

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

How Prevalent Is Crystal Methamphetamine Use Among Young Adults?

A recent report analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) suggests that crystal methamphetamine use by young adults is “considerable higher” than previous surveys have indicated. The table below describes the methodology used to obtain estimates of crystal methamphetamine use by three surveys conducted around the same time: Add Health, Monitoring the Future (MTF), and the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). The methodological differences between the three surveys may help explain why estimates of crystal methamphetamine use differ. The question remains which estimate policymakers should use.

Comparison of Three Surveys Reporting the Prevalence of Crystal Methamphetamine Use Among Young Adults

	Add Health	MTF	NSDUH	Comments
Crystal Meth Estimate (Past Year Use)	2.8%	1.4%	1.7% (all meth use)	NSDUH does not differentiate between meth and crystal meth.
Survey Question	"In the past year, have you used crystal meth?"	"On how many occasions (if any) have you smoked (or inhaled the fumes of) crystal meth ("ice") during the last 12 months?"	"How long has it been since you last used methamphetamine, Desoxyn, or Methedrine?"	Add Health asks about a variety of sensitive behaviors (other than drug use) which may disinhibit reporting of substance use. NSDUH asks about meth in the context of prescription drugs, which may lead to underreporting.
When Conducted	August 2001–April 2002	Spring of 2002	January–December 2001	
Sample Size	14,108	1,767	22,658	Larger sample sizes provide more robust estimates.
Ages Surveyed	18–26	19–28	18–25	
Description of Survey Sample	Longitudinal study of nationally representative sample of persons who were in 7th–12th grades in 1994–95. Original respondents were re-interviewed 1, 2, and 6 years later.	Follow-up survey of representative sample of persons who participated in the MTF survey when they were in 12 th grade (not necessarily the same individuals each year).	Nationally representative sample of residents of households, noninstitutional group living quarters, and civilians living on military bases.	MTF excludes high school drop outs, who may be at higher risk for substance use. Add Health re-interviewed the same respondents several times. The resulting rapport may have increased their willingness to report substance use.
How Administered	Computer-assisted self-interviews (CASI) conducted in home.	Paper survey mailed to home.	Computer-assisted self-interviews (CASI) conducted in home.	CASI are associated with greater reporting of substance use.
Recall Assistance	Calendar.	None.	Calendar.	Calendar may increase the ability to recall past behaviors.

SOURCES: A full list of sources is available on the online version of this issue (www.cesar.umd.edu/cesar/cesarfax/vol16/16-28.pdf).

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The Governor's Office of Crime Control and Prevention funded this project under grant BJAG 2005-1206. All points of view in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position of any State agency.

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**CESAR FAX, Volume 16, Issue 28
July 16, 2007**

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