal use.
- Thirty-four percent (34%) of the 44 cases filed involved female defendants and 66% involved male defendants.

Alternative Public Defender, Wallraff & Gilman

In Santa Cruz County, there are three public defender offices. When the primary public defender contractor has a conflict in representing clients, cases are assigned to Wallraff & Gilman, or to Page, Salisbury & Dudley. For the month of February 2007, all persons represented in court by Wallraff & Gilman were tracked. Selected for the study were those cases that were not drug cases, in other words, those that did not involve possession or sales of controlled substances, or being under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Each attorney was then asked to identify those cases, which in the opinion of the attorney, involved methamphetamine use as a substantial underlying factor leading to the client's arrest.

- In February 2007, there were 17 juvenile clients with non-drug cases. In the opinion of the attorneys, methamphetamine use was a substantial factor in four of those cases.
- Of the four juvenile methamphetamine-related cases, two were male and two were female.
- In the adult court, 45 clients had non-drug charges. Methamphetamine was a substantial contributing factor in 56% of these cases.
- Of the 25 adult methamphetamine-related cases, 44% were females and 56% were males.

Jail Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Services

The CIT at the Santa Cruz County Jail is part of the Forensic Mental Health Services with Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services under the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency. Data were gathered for all inmates who came into contact with CIT during the month of February. Each inmate was asked if they had been using methamphetamine. If methamphetamine use was not confirmed by the inmate, a toxicology test was given to verify use.

- During the month of February, 29% of the inmates who received CIT services in Santa Cruz County Jail had confirmed methamphetamine use.
- Of the 40 inmates with confirmed methamphetamine use, more than half were Caucasian (60%) and over the age of 25 (60%), 56% were males, and 90% were monolingual English-speakers.

Santa Cruz County Law Enforcement

Santa Cruz County Law Enforcement captured descriptive data in the form of race, age and gender related to methamphetamine use for the month of February 2007. Law Enforcement used computer-aided dispatch (CAD) and report-writing methods to capture demographic information in methamphetamine "events." Events were defined as ranging from arrest for a methamphetamine-related crime to simple self-disclosure without arrest.

- There were 75 individuals with methamphetamine-related events.
- The majority of these individuals (72%) were males, over the age of 25 (63%), and Caucasian (56%).

Santa Cruz County Probation Department

For the month of February 2007, Probation Department staff was asked to participate in two studies. One study was to track all individuals referred to the Probation Department and their involvement with methamphetamine and the other study was to assess the degree to which individuals currently on probation caseloads were involved with methamphetamine. Each probation officer kept track of data for their own caseload, which was disaggregated by gender, race, age, zip code, and ethnicity. These studies were conducted separately for juveniles and adults involved in the probation system.

Adult Referrals

- Of the 82 new adult referrals (excluding Proposition 36 caseloads), 32% had some type of methamphetamine involvement.
- Eighty-one percent (81%) of the methamphetamine-involved referrals were males, 58% were Caucasian, and 62% resided in North County.

Adult Existing Caseloads - Proposition 36²

- Of the 56 Proposition 36 probationers analyzed, 71% had some type of documented involvement with methamphetamine.
- Women represented 50% of the methamphetamine-involved Proposition 36 clients, and only 13% of those who had no methamphetamine involvement.
- The strong majority of methamphetamine-involved Proposition 36 probationers were Caucasian (85%) and from North County (85%).

Juvenile Referrals

- Of 154 new clients referred to juvenile intake and supervision caseloads, 13% had some type of methamphetamine involvement.
- A larger percentage of female juveniles referred to probation during the month of February were methamphetamine-involved (32%) than those who were not involved with methamphetamine (19%).
- Fifty-three percent (53%) of the 19 methamphetamine-involved youth analyzed were Caucasian youth, compared with 47% Latino.

Juvenile Existing Caseloads

- Of the 400 juveniles on existing caseloads who were examined, 16% were involved with methamphetamine.
- Methamphetamine involved females comprised over a third (38%) of the total cases of methamphetamine-involved juveniles, compared with 17% of the non-methamphetamine involved females.
- Though there was an overrepresentation of Caucasians in the population of methamphetamine-involved juveniles, about equal numbers of Caucasians and Latinos were involved with methamphetamine.
- The majority of juveniles with methamphetamine involvement were from North County.

² Proposition 36, which went into effect in 2001, allows first- and second-time nonviolent, simple drug possession offenders the opportunity to receive substance abuse treatment instead of incarceration.

Health Agencies

Santa Cruz County Hospitals

Dominican Hospital's Behavioral Health Unit (DHBHU) collected data from Dominican Hospital and Watsonville Community Hospital (WCH). Data were gathered on positive urinalyses for both hospitals, and for all 5150 clients with confirmed, reported, or suspected methamphetamine use for Dominican Hospital.

Dominican Hospital

- The Dominican Hospital Emergency Department served 3,292 individuals in February 2007. Of those served, 12 tested positive for methamphetamine use in a urinalysis test.
- Nineteen percent (19%) of 151 clients evaluated for hospitalization (5150) by DHBHU were confirmed, reported, or suspected of methamphetamine use.
- Of these clients, 64% were male, and 68% were Caucasian.

Watsonville Community Hospital

- During this same time period of February 2007, there were 6 reported confirmed positive urinalysis drug screens for methamphetamine at the Watsonville Community Hospital Emergency Room.

Treatment Agencies

Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency Alcohol and Drug Program

Alcohol and drug abuse services are provided for Santa Cruz County residents through prevention, intervention and treatment services provided by the Alcohol and Drug Program of the Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency. All clients who received treatment or case management services during February 2007 were examined. All data were based on the client's self-report. In order to achieve a sample of unique clients, if a client had more than one program admission or service during the month, the last admission or service received during the month was used.

- Of the 1,461 unique persons receiving services from the HSA Alcohol and Drug Program during the month of February 2007, 25% listed methamphetamine as their primary drug of choice.
- Sixty-eight percent (68%) of these clients were male.
- More primary methamphetamine users (68%) identified as white than non-primary methamphetamine users (49%), and more primary methamphetamine users reported living in North County (38%) than non-primary methamphetamine users (29%).
- Two percent (2%) of primary methamphetamine users were under the age of 18, compared with 35% of non-primary methamphetamine users.
- Twenty-nine percent (29%) of HSA Alcohol and Drug Program clients identified as using methamphetamine as their primary drug of choice had children under the age of 5.

Community Recovery Services/ Santa Cruz County Community Counseling Center

Community Recovery Services (CRS) is a component of the Santa Cruz County Community Counseling Services (SCCCC). In February 2007, data was recorded from both CRS's residential and outpatient programs. In addition to analyzing clients enrolled in substance abuse treatment programs in February, an anonymous survey was conducted with the clients enrolled in the Drinking Driver education program and Domestic Violence Batterers program.

- Forty-six percent (46%) of the 85 residential clients treated in February used methamphetamine as their primary drug of choice.
- Forty-four percent (44%) of the 39 primary methamphetamine users in residential treatment were female, 46% were between the ages of 18-25 years old, 52% were from North County, 59% were Caucasian, and 95% of were English-speaking.

- Forty-two percent (42%) of the 233 active outpatient clients used methamphetamine as their primary drug of choice.
- Of the 97 primary methamphetamine users in outpatient treatment, 55% were women, 70% were over 25 years old, 61% identified as North County residents, 71% self-identified as Caucasian, and almost all outpatients (97%) were English-speakers.

Santa Cruz County Youth Services/ Santa Cruz County Community Counseling Center

Youth Services in Santa Cruz County has a number of youth substance abuse treatment facilities, including both residential and outpatient services. Santa Cruz County Youth Services gathered data on the youth going through their treatment programs, including data on client setbacks. Incidents of client treatment setbacks provide information about the severity of dependence and the addictiveness of the drug of choice.

- During the month of February 2007, Youth Services programs provided substance abuse treatment to a total of 75 clients.
- Over half (52%) of youth in the Youth Services treatment program use methamphetamine as a primary or secondary drug of choice.
- Among the 75 clients served, 74 treatment setbacks occurred; 86% of these treatment setbacks involved youth for whom methamphetamine was the primary or secondary drug of choice.
- Of the 39 youth for whom methamphetamine was the primary or secondary drug of choice, 18 (46%) had two or more significant client treatment setbacks. In comparison, only two (6%) of the 36 non-methamphetamine involved clients had two or more significant client treatment setbacks.

Santa Cruz County Human Resource Agency Family and Children's Services

Family and Children's Services gathered data on suspected or confirmed past or present drug use among parents of children in the Child Welfare System (CWS) for the month of February 2007. These data included referrals and open cases that were receiving emergency response, family maintenance or family reunification services. These cases were split into two separate groups: Drug Abuse (Meth) and Drug Abuse (No Meth).

- Ten percent (10%) of the 116 investigated referrals were identified with a suspected or confirmed methamphetamine issue.
- Of the 362 children with open Child Welfare Services cases in February, 49% were cases in which methamphetamine use was alleged.
- Of those open cases, 61% had children between the ages of 0-5 years.

Conclusion

The findings from the Santa Cruz County Methamphetamine Snapshot Study point to a number of seemingly emerging trends among methamphetamine users accessing County services in our community. While differences existed overall, a number of parallels were apparent among the County service agencies. Females, while generally underrepresented within the County service systems, were generally overrepresented among the population of individuals with some type of methamphetamine involvement. In addition, the population of methamphetamine-involved County services clients was overall more likely to be residing in North County. Further similarities in the demographics of this population emerged when comparing the ethnicity and primary language of methamphetamine-involved clients. Taken as a whole, there were more primary methamphetamine users who identified as Caucasian than any other ethnicity, and of the County agencies reporting clients' primary language, the large majority of methamphetamine-involved clients spoke English as a primary language. Of the clients served by the County agencies involved in the Methamphetamine Snapshot study, the majority were over the age of 25.

Telling the Story: Methamphetamine Use in Santa Cruz County

While further research is needed, in exploring the impact of methamphetamine on the service agencies in Santa Cruz County, a number of common trends become evident. Data from the Methamphetamine Snapshot will be used to implement methamphetamine prevention efforts in Santa Cruz County, in order to reduce the use and negative impacts of methamphetamine on our community. For example, agencies such as the Santa Cruz County Probation Department are beginning to increase the number of services addressed toward women, and for those in North County. Additionally, agencies such as the Probation Department will work with service system partners to further explore the reasons for gender, and other apparent differences in order to better address the treatment needs of methamphetamine-involved clients.