

# The Meth Epidemic in America

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**Two Surveys of U.S. Counties:  
The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities  
The Impact of Meth on Children**

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- **Other crimes are increasing as a result of meth.** Seventy percent of the responding officials say that robberies or burglaries have increased because of meth use, while 62% report increases in domestic violence. In addition, simple assaults (53%) and identity thefts (27%) have also increased.

### The Impact of Meth on Children

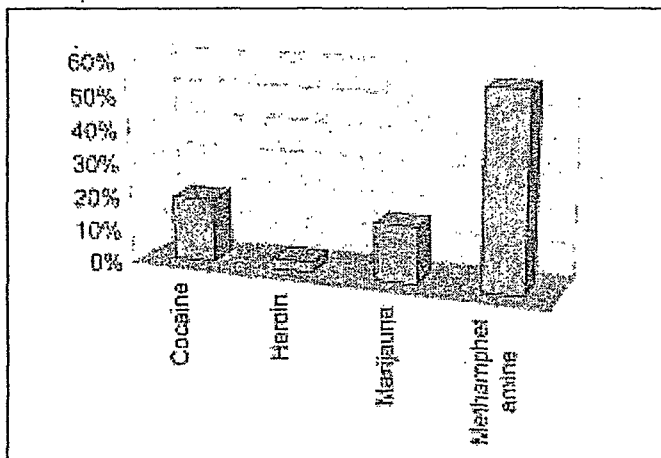
- **Meth is a major cause of child abuse and neglect:**
  - Forty percent of all the child welfare officials in the survey report increased out of home placements because of meth in the last year.
  - During the past five years, 71% of the responding counties in California reported an increase in out of home placements because of meth and 70% of Colorado counties reported an increase.
  - More than 69% of counties in Minnesota reported a growth in out of home placements because of meth during the last year, as did 54% of the responding counties in North Dakota.
- **Meth hurts children and families over the long-term.** County officials were asked if the particular nature of the meth user parent has increased the difficulty of family reunification and 59% said yes.

## What is the Primary Drug Problem in Your County?

Law enforcement officials in all 500 responding counties were asked, using drug related arrests in the last year, to select the drug that was the biggest problem in their county. Although some counties across the country still rated cocaine (19%), marijuana (17%) or heroin (3%) as their number one drug problem, 58% percent of counties in this survey said that methamphetamines were their largest drug problem. See figure 2.

Taking a look at the regional responses to this question, 76% of counties in the Southwest rate methamphetamine as their number one drug problem and 75% of counties in the Northwest say the same. Sixty seven percent of counties in the Upper Midwest rate meth as their number one drug problem. Conversely, only 4% of counties in the Northeast rate meth as number one, while 46% rate heroin as number one and 21% rate marijuana as number one. Since the Northeast is the nation's most urbanized area, this data supports the long held belief that methamphetamine use has for many years been seen as a rural phenomenon. This appears to be changing however, since 57% of the officials in the Lower Midwest ranked meth as its number one drug, and 26% of the officials in the Southeast did the same.

Figure 2: Primary Drug Problem



## Methamphetamine Impact on Jails

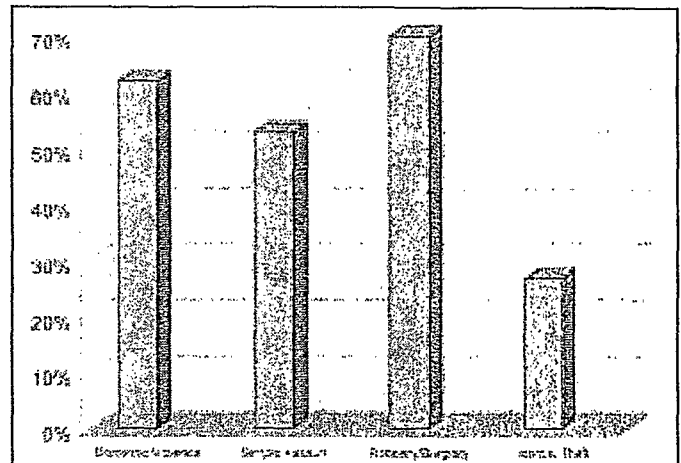
The growth of the use and addiction to methamphetamines has occurred so fast and to such a degree that many local governments are scrambling to catch up. Only 16% of the law enforcement officials report that their county either facilitates or sponsors a meth rehabilitation center or program, while 81% report that they do not. As a result, many abusers of this drug who have committed crimes are housed in local jails.

Officials were asked to estimate what percentage of their local jail inmates were there because of meth related crimes. Of those responding, 50% estimated that up to 20% of their current inmates were housed because of meth related crimes. In the smallest population groups, counties with populations below 50,000, 6% of the counties estimate that 75 to 100% of their inmates are housed because of meth related crimes. In the Upper Midwest, 7% report that 75 to 100% of the jail population are being held because of meth related crimes.

## Crimes Increasing Because of Meth

Although the use of methamphetamines is itself a crime, there are several other crimes that have been increasing because of the prolific use of this drug. Seventy percent of the responding officials say that robberies or burglaries have increased because of meth use, while 62 percent report increases in domestic violence. In addition, simple assaults (53%) and identity thefts (27%) have also increased. See figure 3.

Figure 3: Increase in Crimes Because of Meth Use



## Impact of Meth on Law Enforcement Activities

The increased presence of meth in many counties across the nation has increased the workload of 82% of the responding counties. In the Southwest, 93% of the counties report an increased workload while 88% of the counties in the Northwest report an increase. These increased law enforcement activities that have been attributed to the increased use of and addiction to methamphetamines are putting a heavy financial burden on local law enforcement activities. As a result, 52% of the responding counties say that they have to pay more overtime, while 13% have changed work assignments of police personnel to accommodate the increased need for police power. Eleven percent of counties say that they are assigning their officers to longer shifts to address this growing crisis.

As a means of waging a war against the methamphetamine epidemic, many counties are targeting the labs that are built to manufacture the drug. Many of the labs that remain in this country are small labs, and are often portable. Although toxic and dangerous to the environment, they have been flourishing in recent years. Sixty two percent of the county law enforcement officials report that lab seizures have increased in their counties in the last 3 years. In the Lower Midwest, 74% report increases in lab seizures, while 68% of counties in the Upper Midwest report increases. Even the Northeast, where very few county officials rank meth as the number one drug problem, reports a 42% increase in lab seizures during the last 3 years.

How are counties addressing this problem? First and foremost, most recognize that methamphetamine use is spreading. Local law enforcement officials also acknowledge that for every lab that they close down, 10 new ones are created. They also know that many of

officials were asked if the particular nature of the meth user parent has increased the difficulty of family reunification and 59% said yes. In Minnesota, 90% of county officials said yes and in California, 86 percent of responding counties gave the same response.

An April 2004 article written by Dan Papin, director of Community Services for Washington County for the Association of Minnesota Counties magazines tells the story. According to Mr. Papin, 30 percent of all child protection assessments in his county involve meth use by family members, the primary reason for the department's involvement, another 25% have some form of meth involvement. He also adds that these children often stay in out-of-home placement three times as long as other children.

The reality, as county officials who have experienced difficulty indicated, is that in 48% of these counties there are more families that cannot be reunified, 56% say the families take much longer to reunify than in the past, and in 27% of the counties, officials say recidivism is so great with meth users that the reunification of these families does not last.

Children who are the victims of the methamphetamine epidemic are presenting many unique challenges to social service workers, foster parents, counselors and adoption workers. As a result, 69% of the responding officials from county social service agencies indicate that their counties have had to provide additional and special training for their welfare system workers and have had to develop new and special protocols for workers to address the special needs of these displaced children.

# The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities' Law Enforcement

As you may know, methamphetamine use has risen dramatically in counties across the nation. Formerly a rural problem, it is slowly moving into a more urban setting. At the same time, it has not yet arrived on the national radar screen. The National Association of Counties is conducting a telephone survey of public safety officials in counties to determine the impact of meth use on public safety activities. Can you take a few minutes to answer a few questions that will provide information for a national report that will be released in July?

**1. Have arrests where methamphetamine was involved increased in your county?**

Yes, in the last 5 years .... 88%      Yes, in the last 3 years 87%      Yes, in the last year .... 67%

**2. In your best estimate, what percentage of the total arrests made in your county in the last five years are methamphetamine related?**

0 to 10% .... 36%      10 to 20% .... 15%      20 to 30% .... 11%      30 to 40% .... 10%  
40 to 50% .... 75%      50 to 75% .... 12%      75 to 100% .... 5%

**3. Based on drug related arrests in the last year, which of the following drugs is the biggest problem in your county?**

Cocaine .... 19%      Heroin .... 3%      Marijuana .... 17%      Methamphetamine .... 58%

Others ....

**4. Does your county facilitate or sponsor a methamphetamine rehabilitation center or program?**

Yes .... 16%      No .... 81%

**5. What percent of current county jail inmates are incarcerated because of methamphetamine related crimes?**

0 to 10% .... 37%      10 to 20% .... 13%      20 to 30% .... 11%      30 to 40% .... 8%  
40 to 50% .... 5%      50 to 75% .... 11%      75 to 100% .... 6%

**6. Have methamphetamine lab seizures increased in your county in the last three years?**

Yes .... 62%      No .... 35%

**7. Has the use of methamphetamines in your county increased the workload of public safety staff?**

Yes .... 82%      No .... 18%      *If no, skip to #9*

**8. If workloads has increased which of the following are happening (check all that apply).**

Paying more overtime .... 52%      Longer shifts .... 11%  
Changed work assignments .... 13%      None of the above .... 6%

**9. Have any of the following crimes increased because of the presence of methamphetamines in your county?**

Domestic violence .... 62%      Simple Assault .... 53%      Robbery or Burglary .... 70%  
Identity Theft .... 27%      Don't Know ....

**10. Has your county established an interagency special task force to address methamphetamine issues?**

Yes .... 52%      No, but plans are in the works .... >1%      No .... 40%

**11. Is your county a part of an intergovernmental or regional task force to address methamphetamine issues?**

Yes .... 60%      No, but plans are in the works ....      No .... 35%