

VII. COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS A SOCIETAL PROBLEM

Telephone Poll Respondents

After clarifying the interviewees age and place of residency, they were asked to register their level of agreement with the following definitions of substance abuse. Table 1 depicts the number and percent of respondents that either strongly agreed or agreed with the listed definitions. The definitions that respondents had the highest level of agreement with were the use of illegal drugs daily (90%), and the use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs impair their ability to function (91.3%). More [Wayne County](#) respondents agreed with the definition of use of illegal drugs daily (92.3%) than Monroe respondents (88.2%), and more [Monroe respondents](#) agreed with the impairment definition (93.6%) than Wayne (89.8%).

Reasons for Use Telephone poll participants were asked about their level of agreement with the reasons they think different age groups use drugs. Most of those polled either strongly agreed or agreed that the reason teenagers ages 10 to 18 use drugs is peer pressure (88%). Depression also elicited high levels of agreement, especially in Wayne County (86.8%) versus 68.8% in Monroe County. Parental tolerance was cited by more Wayne County respondents than (75.3%) than Monroe County (63.2%).

For adults ages 18 to 54 respondents were more likely to agree/strongly agree that stress was the reason these adults use drugs (89.9%). Habit elicited the second most frequent level of agreement responses (88.3%). Wayne County respondents were more in agreement with these two reasons than Monroe County respondents.

For older adults ages 55 on up, habit also elicited the highest level of agreement (88.3%) as to the reasons older adults use drugs followed by depression (86.4%). More Monroe County respondents agreed with depression (87.2%), and Wayne County respondents were more likely to agree with habit (89.6%).

Types of Drugs Used Respondents report that alcohol is the drug of choice for all age groups in their communities For older adults the abuse of prescription drugs is ranked second, with more Monroe respondents (13.2%) than Wayne feeling this was a problem (8.7%). Marijuana was the second most frequently identified drug for adults ages 19 to 54. More Wayne County respondents identified this drug as in high use in their community (12.9%) than Monroe (10.1%). Tobacco was the second choice of respondents for teenagers (21.5%) followed by marijuana (20.2%). Wayne County respondents viewed use of these drugs by teenagers as more of a problem than Monroe County participants.

Scope of the Problem Three-quarter (76.3%) of participants in the telephone poll either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that substance abuse is a minor problem in their communities. Less than half agreed that it is a major problem (43.7%). Most respondents perceive substance abuse as a public health problem, with 86.8% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that “substance abuse is a public health problem.” Over half of participants (61.4%) also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “substance abuse is a criminal justice problem.” More [Monroe County](#) respondents felt it

was a criminal justice problem (65.4%) than [Wayne participants \(58.1%\)](#). See [Tables 1 through 9 in Appendix R](#).

Key Informants

There were 36 completed [key informant](#) interviews including State/regional contacts and SEMCA staff. Of these 36% ($n = 13$) were Monroe County informants and 13 were from Wayne County. The majority of the interview questions were open-ended with some close-ended questions.

The first question requested that the interviewee provide their definition of substance abuse. Responses to this question for all interviewees, [Wayne County](#) and [Monroe County](#) informants are distributed in Table 10 in Appendix S. Two definitions were mentioned most frequently: 1) impairment of functioning, and 2) excessive use of Alcohol, Tobacco, and other Drugs. In Monroe County impairment of daily functioning was most often cited, while in Wayne County excessive use was the most frequent definition offered by key informants.

Community Attitudes After clarifying with the informant what their definition of community was (either the entire county or both for State/regional contacts) participants were asked to describe their community's attitude towards substance abuse. The clearest distinction between responses offered by Wayne and Monroe County informants is that only Wayne County respondents indicated that their communities' attitude was acceptance (46.2%), and only Monroe County respondents described their community as proactive (15.4%). These Monroe County informants mentioned local coalitions as evidence of this proactive community stance. More Monroe County informants (30.8%) versus 7.7% of Wayne County informants described their communities' attitude as being zero tolerance. One-third of all informants ($n = 11$ or 30.5%) described a mixture of attitudes dependent upon the population. For example, schools were seen as more likely to be in denial and law enforcement was more likely to be described as having zero tolerance. Informants' also perceived different county subdivisions as having different attitudes with denial being perceived as an attitude in middle class communities, while zero tolerance or acceptance were ascribed to lower income communities.

Informants were also asked to define prevention with two definitions offered most frequently education and early intervention, as well as enforcement and education. Fewer Wayne County informants mentioned early intervention than the other two categories of informants. See [Tables 10 through 12 in Appendix R](#).

Scope of the Problem Charts 1, 2 and 3 in [Appendix S](#) depict key informants answers to how large or small a problem they perceive substance abuse to be among different age groups. Across all age groups more [Wayne County](#) key informants perceived the problem to be a larger one than [Monroe County](#) Informants. Only for the older adult category did any of the key informant groups seem to think substance abuse was a small problem.

Types of Drugs Used [Key informants](#) were asked to identify the top two drugs most frequently used by different age groups. Most informants offered more than two drugs thus the total number of responses varies across age group and key informant category.

Marijuana was the most frequently cited drug used by teens 11 to 17 years of age mentioned by over one-third of informants in all categories as was alcohol. Nearly 10% of key informants in all categories listed prescription drugs. [See Tables 13 through 14 in Appendix R.](#)

Among young adults ages 18 to 21, over one-third of key informants listed marijuana as the drug of choice for this age group followed by alcohol. Cocaine was mentioned twice by Wayne County informants and four times by Monroe County, while crack was mentioned once in Wayne and twice in Monroe. [Chart 4](#) presents the combined percentages for these two drugs and others that were most frequently mentioned by key informants relative to this age group.

For Adults 22 to 54 years old, all key informant groups felt alcohol was a larger problem than marijuana, with one-third or more mentioning alcohol and one-quarter or less citing marijuana. More Monroe County key informants mentioned cocaine (17.6%) than Wayne informants (6.3%), but no Monroe County informants mentioned heroin. This was the first population group for which all three categories of key informants offered “don’t know” responses. These data are presented in [Chart 5](#).

Among older adults ages 55 on up alcohol was mentioned by nearly half of informants in all three groups, followed by prescription drugs. Cocaine was mentioned by all three groups, but not crack. For this population the percent of key informants answering “don’t know” was the highest for any age group ranging from 16.4% among all key informants to 21.7% for Wayne County informants.

[Reasons for Drug Use](#) [Key informants](#) were also asked about the top two reasons these different age groups use drugs. Again answers varied by age group and key informants offered more than two reasons. For teens 11-17 and young adults ages 18 to 21 peer pressure was the number one reason offered by informants in all three categories. Among 11 to 17 year olds experimentation ranked second and for young adults recreation/socialize ranked second. Monroe County informants were more likely to mention experimentation, depression and recreation/socialize than the other two Informant groups. Wayne County informants were more likely to mention stress/family/work issues (7.7%) for teens.

Societal norms were cited as a reason to use drugs for 18 to 21 year olds by all key informant groups. Habit/addiction was mentioned by Wayne County and state/regional informants, but not Monroe County informants. The same holds for stress/family/work issues, which were not mentioned by Monroe County informants, but were by the other two groups. Among Wayne informants this was typically discussed in the context of unemployment and the lack of work opportunities creating stress that resulted in drug use.

For adults 22 to 54 and older adults 55 years of age and older habit/addiction was cited most often by all key informant groups. For adults (22 to 54) recreation/socialize was the second most often cited reason, and for older adults depression was the second reason mentioned. Stress/family/work issues was mentioned by Monroe key informants for the first time with adults, at rates that exceed the responses for other Informants. Wayne County informants were more likely to cite depression than other informants as a reason for drug use among adults.

Depression is the most frequently cited reason for older adults 55 on up by all key informants (23%) and Wayne County informants (41%). Physical health problems were mentioned by Monroe Informants and State/Regional, but not by Wayne County informants as a reason the elderly use drugs. Here again there were more “don’t know” ($n = 10$) responses for this age group than the others. [See Tables 17 through 20 in Appendix R.](#)

Stakeholder Survey Groups

The 57 individuals who returned surveys were asked about the norms and scope of the problem of substance abuse in the communities they live and/or work in. They were also asked to define substance abuse. Law enforcement (36.4%) and school system (45.8%) respondents cited abuse/excessive use, whereas providers most often cited impairment of daily functioning (40%). All three respondent groups’ answers differed as to their communities attitudes about substance abuse. Law enforcement answers were evenly split between denial, zero tolerance, half denial/half zero tolerance, and proactive. Providers felt acceptance best described community attitude (41.2%) followed by denial (23.5%), school system survey participants reported zero tolerance (34.8%) followed by acceptance 21.7%.

When all the respondents’ answers to the questions “how big a problem substance abuse is for different age groups” are combined the most frequently cited response is “medium” with the exception of older adults where it is considered “small.” When answers are analyzed by individual groups, providers are more likely to report that substance abuse is a large problem across all age cohorts than the other respondent groups. These data are presented in [Charts 3 through 6 in Appendix R.](#)

Types of Drugs Used All respondent groups were asked about the types of drugs used most frequently by youth. For youth ages 11 to 17 school systems (46%) and providers (32%) mention alcohol as the most frequently used drug, while providers (37%) and law enforcement (43%) respondents cite marijuana. Responses to this question are depicted in [Chart 7.](#)

Schools were not asked about the other age groups. Among young adults ages 18 to 21 providers report marijuana as the most frequently used drug (34.3%) as does law enforcement (40%). These two groups of respondents cite alcohol as the second most oft used drug. When it comes to 22 to 54 year olds providers report cocaine (36.1%) and alcohol (36.1%) and law enforcement respondents cite alcohol 29.2% and marijuana (29.2%). Both groups agree that alcohol and prescription drugs are the most frequently used drugs among older adults, but providers cite heroin as often as prescription drugs (16.7%). See [Tables 23 through 25 in Appendix R.](#)

Reasons for Drug Use For teenagers ages 11 to 17 and 18 to 21 respondents cite peer pressure as the top reason these groups use drugs. Respondents report habit/addiction as the number one reason adults ages 22- 54 and older adults use substances. These data are distributed in [Tables 26 through 29 in Appendix R.](#)

Focus Groups

Not all focus groups were asked the same questions, since SEMCA wanted to know specific things from specific target audiences. However, despite different questions the discussion elicited some common themes across similar groups. These themes are summarized herein beginning with community groups. Quotes from these focus groups are listed below to illustrate these themes. The MCHSCB was the first group to be convened and Highland Park was the last group.

Scope of the Problem Highland Park residents were most concerned about the lack of enforcement in their community and the use of the community as a dumping ground for the mentally ill, parolees and other high risk populations. Whereas MCHSCB felt the community's attitude was primarily denial with the exception of law enforcement which was focused on deterrence. Although attitudes varied the types of drugs that concerned them by age groups did not. Both communities were concerned about the use of marijuana and alcohol among youth, cocaine/crack and in Wayne County heroin among adults, and for older adults the abuse of alcohol and in Monroe alcohol and prescription drugs. Highland Park residents identified alcohol abuse as on the rise in senior living centers. Both communities also identified the problem of substance abuse across age groups as medium to large.

Providers and law enforcement personnel also perceive marijuana and alcohol as the biggest problem for all age groups with an increasing trend in the use of prescription drugs primarily opiates. Prevention providers and law enforcement also identified Khat among Arab-American youth as a problem. The over prescribing and abuse of methadone was also identified by several groups.

Consumers indicated they started using very young (8, 10, 11 years of age) and that it was tolerated or accepted by their parents and community members. Some suggested drug use was pervasive in the community among youth and adults. They suggested the reason they started using at young ages was boredom and a lack of recreational opportunities along with not realizing the consequences of abuse for their lives in the future. Lack of employment was identified as a reason for current use. Lack of employment was also cited in Highland Park and by some SEMCA providers.

“Highland Parkers” is a negative label; bias; drugs, parolees, homeless and mentally ill are being brought into the community, they are not there to begin with;” “violators/offenders are being brought into the community (not to Oakland County etc.)”; “sellers have the perception that you can come to Highland Park and sell or do whatever you want to do;”

“alcohol; more of a problem in senior citizens centers; increase in HIV infections in seniors overall – no study done specific to Highland Park – but this is a possible indicator of substance abuse; prostitution in senior citizens buildings is on the rise and may be a contributing factor to the rise in HIV infections in this age group.”

“Denial, there is no abuse.” “Parent denial-no referral as a result.” “We (legal side) recognize there is a problem, no tolerance, we fight drugs, we are aware.” “We view it as a criminal issue not a treatment issue.” “We

have one bullet we shoot.” “We have very few adolescent treatment services.” “Some parents don’t view alcohol as a problem.” People are going for services for prescription drugs, then we find out there was alcohol use.” “the sequence of substances used in the community are alcohol, marijuana, and prescription drugs” “In Monroe we see alcohol being number one and prescription drugs being secondary choices.”

“Marijuana and crack cocaine.” “We are seeing Khat, a green drug chewed and used within the Arab community in Dearborn.”

“Khat (dried and bundled) is smuggled to the U.S. and it is illegal. It is not illegal in other countries. It is a methamphetamine that is very socially acceptable and widely used in Arab homes.”

“Methadone is not only prescribed for heroin dependence, it is also prescribed for pain. It is disturbing to hear that clients are being stopped by the police especially when treatment providers are giving them the medication and then letting them drive. There is an increase in legitimate prescriptions for methadone. There is a street value to resale.”

“Cocaine, heroin, alcohol - fueled by unemployment.”

Participants responded that alcohol and marijuana were the drugs most frequently used for teenagers (11 years of age to 17) and young adults (18 years of age to 21). “Kids tell me it is easier to get marijuana.” “seeing students that grind up their ADHD medicines and snort them.” Participants stated that cocaine/crack was the most frequently used drug for adults (22 years of age to 54).

“Whole family uses, makes it hard to get and stay clean.” “went to prison at age 12 for drugs.” “I got into it before age 10 – I grew up with it.” “I was born addicted.” “yeah everybody smokes pot/weed in Michigan and at home.” “Every thing was so boring.” “Drinking was acceptable in my house.” “if you have no money for the Y or something you ass out.”