



ADAI RESEARCH BRIEF

No. 04-04 February 2004

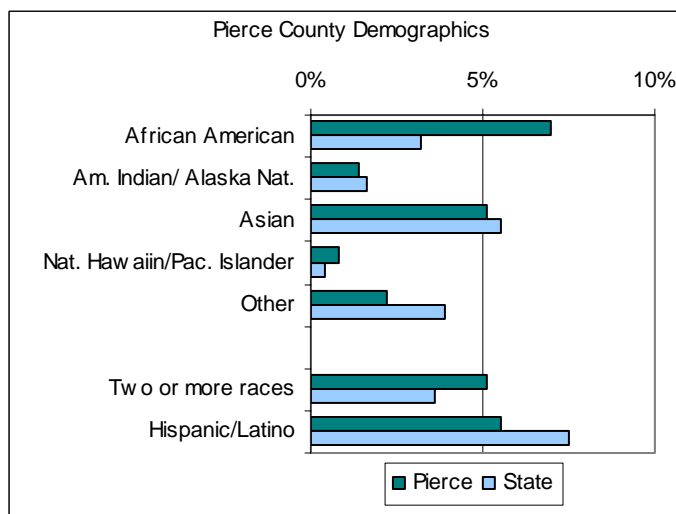
PIERCE COUNTY – DRUG USE EPIDEMIOLOGY

LOCATION AND POPULATION OVERVIEW

Pierce County is located in Western Washington at the southern end of Puget Sound. Geographically, it is a diverse region with Mount Rainier to the east and the Sound, with several islands, in the western part of the County. Total size of the County is 1,679 square miles.

With 700,820 people, Pierce is the second most populous county in the State, representing almost 12% of Washington's population. The increase in the population between 1990 and 2000 was 19.6%. The largest city, Tacoma, has 193,556 people, with approximately half a million living within 10 miles of the city. Population density is among the highest in the State with an average of 432 people per square mile, compared with the State average of 91¹. The Port of Tacoma is the 6th largest container port in North America. Two military bases with approximately 25,000 soldiers are located in the County; Fort Lewis, the largest base, is 136 square miles in size. Interstate 5 cuts across the Western part of the County, with several highways branching off from the interstate.

According to the 2000 census the County has more than twice the proportion of African American residents, 7%, as the State average of 3.2%; Caucasians constitute 78.4% of the County compared with 81.8% of the State. Poverty among all persons in the County, 11.0%, is slightly higher than the State average of 10.2%. Rates of children in poverty are similar with 15.6% for the County and 15.2% statewide.



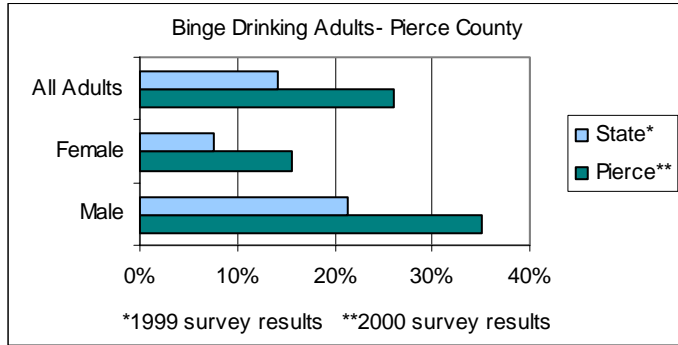
ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE TRENDS - ADULT

Alcohol Use

Alcohol use is prevalent with 58.7% of Pierce County adults reporting past month alcohol use, slightly below the State rate of 60.7%; the national average was 54.2%¹.

Adult Binge Drinking

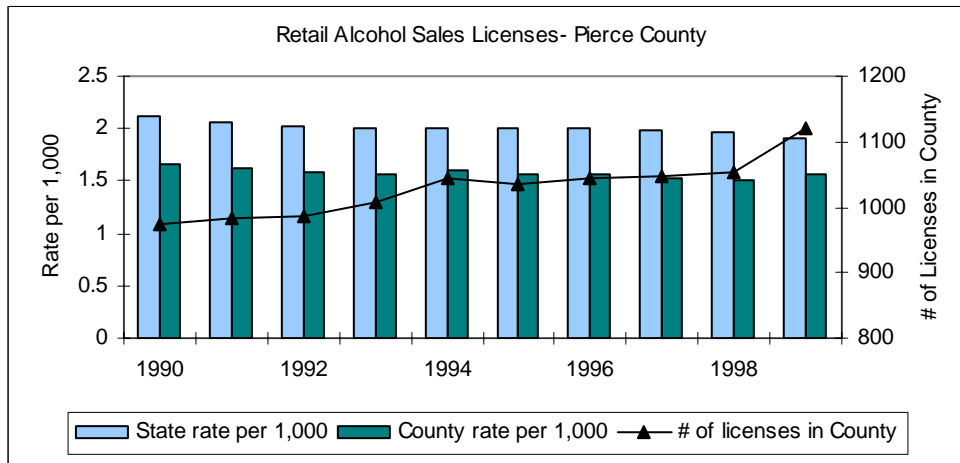
Among those who drink, binge drinking, consumption of five or more drinks at a sitting, is reported much more often among County residents compared with the State as a whole, 26%² versus 14%¹. A third of males who drink report binge drinking in the previous month compared with 16% of females in the County. Data were collected from the County and the State as part of the Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System survey conducted by the Washington State Department of Health.



Alcohol Retail Sales Licenses

The number of alcohol retail sales licenses in a county is an important measure of the availability of alcohol. Sales licenses indicate the number of active licenses at locations including restaurants, grocery stores and wine shops; it does not include liquor stores.

Both the County and State rate of alcohol sales licenses declined throughout the 1990's, as indicated by the vertical bars in the figure. The County has a lower rate of licenses per capita than the State average. Rates are based upon the total number of licenses divided by the population, then multiplied by 1,000. This allows for adjustments as the number of county residents changes over time and also allows for comparisons between counties with populations of different size. There was an increase in the number of licenses to 1,122 in 1999, indicated by the black horizontal line⁴.



Other Drug Use

No recent survey these data available on the level of illegal drug use among adults. Treatment data, presented elsewhere in this report, are the best approximation of current substance use levels.

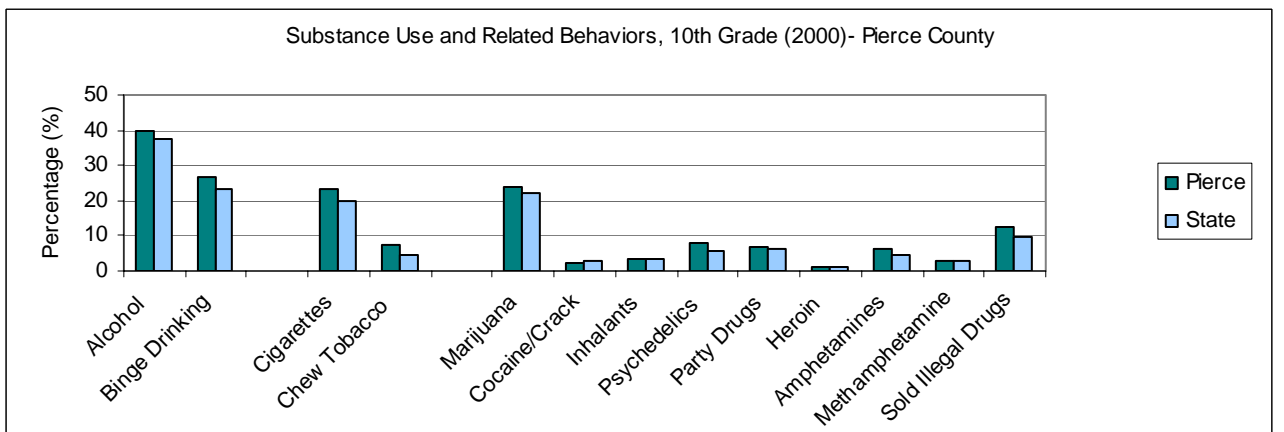
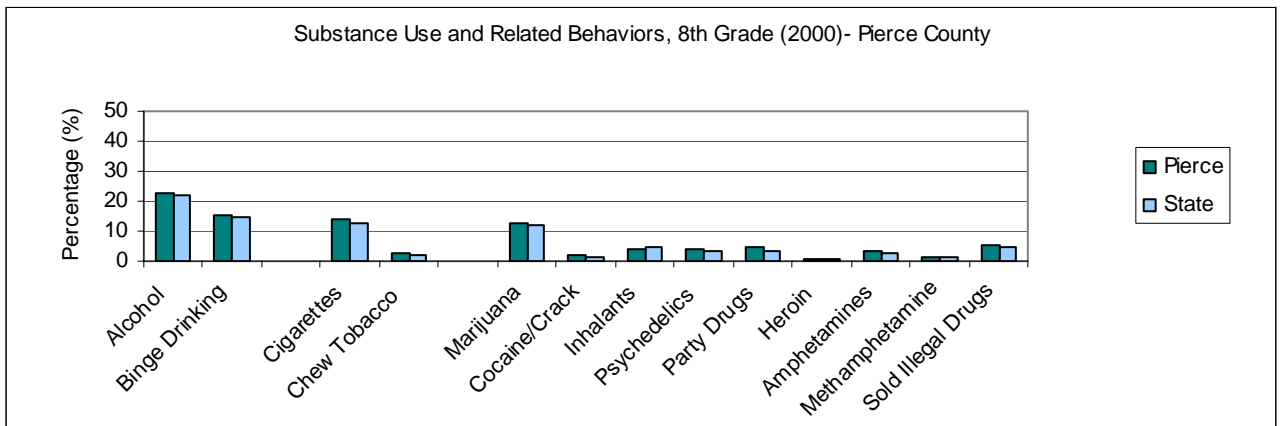
ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE TRENDS - YOUTH

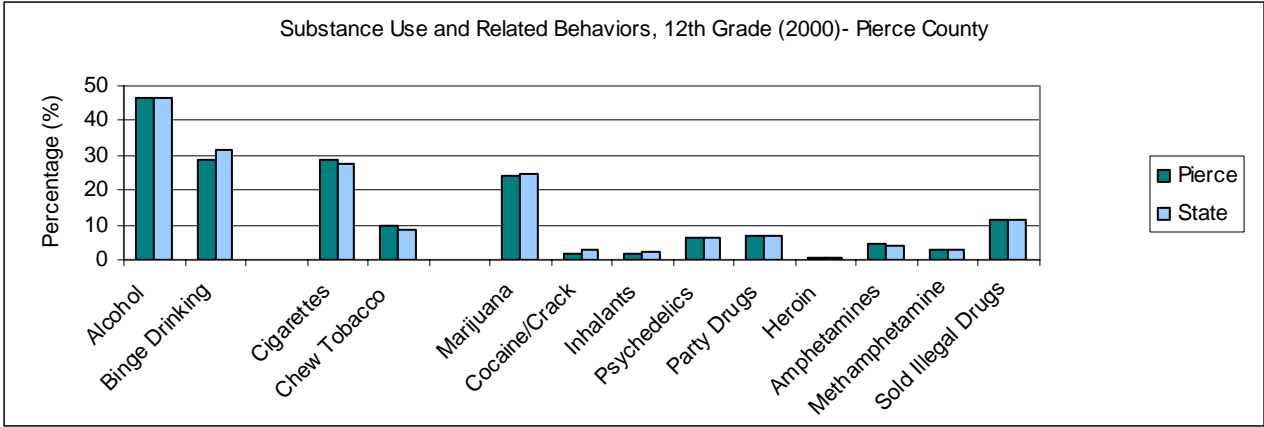
Youth Alcohol and Other Drug Use Estimates

Data on substance use were collected as part of the Washington Student Survey of Adolescent Health Behaviors in the Fall of 2000. Across 8th, 10th and 12th graders alcohol was the most common substance used in the previous month¹. Cigarette smoking and marijuana were the next most commonly used substances, with cigarettes reported more often, except among 10th graders, 24.1% of whom reported recent marijuana use compared with 23.1% for cigarettes.

Binge drinking is common among youth with over a quarter of 10th and 12th graders reporting they had consumed 5 or more drinks in a row within the past two weeks. Use of any alcohol within the prior month was reported by 22%, 40% and 47% of 8th, 10th and 12th graders respectively, similar to State averages.

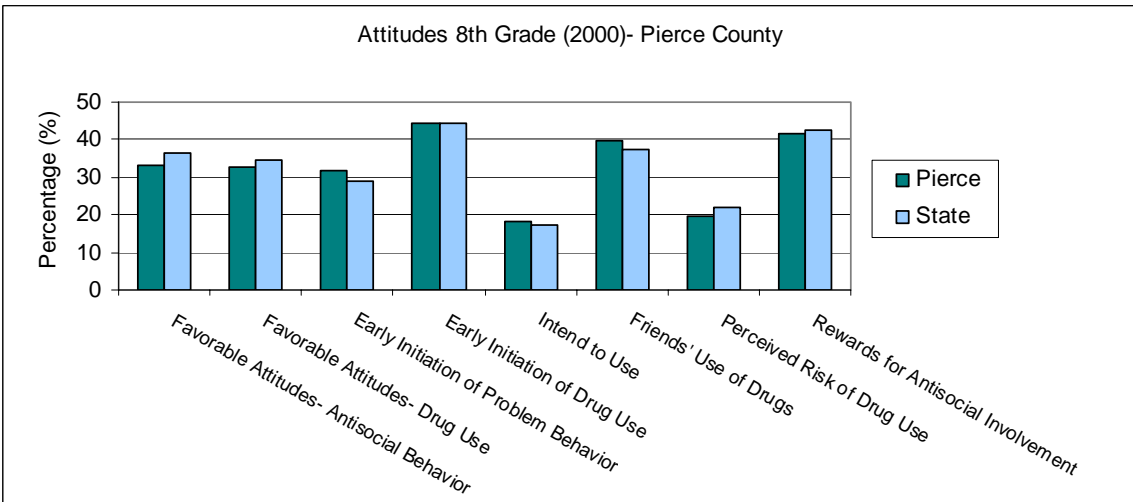
Selling illegal drugs was reported by 12.8% of 10th graders and 11.6% of 12th graders. A recognized limitation of school based surveys is that those with the most serious behavioral and substance using problems are more likely to drop out of school and are therefore less likely to be surveyed in the higher grades; the result being an under reporting of such problems.

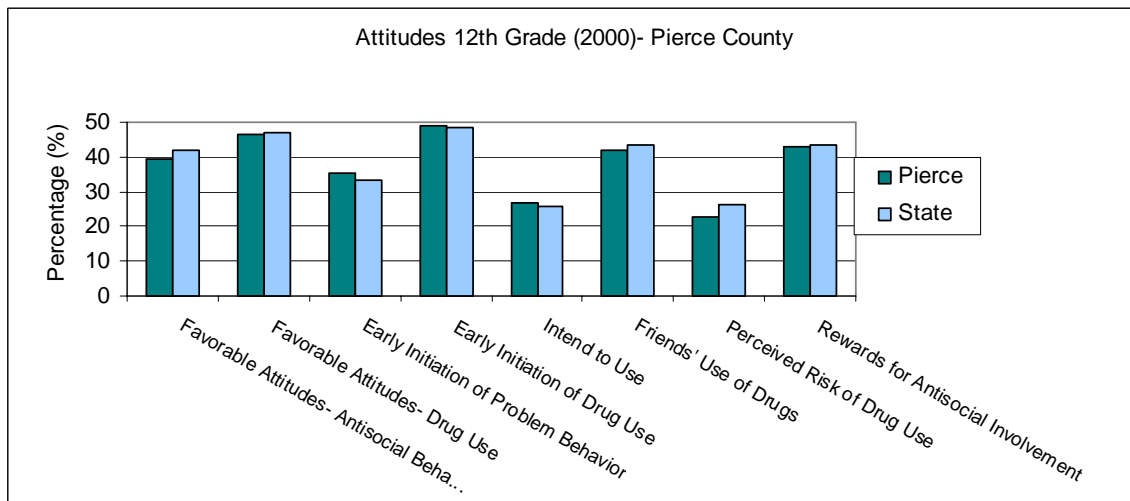
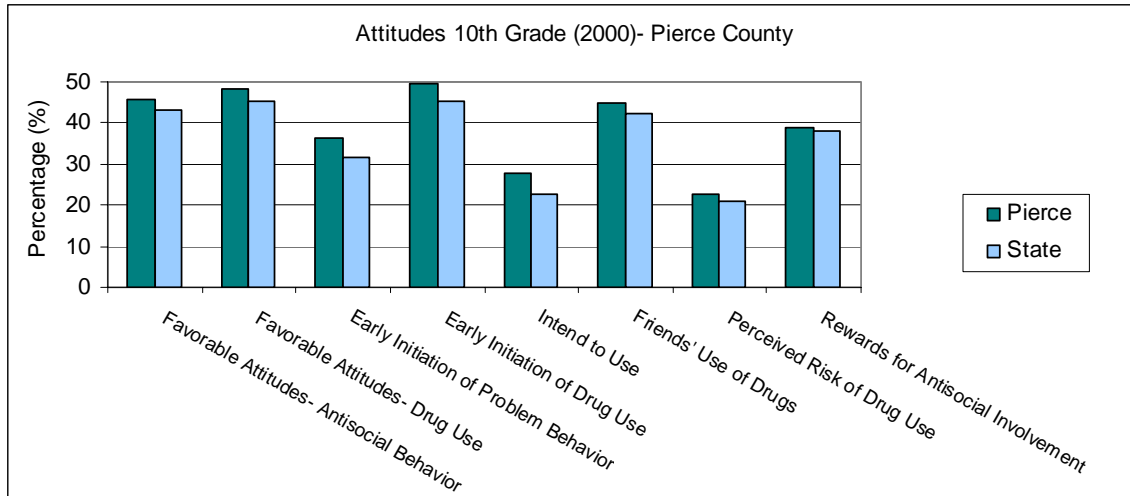




Peer Attitudes Towards Drug Use and Antisocial Behavior

County-wide school surveys point to minimal differences between the County and the rest of the State. Relatively high levels of risk factors are present by 8th grade. About a third of 8th graders indicated they had favorable attitudes towards anti-social behaviors and drug use. Over 40% reported early initiation of drug use. Intending to use drugs increased with age, with over a quarter of 12th graders indicating that they intended to use drugs. About 40% of 8th graders reported that they had friends who had used drugs and that there were rewards for antisocial behavior. Only 20% of 8th graders felt that drug use was risky, this number increased only slightly for those in higher grade levels.

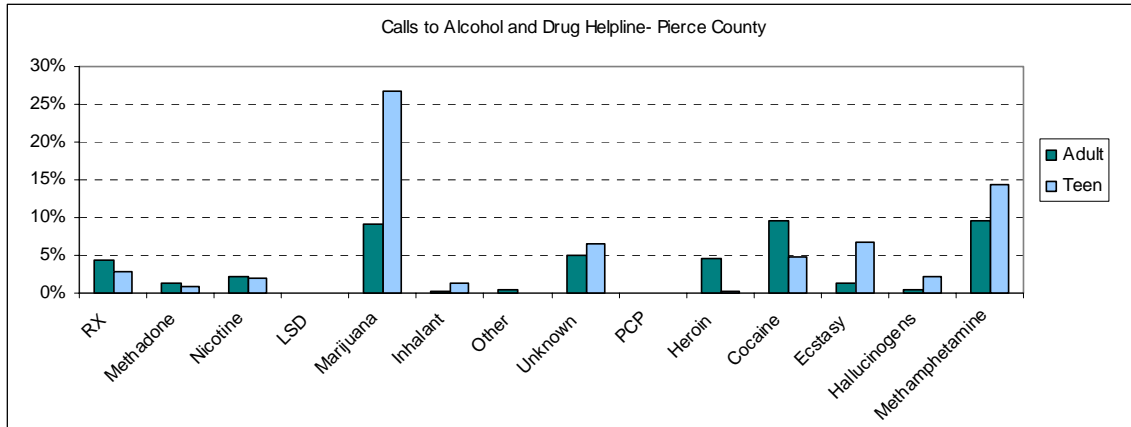




ALCOHOL AND DRUG HELP LINE - YOUTH AND ADULT

The Washington State Alcohol/Drug Help Line provides confidential 24-hour telephone-based treatment referral and assistance for Washington State. Note that the number and types of calls vary greatly statewide and are impacted substantially by local referrals, education, prevention and intervention efforts.

Callers to the Help Line totaled 2,398 in 2001 from Pierce County, with 70% of calls pertaining to adult substance use. The figure shows which illegal drugs were identified during calls to the Help Line. The majority of calls were for alcohol, 52% of adults and 31% of youth calls. A greater proportion of adults than youth called regarding alcohol, cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin. A higher percentage of youth identified marijuana, methamphetamine and ecstasy as the reason for their call.



POISON CENTER

The Washington Poison Center receives calls from throughout Washington State made to its toll free number. In 2001 there were 1,316 calls from Pierce County residents related to commonly abused illegal, prescription and over-the counter drugs to the Poison Center¹. (See the end of this document for important details about this data source.) The majority of these were for over-the-counter and prescription medicines.

Calls regarding street drugs and stimulants were dominated by substances lumped into the category of amphetamines, 172 of 228 calls. Poison center staff report that this is used as a 'catch all' term for stimulants, including methamphetamine, that are not identified more specifically and does not necessarily refer to amphetamines as commonly referred to by those in the substance abuse field (N. Hasting, August 19, 2002, personal communication). Amphetamines were the most commonly mentioned street drug statewide as well. The number of calls for other street drugs were quite small.

Note that the number and types of calls vary greatly statewide and are impacted substantially by local referrals, education, prevention and intervention efforts.

Drug Category	Drug Name	Total # of Exposures
Prescription(Rx) and Over the Counter Drugs(OTC)		1,088
	Antihistamines- (Rx & OTC)	283
	Opiates (Rx)	264
	Dextromethorphan- cold & cough preparations	211
	Benzodiazepine	187
	Other depressants/sedatives	143
Street Drugs		228
	Amphetamine	172
	Marijuana	23
	Cocaine	10
	Mushrooms: hallucinogenic	10
	Heroin	6
	PCP	5
	Methylphenidate	1
	Hallucinogenic amphetamine	1
Sub-total- Street, Rx and OTC Drugs (Summed from above)		1,316
Alcoholic Beverages		131

NEED FOR TREATMENT AND THE TREATMENT GAP

Treatment Services

Referrals to alcohol and other drug treatment programs are available via the County funded community assessment, referral, education, and information service agency. Sixty six State certified chemical dependency treatment agencies are located in the County as of the beginning of 2002. The full range of substances of abuse are addressed, various treatment modalities are available and a number of programs exist for specific sub-populations such as pregnant and parenting women and American Indians. Opiate substitution treatment is the primary form of treatment for heroin addiction. The Tacoma Pierce County Health Department is currently the only State licensed provider of methadone in the County. They have two licenses for methadone maintenance, each allowing for 350 clients. As of September 2002 approximately 510 clients were on the caseload (D. Bischof, personal communication, September 2002). Staffing and funding limitations are currently limiting the number of available treatment slots.

Opiate substitution treatment utilizing methadone is also available at the Veteran's Affairs Administration site at American Lake as of August, 2002. The maximum capacity is 100 clients. As of November 2002, 45 clients were enrolled with an average of two new clients added per week. (D. Calsyn, personal communication, November 21, 2002.)

Drug courts are available for youth and adults in Pierce County. Adult drug court began in 1994 and is limited to offenders whose crimes did not include violence, sexual offenses or weapons-related charges. Capacity is currently approximately 300 defendants. Juvenile drug court has recently received funding; capacity is anticipated to be 75 to 150 youth.

Treatment Gap

The estimated gap in Pierce County between needed treatment and actual treatment utilization is 73.6% for those under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, nearly identical to the State's, (see the table below)⁴. This means that only about one in four poor people who are in need of alcohol or other drug treatment services receive such services.

Region	Number of adults <200% FPL* and eligible for DASA services	Percent of adults <200% FPL and in need of Treatment	Number of adults <200% FPL Receiving Treatment	Number of Adults not Receiving Treatment	Treatment Gap
Pierce County	107,796	10.57%	3,011	8,383	73.60%
State Total	868,734	11.12%	25,395	71,207	73.70%

*Federal Poverty Level, 200% FPL = \$36,200 for a family of four in WA

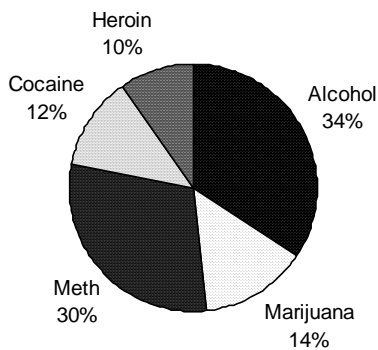
This estimate of treatment gap is based upon the Washington Needs Assessment Household Survey of substance use and treatment need done in 1993-94 and adjusts for new population numbers. There are some limitations to these data because patterns of drug utilization are known to have changed since this survey, e.g. the rise in methamphetamine use. However, this is the best available data on estimating the need for treatment services in the State.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG TREATMENT ADMISSIONS

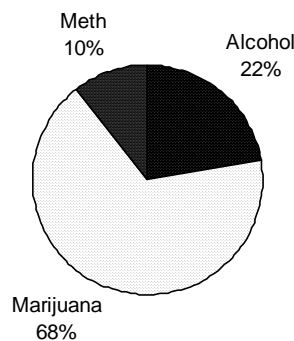
Alcohol and Other Drugs

Alcohol was the most common primary drug at treatment admission for adults, followed closely by methamphetamine¹. Two-thirds of youth treatment admissions were for marijuana followed by alcohol and methamphetamine.

Adult Publicly Funded Treatment Admissions 2001



Youth Publicly Funded Treatment Admissions 2001

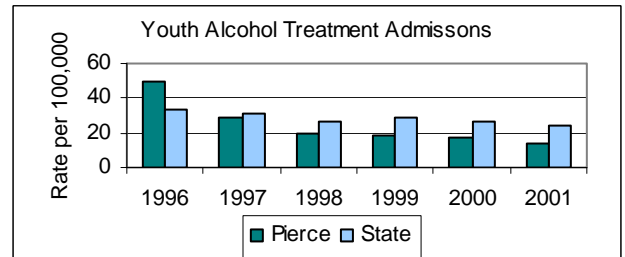
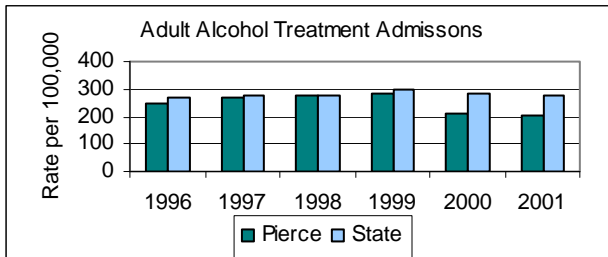


Admission to treatment reflects many factors including treatment demand (self referral and professional/court referrals), treatment availability (locally and regionally), funding, outreach and intervention programs, and changes in local and state policies. It is very important to note that available these data only for publicly funded treatment, it is likely that those receiving privately funded treatment differ in terms of demographics and the types of substances abused. Data on those receiving privately funded treatment are unavailable.

Alcohol

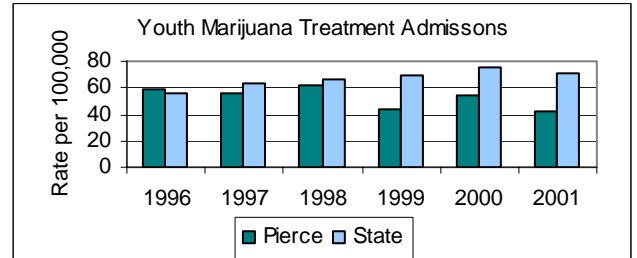
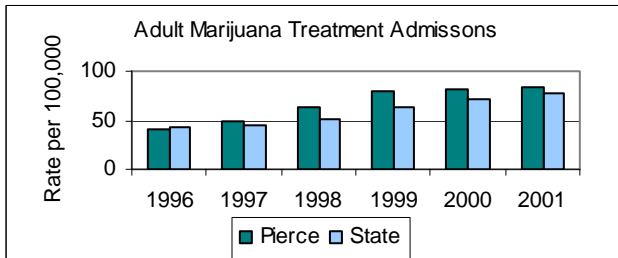
County treatment admissions for adult problematic alcohol users were steady from 1996 to 1999, they then declined from a rate of 308 per 100,000 in 1999 to 243 per 100,000

population in 2000 and stayed at this level into 2001. Youth treatment admissions have been declining since 1996. In 2001, 100 youth reported alcohol as their primary drug at admission, compared with 325 in 1996.



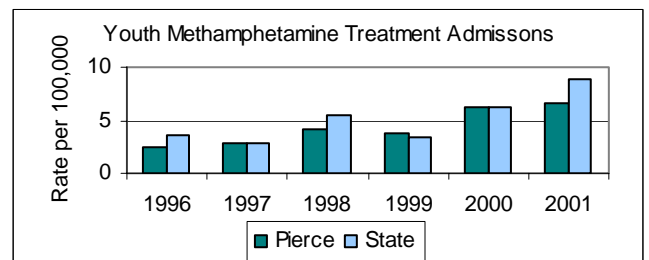
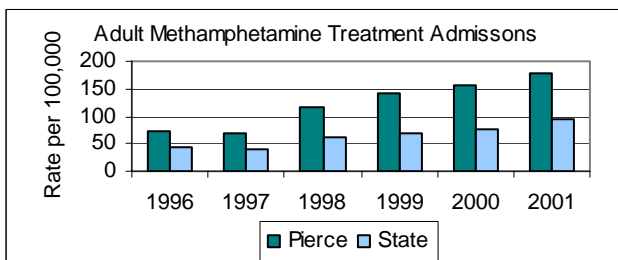
Marijuana

The rate of marijuana treatment admissions in the County doubled for adults, rising at a similar rate and to a similar level as the State's. Youth treatment admissions declined in the County while rising across the State.



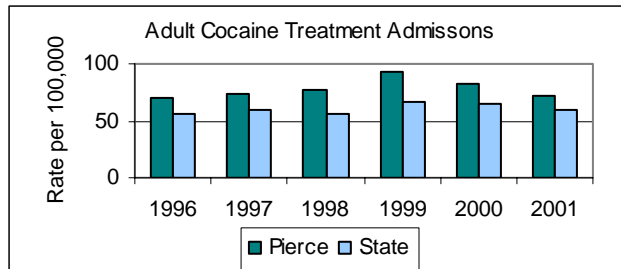
Methamphetamine

Much higher levels of treatment for methamphetamine are evident in the County compared to the State. The County rate increased from 74 per 100,000 to 178 per 100,000 population from 1996 to 2001 for adults. The State rate doubled during this time, but is much lower than the County rate. Youth treatment admissions for methamphetamine have remained relatively low, despite rising threefold. In 2001, 47 youth were admitted to treatment with methamphetamine as their primary drug.



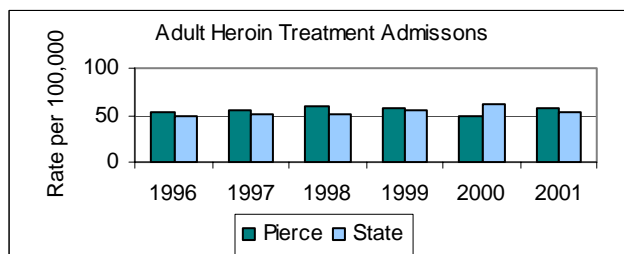
Cocaine

Adult cocaine treatment admissions increased from 1996 to 1999, and in 2001 returned to levels seen in 1996. The rate of youth treatment admissions is quite low, with only 41 admissions from 1996 to 2001.



Heroin

The rate of heroin treatment admissions fluctuated between 48 per 100,000 and 59 per 100,000 from 1996 to 2001. In 2001, a total of 414 adults were admitted to publicly funded treatment with heroin as their primary drug. The County rate is similar to the State's. Only 20 youth were admitted to treatment with heroin their primary drug of choice from 1996 to 2001.



DRUG TRAFFICKING AND PRODUCTION

Trafficking

Mexican nationals are involved in the trafficking of multiple types of drugs including heroin, cocaine, marijuana and methamphetamine. Law enforcement reported 23 known drug trafficking organizations operating in Pierce County in 2001. Further, HIDTA's 2002 Threat Assessment notes that methamphetamine manufacture and dump sites are increasingly common on military bases, particularly Fort Lewis in Pierce County¹.

Notable law enforcement activity during January-June 2002 includes¹:

- April 2002, DEA reported that approximately 1,900 pounds of 'BC Bud' was seized along with arrests of 11 individuals, including buyers.
- April 23, 2002 Lakewood Police Department seized 37.5 pounds of Mexican heroin.
- May 30, 2002 DEA Tacoma seized 114 pounds of black tar heroin (Mexican), 13 pounds of cocaine, two handguns, \$336,250 in US currency and arrested nine individuals. The purity of the heroin seized ranged from 12% to 20%.
- Seattle's DEA Mobile Enforcement Team concluded its deployment to Pierce County during this time frame. Investigation of a convenience store operator who was selling to local methamphetamine manufacturers resulted in seizures of 394,576 pseudoephedrine tablets and \$543,000.

DEA provided the following information on drug trafficking, prices and availability in Pierce County January-June 2002:

- Crack cocaine is readily available in Lakewood.
- Crack cocaine prices remain stable per DEA Tacoma at \$700/ounce.
- Crystal methamphetamine, 'ice', ranges in price between \$1,200-\$1,500 an ounce in Tacoma, Seattle, and Spokane per local DEA offices.
- The purity of methamphetamine produced locally continues to be higher than that smuggled from Mexico.
- Methamphetamine investigations represent the majority of DEA caseload in Tacoma.

- Local law enforcement in Pierce County are increasing enforcement activities related to convenience stores selling cases of pseudoephedrine.
- Convenience stores sold cases of pseudoephedrine for \$1,500 during recent DEA activities.
- Gamma Hydroxybutyrate (GHB) sold in Tacoma is often in small breath mint bottles containing approximately 100 doses and selling for \$100. No instances of local production have been noted.

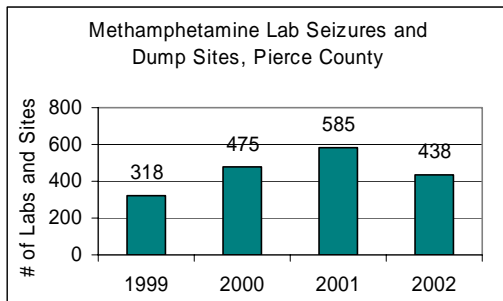
Production

Marijuana

Marijuana is grown in Washington State and is also available from sources up and down the West Coast including British Columbia, Canada. Marijuana cultivation seizures in the County totaled 10 in 2000 and 14 in 2001⁷. This represents a tiny fraction of the marijuana grown locally.

Methamphetamine

Approximately one-third of methamphetamine used in Washington is produced in the State. Substantial amounts of methamphetamine are manufactured in the County as evidenced by the number of laboratory seizures. Pierce County has by far the greatest number of methamphetamine lab seizures and dump sites in the State with 438 in 2002, representing 26% of the 1,693 statewide. The rate of lab seizures and dump sites was 63 per 100,000 population in 2002, compared with the State average of 29 per 100,000. Data for 2002 point to a substantial decline in the number of labs and dump sites. Law enforcement believe this is related to several factors including arrests of major drug producers and increased focus on arresting those attempting to obtain pre-cursor chemicals. By arresting drug manufacturers prior to production, law enforcement may be decreasing the number of labs and dump sites. Treatment providers note that they believe many methamphetamine ‘cookers’ are making methamphetamine for their own use.



SUMMARY

Alcohol use is prevalent with more than half of Pierce County adults reporting past month alcohol use, similar to usage levels statewide. Problematic alcohol use such as binge drinking among adults is more common in the County than statewide. The largest proportion of treatment admissions, 45%, are for alcohol. Methamphetamine is also a substantial problem in the County with the largest number of seizures of methamphetamine producing laboratories in the State. Methamphetamine treatment rates for adults are well above the State average and constitute 30% of all adult admissions to treatment. Heroin and cocaine are both readily available in the County. The most common drugs used by adolescents are alcohol, tobacco and marijuana. Injection drug users exchanged 1.7 million needles at the County needle exchange in 2001.

Sources and Data Notes

¹ Office of Financial Management, State of Washington (2002). *Population Density by County 1910-2002*. Olympia, WA: Author. [<http://www.ofm.wa.gov/popden/index.htm> (Year 2002 data included in this report)]

² Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department (2001). *2000 Behavioral Health Risks of Pierce County Adults*. Tacoma, WA: Author.

³ Washington State Department of Health (1999). *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Washington Statewide Survey Data Washington State*. Olympia, WA: Author.
[<http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/CHS/CHS-data/brfss/Links/WA99STRP.pdf>]

⁴ Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Management Services Administration, Research and Data Analysis Division (2001). *Risk and Protection Profile for Substance Abuse Prevention Planning in Pierce County* (Rep. No. 4.40-27). Olympia, WA: Author.

⁵ Washington Poison Center. *American Association of Poison Control Centers, Toxic Exposure Surveillance System, Annual Report 2001, Washington Poison Center*. Seattle, WA: Author.

Data note: The majority of calls to the Poison Center are made from private residences regarding poisonings that occur in the home, health care facilities represent the second largest group calling the poison center. Calls related to symptomatic exposure or intoxication from drugs of abuse are more likely to be placed by health care facilities compared to information only calls which are more likely to be placed from residences (information only calls are not included in the data presented). Most calls from health care facilities are regarding serious cases or unusual presentations in which substance specific medical advice or consultation is desired. Not every poisoning or exposure is reported to the Poison Center and the total numbers reported do not equal the total number of poisonings that actually occurred statewide. Therefore data do not indicate the prevalence of symptomatic exposures to substances used, but rather point to serious or unusual situations involving substances. Multiple substances may be recorded for each call. Information requests related to pill identification are referred to the FDA.

⁶ Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Tobacco, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Trends in Washington State 2002 Report.

Data note: These data excludes Detoxification, Transitional Housing and Group Care Enhancement, private pay admissions. Includes total admissions – counts may be duplicated for an individual based on multiple admissions or multiple modalities of care.

⁷ Northwest High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (2002). *Threat Assessment 2002*. Seattle, WA: Author.

⁸ Drug Enforcement Administration (2002). *Memo: trends in the Traffic- Washington State and Portland, Oregon Metropolitan Area, January-June 2002*. Provided by local DEA to Caleb Banta-Green.

Pierce County – Drug Use Epidemiology, February, 2004. (ADAI Research Brief 04-04). Prepared by Caleb Banta-Green, MPH, MSW. Seattle: Alcohol & Drug Abuse Institute, University of Washington. Preparation of this report was funded in part by the Washington State Department of Social & Health Services' Division of Alcohol & Substance Abuse. URL: http://depts.washington.edu/adai/pubs/arb/arb04_04.pdf