



*The District of Columbia
1990 Public Opinion Survey
of Drug Abuse and Crime*

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U.S. Department of Justice

Statistical Analysis Center, Office of Criminal Justice

Plans and Analysis

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Government of the District of Columbia
Marion Barry, Jr. - Mayor

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Introduction

The Statistical Analysis Center (SAC) of the District's Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Analysis was selected, along with agencies from 27 other states, to participate as a member of the Consortium for Drug Strategy Impact Assessment (CDSIA). This consortium is charged with gathering data about the incidence of drug use and consequent criminal justice activity. Funds are provided to consortium participants by the Criminal Justice Statistics Association which receives funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice for this effort.

As part of a national effort to monitor and evaluate drug control strategies, the CDSIA sponsored statewide public opinion surveys in Arizona, Utah, Ohio, Texas, Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. In 1988, the District conducted its first citywide survey about attitudes toward drug abuse. This report presents findings from the second survey completed in February 1990. The telephone surveys used representative samples of adult District residents and provided city policymakers and planners with important information about drug abuse and use trends, attitudes about different approaches to solve the drug abuse problem and public sentiment on salient issues such as legalization of drugs and sanctions for drug crimes.

The most recent survey focused primarily on two areas: alcohol and illicit drug use and abuse, and public opinion about how the community should respond to issues associated with the drug problem. Common questionnaire items were used by each of the participating jurisdictions to facilitate inter-jurisdictional comparisons of responses.

Data from both surveys have helped to shape the District's drug strategy by providing a measure of the level of support for current program and policy directions, providing another means to estimate the

level of illicit drug use among various segments of the population, and ascertaining information from residents about their knowledge of the dangers of illicit drug use. Findings also help the District evaluate the efficacy of current approaches, identify target groups where drug use may be high and knowledge of dangers of drug use may be low and help determine which of the options open to government in addressing the drug problem could expect significant public support.

The District intends to conduct a third survey later in 1990 that will continue to aid in the areas outlined above and will provide additional perspectives by expanding the survey to include interviews of criminal justice and public health practitioners and youth.

Methodology

The District of Columbia 1990 Public Opinion Survey of Drug Abuse and Crime was conducted using a modified random digit dialing telephone sampling technique. A local research firm, Development Associates, Inc., was contracted to interview 600 District of Columbia residents ages 18 or older concerning their opinions about different facets of the drug problem.

There were 937 residents contacted with 601 residents ultimately responding to the survey questions for a response rate of 64 percent. The eligible interviewees who did not cooperate with the survey included 283 residents who refused at the outset and 53 who listened to the interviewer's description of the survey and answered some of the questions prior to terminating the interview.

A statistical sample drawn using a modified random digit dialing procedure that controlled for neighborhood, age, gender, income and ethnicity was used for this study. The sampling error derived from the sample size and the estimated population in the District is about 4

percent. Percents reported for smaller subgroup responses may result in a slightly higher margin of error. The survey was completed in February 1990.

For each response, the data were analyzed along several variables including race, gender, income, and age. For income, the sample was divided into three groups. The higher income group was comprised of respondents with an annual family income of \$40,000 or greater; the middle income group included respondents with family incomes between \$20,000 and \$39,999; and the lower income group included respondents with incomes lower than \$20,000. For the age variable, the sample was divided into three categories: ages 18 to 32, 33 to 47, and 48 or older.

Perception of Drug Activity

Arrestee urinalysis test results, drug arrests and public health information are typically used as measures of drug use. These indicators do not, however, measure directly the extent of drug use. Although self reported information may either exaggerate or diminish the actual amount of drug involvement, respondents were asked several questions to ascertain the prevalence of drug use. Instead of asking about an individual's personal drug use, respondents were asked to report their knowledge of others' illegal drug involvement with the following questions:

Do you personally know of an individual who regularly uses illegal drugs?

Do you personally know of an individual who regularly sells illegal drugs?

Does anyone in your household have a drug abuse problem?

Thirty-four percent of all respondents reported knowing an individual who regularly uses illegal drugs. Only 14

percent reported knowing an individual who regularly sells illegal drugs. Only the age variable produced any significant differences. Of respondents ages 18 to 32, 41 percent reported knowing an individual who regularly uses drugs and 20 percent reported knowing an individual who regularly sells illegal drugs (Tables 1 and 2) and 6 percent reported having someone in their household with a drug abuse problem.

Excessive use of alcohol is often ignored as a form of substance abuse. However, alcohol has been associated with many debilitating and deadly diseases and is considered by many experts to be a "gateway" substance leading to illegal drug use. With this in mind, respondents were asked:

Do you know of an individual who regularly abuses alcohol?

Overall, 47 percent reported knowing someone who regularly abuses alcohol. Of respondents ages 18 to 32, 53 percent knew an alcohol abuser. Of respondents ages 33 to 47, 51 percent also reported knowing an individual who regularly abuses alcohol (Table 3).

To further assess how prevalent the drug problem appears to the public, District respondents were asked to define the drug problem in terms of their own neighborhoods with the following question:

Do you think drug activity and use in your neighborhood is a crisis?

Half of the respondents felt that drug activity has reached a state of crisis in their neighborhoods. Fifty-nine percent of respondents who were non-white and 60 percent of those with lower incomes perceived themselves as living in a neighborhood taken over by the drug trade (Table 4). This contrasts with 31 percent for white respondents.

Overall, these results suggest that there is a higher awareness of drug use

Table 1
Knowledge of Others' Drug Use
by Respondents' Age
(Question 17)

Age	Yes	No
18-32	41%	59%
33-47	39%	61%
48+	21%	79%
All Respondents	34%	66%

Table 2
Knowledge of Others' Selling
Drugs by Respondents' Age
(Question 18)

Age	Yes	No
18-32	20%	80%
33-47	15%	85%
48+	6%	94%
All Respondents	14%	86%

Table 3
Knowledge of Alcohol Abuse
by Respondents' Age
(Question 19)

Age	Yes	No
18-32	53%	47%
33-47	51%	49%
48+	37%	63%
All Respondents	47%	53%

among the younger respondents. This may be due, in part, to the fact that drug use is traditionally highest within this age group.

Although much attention is focused on the hazards of illegal drugs, problems surrounding alcohol abuse appear widespread with over 50 percent of respondents ages 18 to 47 having personal knowledge of abuse.

Table 4
Perception of Drug Activity as Crisis in
Neighborhood by Respondents' Race
and Income
(Question 21)

Race	Yes	No
Non-Whites	59%	41%
Whites	31%	69%
Income		
Low Income	60%	40%
Middle Income	49%	51%
High Income	39%	61%
All Respondents	50%	50%

Among District residents, there is a strong perception of drug activity having reached a dimension of crisis in most neighborhoods, especially in non-white and lower income areas. This may be in part due to the nature of drug activity in lower income areas where drugs are possibly more visible both in terms of use and the violence that is inherent in the drug trade.

Harm Associated with Drug Use

Although campaigns against drug abuse attempt to inform the public of the mental and physical damage caused by drugs, public perceptions of the harm associated with drug use remain unclear. In general, studies have shown that the likelihood of drug use is negatively correlated with the perceived harm associated with it. In an effort to gauge this, respondents were asked to rate the risk of harm from drugs and alcohol used in varying degrees.

Older respondents were more likely to see any drug and alcohol use as entailing more risk than their younger counterparts. However, as frequency of usage increases, all age groups were in agreement that the risk to mental and or physical health is increased. While occasional use of marijuana was not viewed as very

hazardous among respondents ages 18 to 47, 46 percent of respondents ages 48 and over felt that even experimental use (trying marijuana once) was very risky. Furthermore, marijuana use was not felt to entail great risk by respondents ages 18 to 47 until used regularly (Table 5).

There was widespread agreement across all subgroupings that trying cocaine once or twice entails great risk. When cocaine was used regularly, the opinion was almost unanimous that such use was highly risky by at least 91 percent of each group (Table 6).

Drinking was not considered a great health threat unless consuming 1 or 2 drinks everyday. Occasional drinking at parties or over the weekend was not felt to be high risk behavior by any age group.

Although age may be a factor in determining how respondents rank the health risks of drug use, with certain drugs the perceived dangers inherent in use appear to be universal. Occasional use of drugs such as marijuana do not represent much of a health risk to younger respondents, though for older respondents, even experimentation is seen as dangerous. On the other hand, drugs such as cocaine are perceived as dangerous by all ages such that even experimentation is considered dangerous. There is also consensus among all ages that drinking alcohol is not highly risky until use is daily.

Handling the Drug Problem

Currently, drug prevention strategies stress that communities, schools and businesses are responsible and have a role in fighting substance abuse. District residents were asked which group they thought was most effective in fighting against drugs with the following question:

Which one of the following groups do you think can do the most to help in the fight against drugs?

Table 5
Perceived Risk of Marijuana Use by Respondents' Age
(Question 16)

	Great Risk	Moderate Risk	Slight Risk	No Risk
Trying Marijuana 1-2 Times				
Ages 18-32	18%	18%	30%	34%
33-47	18%	17%	32%	32%
48+	46%	14%	25%	16%
Smoke Marijuana Occasionally				
Ages 18-32	27%	32%	30%	11%
33-47	26%	30%	27%	17%
48+	61%	19%	14%	5%
Use Marijuana Regularly				
Ages 18-32	57%	30%	12%	2%
33-47	58%	25%	13%	4%
48+	83%	13%	0%	4%

Possible responses were:

Schools
Police and Courts
Family
Churches
Treatment Centers
Business and Industry

Overall, the strongest consensus (42 percent) was that the family is most adept at fighting the drug problem, with the next choices being the schools (17 percent) and the police and courts (16 percent). Among the college educated, 45 percent indicated that families can do the most to fight drugs. One third of non-college educated respondents felt that families were the most able group, with the rest almost evenly divided among the other possible choices (Table 7).

Many neighborhoods have taken control of the drug problem into their own hands by forming community patrol groups and "watch dog" organizations. District residents were asked to comment on the effectiveness of these measures by responding to the following question:

Do you feel that community patrols made up of neighborhood residents can...

Possible responses were:

Greatly reduce drug activity?
Somewhat reduce drug activity?
Have little effect on drug activity?

District respondents expressed at least modest support for the amount of reduction in drug activity that can be attributable to community groups with 49 percent giving some credit to these organizations. White respondents were less likely to see the neighborhood patrols as highly effective with only 29 percent believing that the patrols greatly reduce drug activity compared to 40 percent of non-white respondents (Table 8). Lower income respondents were also more likely than higher income respondents to see the patrols as highly effective (41 percent and 33 percent respectively) (Table 9).

There are various perspectives on how a drug abuser should be handled. These viewpoints are often based on whether drug abuse is seen as a legal issue or a medical issue. In an effort to gauge this perspective, respondents were asked the following question:

Which of the following statements best reflects your views on how to handle people who use illegal drugs?

Possible responses were:

They should be arrested and prosecuted.

Table 6
Perceived Risk of Cocaine Use by Respondents' Age
(Question 16)

	Great Risk	Moderate Risk	Slight Risk	No Risk
Try Cocaine 1-2 Times				
Ages 18-32	51%	18%	27%	3%
33-47	53%	24%	18%	6%
48+	77%	18%	6%	0%
Use Cocaine occasionally				
Ages 18-32	71%	22%	5%	2%
33-47	77%	14%	8%	2%
48+	92%	7%	2%	0%
Use cocaine regularly				
Ages 18-32	95%	3%	1%	2%
33-47	91%	6%	1%	2%
48+	96%	1%	2%	1%

Table 7
Groups Considered Most Able to Fight Drug Abuse
by Respondents' Education
(Question 1)

	College Educated	Non-College Educated	All Respondents
Schools	20%	14%	17%
Police/Courts	15%	18%	16%
Family	48%	37%	42%
Churches	5%	14%	9%
Treatment Centers	11%	14%	13%
Business/Industries	2%	3%	3%

Table 8
Perceived Effectiveness of Neighborhood Patrols
by Respondents' Race
(Question 2)

	Whites	Non-Whites	All Respondents
Greatly reduce drug activity	29%	40%	36%
Somewhat reduce drug activity	54%	46%	49%
Have little effect on drug activity	17%	14%	15%

Table 9
Perceived Effectiveness of Neighborhood Patrols
by Respondents' Income
(Question 2)

	Lower Income	Middle Income	Higher Income	All Respondents
Greatly reduce drug activity	41%	34%	33%	36%
Somewhat reduce drug activity	45%	53%	48%	49%
Have little effect on drug activity	14%	12%	19%	15%

Table 10
Handling of Illegal Drug Users by Respondents' Race
(Question 8)

Response	Whites	Non- Whites	All Respondents
Arrest/ Prosecute	40%	25%	30%
Treat Medically	56%	70%	65%
Leave Alone	4%	5%	5%

Table 11
Handling of Illegal Drug Users by Respondents' Income
(Question 8)

Response	Lower Income	Middle Income	Higher Income	All Respondents
Arrest/ Prosecute	33%	27%	29%	30%
Treat Medically	60%	71%	67%	65%
Leave Alone	7%	2%	4%	5%

They should be treated medically, like any person with a physical or emotional problem.

They should be left alone unless they are bothering somebody.

The majority (65 percent) of respondents saw drug abuse as a medical problem that should be treated as any other illness. While there was very little support for allowing a person to use drugs freely (5 percent), there was not strong support for arresting and prosecuting someone if abuse of the drug was the only crime (30 percent).

Although the majority of whites (56 percent) felt that drug abuse is a medical problem, there was more support for prosecuting abusers (40 percent) than among non-white respondents (25 percent) (Table 10). The same was true among respondents with lower incomes. Though 60 percent felt abusers should be treated medically, 33 percent of low income respondents agreed that they should be arrested and prosecuted compared with 27 percent of middle income respondents and 29 percent of higher income respondents (Table 11).

In addition to favoring a community approach to dealing with the drug problem with less emphasis on the criminal justice system, 65 percent of respondents were also willing to have a drug treatment center built in their neighborhoods. Comparatively, 31 percent were willing to have a jail erected in their community.

Generally, District respondents feel that the challenge of fighting drug abuse lies within the smaller sphere of family and the community with the courts and police providing support. There seems to be a realization that the government is not the primary organization to handle substance abuse. The fact that whites and higher income respondents were less likely to see neighborhood patrols as highly effective may be due to the fact that community patrols are most effective when used in areas where drug activity is more visible,

which generally is not the case in white or higher income areas. There was also widespread support for treating drug abuse as a medical matter with most respondents favoring treatment as opposed to prosecution. This is further supported by respondents' willingness to have treatment centers located in their communities.

Drug Activity and Children

Drug activity among children is a major concern to those involved in the drug war. In the hope of protecting youth, school officials and policymakers have implemented drug-free zones that protect a 1,000 foot radius of a school from the use, sale and distribution of illegal substances punishable by a mandatory one year felony sentence. Unfortunately, students sometimes become enmeshed in the drug market and find ways to sell illegal drugs within the school system. District respondents were asked their opinions on what should be done with these students with the following question:

For students found to be selling drugs to other students, what do you think should be the proper response by school officials?"

Possible responses were:

Let the police and the courts handle the matter.
Expel the students from school.
Keep the student in school and provide counseling.
Keep the student in school, but let the parents handle any discipline.

The majority (52 percent) of the respondents preferred that the student be kept in school, 47 percent felt counseling should be provided and another 5 percent were in favor of letting parents handle the discipline. Allowing the criminal justice system to handle the problem was the second most often given option by 30

Table 12
 Handling of Student Drug Sellers by Respondents' Income
 (Question 10)

Response	Lower Income	Middle Income	Higher Income	All Respondents
Let police and courts handle	32%	27%	31%	30%
Expel student	13%	23%	22%	19%
Keep student in school, provide counseling	46%	47%	45%	47%
Keep student in school, let the parents handle	9%	3%	3%	5%

Table 13
 Handling of Children of Drug Users/Sellers by Respondents' Education
 (Question 11)

Response	College Educated	Non-College Educated	All Respondents
Foster Care	44%	51%	47%
Remain with Parents, mandatory treatment	46%	37%	41%
Remain with Parents, treatment offered	11%	12%	12%

Table 14
 Perception that Social Problems Underlie the Drug Problem by Respondents' Gender
 (Question 13)

Response	Male	Female	All Respondents
Agree*	61%	73%	68%
Disagree**	39%	27%	32%

*This category includes "strongly agree" and "agree" responses.

**This category includes "strongly disagree" and "disagree" responses.

percent of respondents (Table 12).

With the various pressures that are sometimes placed on children to either use or sell illegal drugs, it becomes that much harder to resist when parents are also involved in illegal drug activity. District respondents were asked what the responsibility of the government is in the following question:

What should be the government's response when children are found to be living in a home where cocaine or heroin are frequently used or sold?"

Possible responses were:

Remove the child and place him or her in foster care or residential care.
Leave the child with parents only if parents agree to receive treatment.

Leave the child with the parents and offer parents treatment services.

Most District respondents (53 percent) were in favor of leaving the child with the parent, 41 percent stressing mandatory treatment for the parent, and 12 percent in favor of optional treatment. Forty-seven percent were in favor of removing the child. The majority (51 percent) of non-college educated respondents were in favor of removing the child as opposed to 44 percent of college educated respondents (Table 13).

When faced with the problem of children involved in drug activity, respondents were more in favor of counseling with the second choice being intervention by the criminal justice system. For children selling drugs, the majority of respondents were in favor of allowing the child to remain in school and exercise other methods of discipline. For children of drug abusers, the majority of respondents were in favor of allowing the child to remain in the home through mandatory or optional drug treatment.

Alternatives to Current Solutions

Many social problems both cause and are caused by drug abuse. There is a possibility that the fight against drug abuse is futile unless these associated problems are acknowledged and addressed. There is public consensus that poverty, single-parenthood, illiteracy and homelessness are among these problematic social issues. In order to gauge District residents' feelings on the association between these problems and the drug problem, the following question was asked:

Please react to the following statement. "No major improvements will be made in the fight against drugs until poverty and other social problems are dealt with." Do you...

Possible responses were:

Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Among District residents, 68 percent agreed with the statement. Of those in agreement, 30 percent were in strong agreement. Although this sentiment was true for those of various income levels, gender, education levels, and ethnic backgrounds; different groups expressed varying amounts of support. For example, while 61 percent of males were in agreement, 73 percent of females expressed agreement (Table 14). The same is true of higher income respondents, 65 percent of whom agreed as compared with 70 percent of lower income respondents and 73 percent of middle income respondents.

Legalization is one of the more controversial methods suggested for combatting drug abuse. There has been much speculation that legalization, or at least decriminalization, would put an end to the violence and prevalence of drug

Table 15
Attitudes About Drug Legalization by Respondents' Education
(Question 15)

Response	College Educated	Non-College Educated	All Respondents
Legalize nothing	65%	74%	70%
Marijuana Only	12%	11%	11%
Everything except most dangerous	19%	10%	11%
Legalize everything	10%	8%	8%

to the violence and prevalence of drug abuse. District respondents were asked their opinion on this matter with the following question:

Some people today say that making drugs legal would remove the trade from criminals and reduce the health hazards to users. Others argue that this would greatly increase the number of drug users and overload our capacity to deal with them. Which one of the following statements best fits your own beliefs about this issue?

Possible responses were:

The sale of all drugs should be on the open market.

The sale of most drugs should be legal, except the two or three most dangerous ones.

The sale of most drugs should not be made legal, except marijuana.

None of the drugs which are now illegal should be made legal for sale.

Although 30 percent of the respondents favored some easing of the laws with respect to legalization, the overwhelming majority (70 percent) felt that illegal drugs should remain illegal. Citizens favoring some form of legalization were evenly split between legalizing marijuana (11 percent) and legalizing all but the most dangerous drugs (11 percent).

Among college educated respondents, 35 percent were in favor of some form of legalization, with 23 percent in favor of legalizing everything or all but the most dangerous drugs (Table 15).

There is widespread agreement with the idea that drug abuse is not a problem unto itself, but rather a manifestation of greater social ills that need to be addressed before any progress can be made to end the drug problem. In spite of this realization, legalization is not an option preferred by the majority of District respondents.

Resource Allocation

With scarce resources, policymakers are left with the difficult task of determining which efforts are most effective and needed, and which are worthy of or necessitate funding. District residents were asked for their input on how scarce resources earmarked for the fight against drugs should be spent with the following questions:

There are a number of possible methods of combatting drug abuse. Which of the following do you feel should receive the most money and effort?

Possible responses were:

Table 16
Resource Allocation by Respondents' Race
(Question 3)

Response	Whites	Non-Whites	All Respondents
Treatment	23%	21%	22%
Arrest/Prosecution	17%	9%	12%
Education/Prevention	41%	29%	33%
Border Interdiction	19%	42%	34%

Treatment.

Arrest and prosecution of drug law violators.

Drug abuse education and prevention.

Stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the country.

Overall, most District respondents felt that both interdiction efforts (34 percent) and education and prevention (33 percent) should receive the most effort and money. Among non-whites and persons of lower income, there was a stronger preference towards drug interdiction with 42 percent in favor of this method. Whites and higher income respondents first preferred education (41 and 39 percent respectively), and secondly treatment (23 and 25 percent respectively) (Tables 16 and 17).

A similar question was asked with respect to allocation in terms of where residents felt more resources should be devoted with the following question:

If the District government were to devote more resources to anti-drug programs, would you rather they build more...

Possible responses were:

Jails?

Drug Treatment centers?

Recreation centers?

Job training centers?

Forty-six percent of the District

respondents preferred job training centers if more resources were available. The second option preferred by 38 percent of respondents was drug treatment centers. Among lower income respondents, 50 percent considered job training as the most important while, among higher income respondents, 46 percent considered drug treatment centers as most important (Table 18).

Increased revenue would allow for more resources with which to fight drug abuse. A tax increase is one method of increasing revenue. District respondents were asked about their willingness to pay tax increases with the following question:

How much, if any, would you be willing to see your taxes increased in order to provide money for the fight against drug abuse?

Possible responses were:

No increase.

\$50 per year increase.

Between \$50 and \$300 per year increase.

More than \$300 per year increase.

Sixty-six percent of District respondents indicated that they would agree to some form of tax increase to fight drug abuse, 39 percent would agree to a \$50 per year increase, 22 percent would agree to a \$50 to \$300 increase per year

Table 17
Resource Allocation by Respondents' Income
(Question 3)

Response	Lower Income	Middle Income	Higher Income	All Respondents
Treatment	23%	19%	25%	22%
Arrest/Prosecution	11%	10%	14%	12%
Education/Prevention	24%	38%	39%	33%
Border Interdiction	42%	33%	23%	34%

and 5 percent would agree to an increase of more than \$300 per year. Even among respondents with incomes of less than \$5,000, the majority (59 percent) would agree to a tax increase (Table 19).

Overall, District respondents were more interested in resources being used for preventive methods of combatting drug activity. More respondents were interested in stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the country, providing job training and education for at-risk populations, and providing drug treatment services when needed. To achieve this goal, most respondents indicated that they would agree to a modest tax increase to provide more resources.

Future Expectations

As policymakers, law enforcement and public health officials and the general public continue to wage the war on drugs, one question that comes to mind is what kind of situation the nation will face in the future given current efforts. To assess the public perception, respondents were asked:

Which of the following statements best summarizes your feelings about where the U.S. will be with the drug problem 20 to 25 years from now?

Possible responses were:

Drug abuse will be eliminated as a social problem.

Drug abuse will decline, but still be a problem.

Drug abuse will continue to be a problem, about as serious as it is now.

Drug abuse will increase, becoming an even more serious problem.

Drug abuse will be out of control and will seriously threaten our way of life.

The majority of respondents (52 percent) felt that the drug problem will at least decline, 5 percent saw that the problem will be totally eliminated and 47 percent believed that the problem will subside. Thirty-six percent of the respondents felt that the problem will increase and 16 percent felt that the drug problem will seriously threaten their way of life. Lower income respondents were less optimistic regarding the future of the drug problem. Twenty-one percent felt that drug abuse will be out of control as compared to 12 percent of higher income respondents (Table 20). Also, while 52 percent of higher income respondents felt that the drug problem will decline, 41 percent of lower income respondents felt the same.

Although very few respondents felt that drug abuse will be eliminated as a problem, many felt that the problem will at

Table 18
Resource Allocation Devoted to Anti-Drug Programs
by Respondents' Income
(Question 4)

Response	Lower Income	Middle Income	Higher Income	All Respondents
Jails	12%	9%	9%	10%
Drug Treatment Centers	34%	42%	46%	38%
Recreation Centers	4%	6%	7%	5%
Job Training Centers	50%	43%	38%	46%

Table 19
Willingness to Incur Tax Increase by Respondents' Income
(Question 5)

Response	Lower Income	Middle Income	Higher Income	All Respondents
No Increase	42%	33%	25%	35%
\$50/year increase	41%	42%	37%	39%
\$50-\$300/year increase	15%	24%	28%	22%
\$300+/year increase	3%	2%	11%	5%

Table 20
Future Projections by Respondents' Income
(Question 14)

Response	Lower Income	Middle Income	Higher Income	All Respondents
Drug abuse will be out of control	21%	14%	12%	16%
Drug abuse will increase, becoming even more serious	9%	11%	8%	10%
Drug abuse will continue to be a problem, as serious as it is now	22%	19%	28%	23%
Drug abuse will decline, but still be a social problem	41%	49%	52%	47%
Drug abuse will be eliminated	8%	6%	2%	5%

least diminish. There is a higher level of fear among lower income residents possibly because of the greater effect the drug problem is having on their immediate environment.

Summary and Conclusions

The District's Office of Criminal Justice Plans and Analysis conducted a public opinion survey on alcohol and illicit drug use and how the government and community should respond to issues associated with the drug problem.

A modified random digit dialing telephone sampling technique was used to select respondents and a telephone survey of 601 District residents ages 18 and older was conducted. Data from the survey was analyzed considering several variables including race, gender, household income and age. Findings from the survey reveal that:

Approximately one third of the respondents personally knew someone who regularly uses illicit drugs and 14 percent knew someone who sells drugs.

About one half of the respondents believed that drug activity has reached a crisis level in their neighborhood.

Almost two thirds of the respondents felt that drug users should be treated medically rather than arrested and prosecuted.

Approximately 70 percent of the respondents were opposed to legalization of any illicit substances.

About three quarters of the respondents felt resources allocated for anti-drug activities should be used for drug treatment and job training centers instead of jails.

Almost two thirds of the respondents expressed a willingness to incur at

least a modest tax increase if the funds were targeted for anti-drug activities.

About half of the respondents felt that drug abuse will decline and be less of a problem 20 to 25 years from now.

While District residents differ in response patterns in some instances with regard to race, income, age and gender; survey findings suggest that illicit drug use remains a pervasive problem affecting all racial, income and gender groups.

Generally, District residents now believe that illicit drug activity, especially drug use, is best dealt with outside the criminal justice system. While still opposed to legalization, the majority of residents believe that drug prevention education, job training and, to a lesser degree, drug treatment are where anti-drug resources should be focused.

The tendency for policymakers is to emphasize the need for more criminal justice-oriented measures to fight the drug problem and claim that this is what the public wants. Findings of this survey suggest that there is diminishing support for the traditional approaches to fighting the drug problem and are consistent with the results of the 1989 public opinion survey. It would perhaps behoove policymakers to re-examine the approaches typically taken in addressing the drug problem.

While the complexity and magnitude of fight against drugs in the District is not being overlooked, residents are somewhat optimistic about the future with the majority feeling that the drug problem will be lessened a generation from now.

**Survey Questionnaire Items
and Percent of Affirmative Responses**
(Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding)

1. Which one of the following groups do you think can do the most to help in the fight against drugs?

Response

Schools	17
Police and courts	16
Family	42
Churches	9
Treatment Centers	13
Business and industry	3

2. Do you feel that the community patrols made up of neighborhood residents can...

Response

Greatly reduce drug activity?	36
Somewhat reduce drug activity?	49
Have little effect on drug activity?	15

3. Which of the following do you feel should receive the most money and effort in the fight against drugs?

Response

Drug treatment and rehabilitation	22
Arrest and prosecution of drug law violators	12
Drug abuse education and prevention	33
Stopping the flow of illegal drugs into the country	34

4. If the District government were to devote more resources to anti-drug programs, would you rather they build more...

Response

Jails?	10
Drug treatment centers?	38
Recreation Centers?	5
Job training centers	46

5. How much, if any, would you be willing to see your taxes increased in order to provide money for the fight against drug abuse?

Response

No increase	35
\$50 per year increase	39
Between \$5 and \$300 per year increase	22
More than \$300 per year increase	5

6. Would you be willing to have a jail for drug offenders built in your neighborhood?

Response

Yes	31
No	69

7. Would you be willing to have a treatment center for drug addicts built in your neighborhood?

Response

Yes	65
No	35

8. Which of the following statements best reflects your views on how to handle people who use illegal drugs?

Response

They should be arrested and prosecuted	30
They should be treated medically, like any person with a physical or emotional problem	66
They should be left alone unless they are bothering somebody	5

9. Are you currently volunteering your services to any anti-drug programs or activities?

Response

Yes	13
No	87

10. For students found to be selling drugs to other students, what do you think should be the proper response by school officials?

Response

Let the police and courts handle the matter	30
Expel the student from school	19
Keep the student in school and provide counseling	47
Keep the student in school, but let the parents handle the discipline	5

11. What should be the government's response when children are found to be living in a home where cocaine or heroin are frequently used or sold?

Response

Remove the child and place him or her in foster or residential care	47
Leave the child with parents only if parents agree to receive treatment	41
Leave child with the parents and offer parents treatment services	12

12. I would like to name seven issues that people may consider to be problem areas for America right now. Please listen to the seven problem areas, then tell me which three you consider to be the most serious. (Ranked as 1st, 2nd and 3rd most serious problems).

Response

Crime

Least serious	51
Moderately serious	34
Most serious	15

Damage to the environment

Least serious	24
Moderately serious	30
Most serious	46

Taking care of the needy

Least serious	18
Moderately serious	32
Most serious	49

(Question 12 continued)

Drug Abuse	
Least serious	45
Moderately serious	39
Most serious	17
Public education	
Least serious	24
Moderately serious	26
Most serious	50
Alcohol Abuse	
Least serious	13
Moderately serious	51
Most serious	37
Problems relating to the economy	
Least serious	22
Moderately serious	21
Most serious	16

13. Please react to the following statement. "No major improvements will be made in the fight against drugs until poverty and other social problems are dealt with?" Do you...

Response	
Strongly agree	30
Agree	38
Disagree	23
Strongly disagree	9

14. Which of the following statements best summarizes your feeling about where the U.S. will be with the drug problem 20-25 years from now?

Response	
Drug abuse will be eliminated as a social problem	5
Drug abuse will decline, but still be a problem	47
Drug abuse will continue to be a problem, about as serious as it is now	23
Drug abuse will increase, becoming an even more serious problem	10
Drug abuse will be out of control and will seriously threaten our way of life	16

15. Some people today say that making drugs legal would remove the trade from criminals and reduce the health hazards to users. Others argue that this would greatly increase the number of drug users and overload our capacity to deal with them. Which one of the following statements best fits your own beliefs about this issue?

Response

The sale of drugs should be legal on the open market	8
The sale of most drugs should be legal, except the two or three most dangerous ones	11
The sale of most drugs should not be made legal, except marijuana	11
None of the drugs which are illegal should be made legal for sale	70

16. How much do you think people risk harming themselves (physically or in other ways), if they...

Response

Try marijuana once or twice	
No risk	26
Slight risk	28
Moderate risk	15
Great risk	25
Can't say	5
Drug is unfamiliar	2

Smoke marijuana occasionally	
No risk	11
Slight risk	23
Moderate risk	25
Great risk	34
Can't say	5
Drug is unfamiliar	2

Smoke marijuana regularly	
No risk	3
Slight risk	8
Moderate risk	21
Great risk	61
Can't say	5
Drug is unfamiliar	2

(Question 16 continued)

Try cocaine once or twice	
No risk	3
Slight risk	16
Moderate risk	19
Great risk	55
Can't say	5
Drug is unfamiliar	2
Use cocaine occasionally	
No risk	1
Slight risk	5
Moderate risk	14
Great risk	74
Can't say	5
Drug is unfamiliar	2
Use cocaine regularly	
No risk	1
Slight risk	1
Moderate risk	3
Great risk	88
Can't say	4
Drug is unfamiliar	2
Have an occasional drink at a party	
No risk	39
Slight risk	37
Moderate risk	10
Great risk	11
Can't say	3
Drug is unfamiliar	<1
Have 5 or more drinks each weekend	
No risk	8
Slight risk	21
Moderate risk	29
Great risk	38
Can't say	4
Drug is unfamiliar	1

(Question 16 continued)

Have 1 or 2 drinks nearly every day	
No risk	3
Slight risk	12
Moderate risk	26
Great risk	56
Can't say	3
Drug is unfamiliar	<1

Have 4 or 5 drinks nearly every day	
No risk	<1
Slight risk	2
Moderate risk	7
Great risk	88
Can't say	2
Drug is unfamiliar	<1

Have more than 5 drinks nearly every day	
No risk	1
Slight risk	1
Moderate risk	2
Great risk	93
Can't say	3
Drug is unfamiliar	<1

17. Do you personally know of an individual who regularly uses illegal drugs?

Response	
Yes	34
No	66

18. Do you personally know of an individual who regularly sells illegal drugs?

Response	
Yes	14
No	86

19. Do you personally know of an individual who regularly abuses alcohol?

Response	
Yes	47
No	53

20. Does anyone in your household have a drug abuse problem?

Response

Yes	6
No	94

21. Do you think illegal drug activity and use in your neighborhood is a "crisis?"

Response

Yes	50
No	50