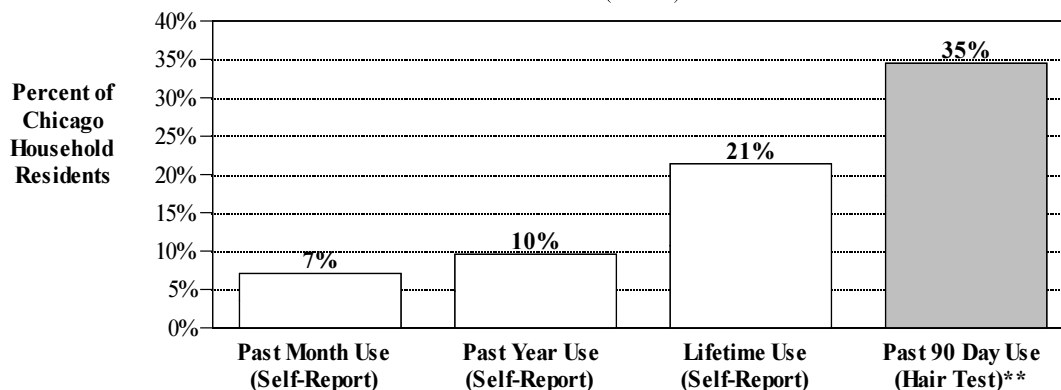


Study Finds That Household Surveys May Underestimate Cocaine Use By Residents of High-Risk Communities

Estimates of drug use are typically based on findings from household surveys. However, a recent study has found that survey respondents may not provide accurate self reports of their cocaine and heroin use. Researchers interviewed a sample of 322 residents in high-risk* Chicago neighborhoods who provided a hair specimen for analysis. According to the hair tests, cocaine use was five times greater than the self-reported use in the past month and more than three times greater than the self-reported use in the past year (see figure below). Heroin use was also underreported by respondents. Furthermore, use of a self-administered, computerized interview (audio-CASI) by some respondents did not reduce underreporting. This study should be replicated so that household surveys may be designed to provide policymakers with more accurate estimates of drug use.

Estimated Cocaine Use Among Chicago Household Residents, by Self-Report and Hair Test, 1997

(n=322)



*High-risk neighborhoods were defined as those with above-average admissions to state-supported drug and alcohol treatment programs.

**Hair segments were cut to 3 cm in length from the root ends, corresponding to estimated drug use in the past 90 days. Approximately 10% of the hair specimens were shorter than 3 cm.

SOURCE: Michael Fendrich, Timothy P. Johnson, Seymour Sudman, Joseph S. Wislar, and Vina Spiehler, "Validity of Drug Use Reporting in a High-Risk Community Sample: A Comparison of Cocaine and Heroin Survey Reports with Hair Tests," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 149(10):955-62, 1999. For more information, contact Michael Fendrich at 312-413-1084.