

The Meth Epidemic in America

**Two Surveys of U.S. Counties:
The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities
The Impact of Meth on Children**

July 5, 2005

**Angelo D. Kyle
NACo President**

**Bill Hansell
NACo President-Elect**



Executive Summary

The methamphetamine epidemic in the United States, which began in the West and is moving East, is having a devastating effect on our country. The increasingly widespread production, distribution and use of meth are now affecting urban, suburban and rural communities nationwide. County governments across America are on the front lines in responding to the methamphetamine crisis.

For counties, meth abuse causes legal, medical, environmental and social problems. County governments and their citizens must pay for investigating and closing meth labs, making arrests, holding lawbreakers in detention centers and then trying them, providing treatment for those addicted to the drug, and cleaning-up lab sites.

There are also many societal effects that must be considered. In an alarming number of meth arrests, there is a child living in the home. These children many times suffer from neglect and abuse.

Meth labs pose a significant danger in the community, as they contain highly flammable and explosive materials. Additionally, for each pound of methamphetamine produced, five to seven pounds of toxic waste remain, which is often introduced into the environment via streams, septic systems and surface water run-off.

The meth epidemic is a complex problem that is not easily solved. To better understand the extent of the problem, the National Association of Counties (NACo) recently conducted surveys of law enforcement and county child welfare officials in order to determine the impact of meth on these county services and their communities.

The surveys were conducted by Research, Inc. of Washington, D.C. Results from 500 counties from 45 states comprise the survey, “The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities.” The results of the survey, “The Impact of Meth on Children,” are based on responses from 303 counties from all 13 states where child welfare activities are performed at the county level. Here is a summary of the survey results.

The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities

- **Meth is a growing problem that is now national in scope.** Of the 500 responding law enforcement agencies, 87% report increases in meth related arrests starting three years ago.
- **Meth is the leading drug-related local law enforcement problem in the country.** Fifty-eight percent of counties in this survey said that methamphetamine was their largest drug problem. Meth was followed by cocaine (19%), marijuana (17%) or heroin (3%) as the number one drug problem.
- **Meth related arrests represent a high proportion of crimes requiring incarceration.** Fifty percent of the counties estimated that 1 in 5 of their current jail inmates were housed because of meth related crimes. The problem is even worse in the other half of the counties surveyed. Seventeen percent of the counties report that more than half of their populations are incarcerated because of meth related crimes.

- **Other crimes are increasing as a result of meth.** Seventy percent of the responding officials say that robberies or burglaries have increased because of meth use, while 62% report increases in domestic violence. In addition, simple assaults (53%) and identity thefts (27%) have also increased.

The Impact of Meth on Children

- **Meth is a major cause of child abuse and neglect:**
 - Forty percent of all the child welfare officials in the survey report increased out of home placements because of meth in the last year.
 - During the past five years, 71% of the responding counties in California reported an increase in out of home placements because of meth and 70% of Colorado counties reported an increase.
 - More than 69% of counties in Minnesota reported a growth in out of home placements because of meth during the last year, as did 54% of the responding counties in North Dakota.
- **Meth hurts children and families over the long-term.** County officials were asked if the particular nature of the meth user parent has increased the difficulty of family reunification and 59% said yes.

Survey 1

The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities' Law Enforcement Agencies

In response to the rapid escalation of the methamphetamine epidemic, the National Association of Counties conducted a survey of 500 county law enforcement agencies in 45 states to determine the impact of this drug on their communities. In this telephone survey, conducted by Research, Inc., information about the impact of methamphetamine use on public safety programs and criminal activities was requested.

Crime and police activities have increased in response to meth growth. As the numbers of people who used meth grew and the numbers of people who became addicted to meth grew, police involvement also grew. Meth users were criminals who committed other crimes while under the influence of the drug and also to finance the purchase or manufacture of the drug. County law enforcement officials began to see a dramatic increase in the number of arrests that involved this drug.

Increases in Arrests Involving Methamphetamines

In the recently conducted survey, county public safety officials were asked about the percentage increases in arrests related to methamphetamine for the following three time periods – during the last 5 years, during the last three years and during the last year. The results indicate continuing increases during the specific periods.

Increases during last five years

Of the 500 responding law enforcement agencies, 88% report increases in meth related arrests starting 5 years ago. Regionally, the areas reporting the greatest increases starting 5 years ago are the Upper Midwest, Southwest and the Northwest, each reporting a 93% increase. These areas are followed closely by the Lower Midwest with a 90% increase. The lowest reported increase in meth related arrests starting 5 years ago, was in the Northeast, which reported a 54% increase.

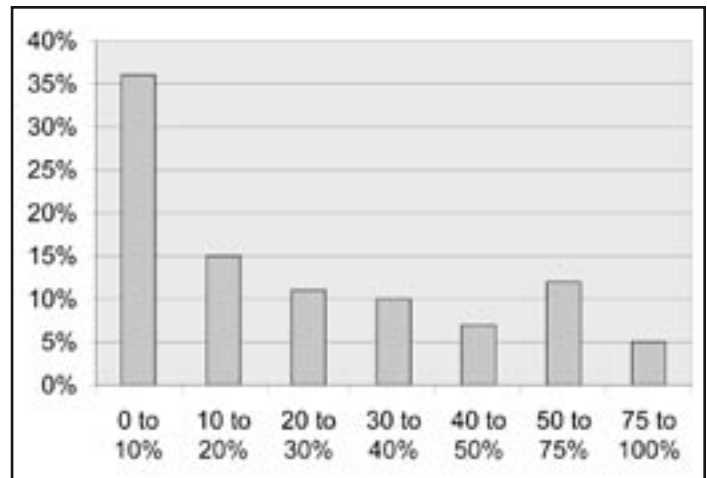
The states reporting the highest percentage increase in meth related arrests starting 5 years ago are Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Washington and Wyoming, all reporting a 100% increase in the rate; Georgia reporting a 96% increase; Colorado and Missouri, both reporting a 95% increase; South Dakota and Kansas, both reporting a 94% increase and Idaho, California and Montana, all reporting a 90% increase.

Increases during last three years

Of the responding counties, 87% report increases in arrests involving meth starting 3 years ago. The Southwest leads the increases, reporting a 96% increase, followed by the Northwest with a 90% increase. Again, the Northeast is the lowest, reporting a 58% increase in meth related arrests during this time period.

The states reporting the highest percentage increase in meth related arrests during the last three years are Arizona, Arkansas,

Figure 1: Percentage Increase in Meth Related Arrests in Last 5 Years



California, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Washington and Wyoming, all reporting a 100% increase; Iowa and Mississippi, both reporting an increase of 95%; South Dakota, reporting an increase of 94%; Georgia and Kentucky, both reporting an increase of 92%; Illinois and North Dakota, both reporting an increase of 91% and Idaho with an increase of 90%.

Increases during the last year

This data for the 500 respondents indicates that for most regions, the rate of increase in percentage of meth related arrests is slowing somewhat since only 67% reported continuing increases for this time period. The Southwest led the increases again with 76% reporting continuing increases in arrests, while the Northeast again reported the lowest, a constant 58% increase for the last year, the same as for the three year period.

Just as at the national level, the continuing rate of increases in the percentage of arrests related to meth state by state has slowed. The highest rate of continuing increase was reported in Arkansas and Utah, both reporting 100%; while Idaho reported a 90% increase; Wyoming reported an 89% increase and New Mexico reported 88%.

Total Methamphetamine Related Arrests

More than 51% of the 500 responding local law enforcement agencies report that up to 20% of arrests made in their counties during the last 5 years are methamphetamine related, while 17% report that more than 50% are related. Twenty four counties report that between 75 and 100% of the arrests made in their counties during this period are meth related. *See figure 1.*

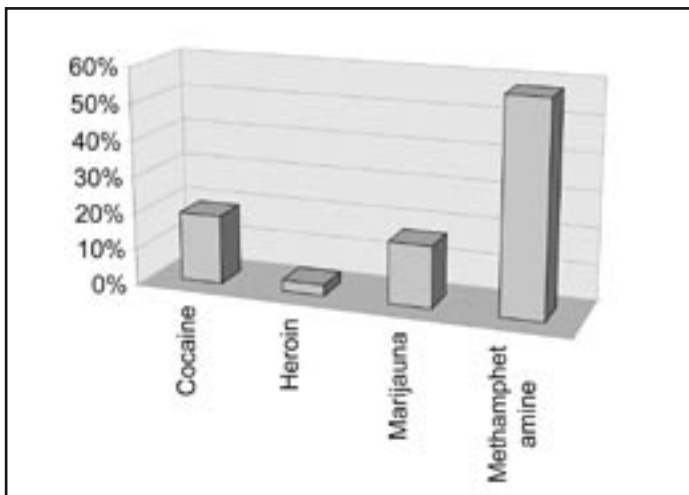
On the national level, the federal government still considers marijuana as the number one drug problem in America, but county law enforcement officials have a different perspective on this ranking. With the growth of this drug from the rural areas of the western and northwestern regions of this country and its slow but continuing spread to the east, local law enforcement officials see it as their number one drug problem.

What is the Primary Drug Problem in Your County?

Law enforcement officials in all 500 responding counties were asked, using drug related arrests in the last year, to select the drug that was the biggest problem in their county. Although some counties across the country still rated cocaine (19%), marijuana (17%) or heroin (3%) as their number one drug problem, 58% percent of counties in this survey said that methamphetamines were their largest drug problem. *See figure 2.*

Taking a look at the regional responses to this question, 76% of counties in the Southwest rate methamphetamine as their number one drug problem and 75% of counties in the Northwest say the same. Sixty seven percent of counties in the Upper Midwest rate meth as their number one drug problem. Conversely, only 4% of counties in the Northeast rate meth as number one, while 46% rate heroin as number one and 21% rate marijuana as number one. Since the Northeast is the nation's most urbanized area, this data supports the long held belief that methamphetamine use has for many years been seen as a rural phenomenon. This appears to be changing however, since 57% of the officials in the Lower Midwest ranked meth as its number one drug, and 26% of the officials in the Southeast did the same.

Figure 2: Primary Drug Problem



Methamphetamine Impact on Jails

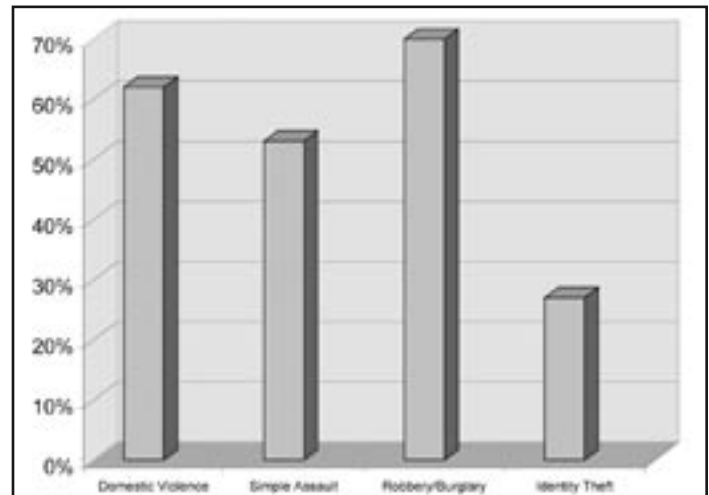
The growth of the use and addiction to methamphetamines has occurred so fast and to such a degree that many local governments are scrambling to catch up. Only 16% of the law enforcement officials report that their county either facilitates or sponsors a meth rehabilitation center or program, while 81% report that they do not. As a result, many abusers of this drug who have committed crimes are housed in local jails.

Officials were asked to estimate what percentage of their local jail inmates were there because of meth related crimes. Of those responding, 50% estimated that up to 20% of their current inmates were housed because of meth related crimes. In the smallest population groups, counties with populations below 50,000, 6% of the counties estimate that 75 to 100% of their inmates are housed because of meth related crimes. In the Upper Midwest, 7% report that 75 to 100% of the jail population are being held because of meth related crimes.

Crimes Increasing Because of Meth

Although the use of methamphetamines is itself a crime, there are several other crimes that have been increasing because of the prolific use of this drug. Seventy percent of the responding officials say that robberies or burglaries have increased because of meth use, while 62 percent report increases in domestic violence. In addition, simple assaults (53%) and identity thefts (27%) have also increased. *See figure 3.*

Figure 3: Increase in Crimes Because of Meth Use



Impact of Meth on Law Enforcement Activities

The increased presence of meth in many counties across the nation has increased the workload of 82% of the responding counties. In the Southwest, 93% of the counties report an increased workload while 88% of the counties in the Northwest report an increase. These increased law enforcement activities that have been attributed to the increased use of and addiction to methamphetamines are putting a heavy financial burden on local law enforcement activities. As a result, 52% of the responding counties say that they have to pay more overtime, while 13% have changed work assignments of police personnel to accommodate the increased need for police power. Eleven percent of counties say that they are assigning their officers to longer shifts to address this growing crisis.

As a means of waging a war against the methamphetamine epidemic, many counties are targeting the labs that are built to manufacture the drug. Many of the labs that remain in this country are small labs, and are often portable. Although toxic and dangerous to the environment, they have been flourishing in recent years. Sixty two percent of the county law enforcement officials report that lab seizures have increased in their counties in the last 3 years. In the Lower Midwest, 74% report increases in lab seizures, while 68% of counties in the Upper Midwest report increases. Even the Northeast, where very few county officials rank meth as the number one drug problem, reports a 42% increase in lab seizures during the last 3 years.

How are counties addressing this problem? First and foremost, most recognize that methamphetamine use is spreading. Local law enforcement officials also acknowledge that for every lab that they close down, 10 new ones are created. They also know that many of

the safeguards that have been put in place to reduce the ability of the “cooks” of these drugs to obtain the necessary materials that they need to manufacture this drug have sent the largest manufacturers into Mexico and Canada, which are now responsible for the exportation of large amounts of meth. In order to tackle this problem head on, 52% of counties have established interagency special task forces and 60 % are members of intergovernmental or regional task forces that have been created to battle this epidemic.



Survey 2

The Impact of Meth on Children Out of Home Placement

There are many innocent victims of the increased use of methamphetamines in this country. To understand who they are, it is important to look at the drug’s effects. Meth is favored by many drug users because it alters their moods. Since there are several ways that the drug can be taken, its effects will differ based on the method used. If smoked or taken by intravenous injection, there is an intense high that lasts for just a few minutes but has been compared to crack in its pleasure. Smoking or injecting will give the fastest high, sometimes in as little as 5 to 10 seconds. The high from snorting or eating the drug does not produce the intense rush that other methods do.

The drug, which stimulates the central nervous system, can create effects that can last for nearly an entire day. It modifies the behavior of the users, and after lengthy use it can actually change the way the brain functions. Meth has been known to cause heart failure, brain damage and stroke. It is also responsible for many psychological changes in the user. These psychological affects can cause anger, panic, paranoia, hallucinations, repetitive behavior, confusion, jerky or flailing movements, irritability, insomnia, aggression, incessant talking and convulsions. Many of these side effects can lead to violent aggressive acts and suicide.

Now add a child to this volatile mixture. Pregnancies of methamphetamine-addicted mothers can produce birth defects, low birth weight, attention deficit disorder, and other behavior disorders. In addition, the side effects of the drug that are affecting the parents create a greater risk of child abuse, shaken baby syndrome and neglect.

As law enforcement officials are clamping down on the manufacture and use of meth, they are finding a disturbing side effect. Many children are being grossly neglected by their addicted parents and these same children are being exposed to the harmful side effects of the production of the drug if they live in close proximity to a lab.

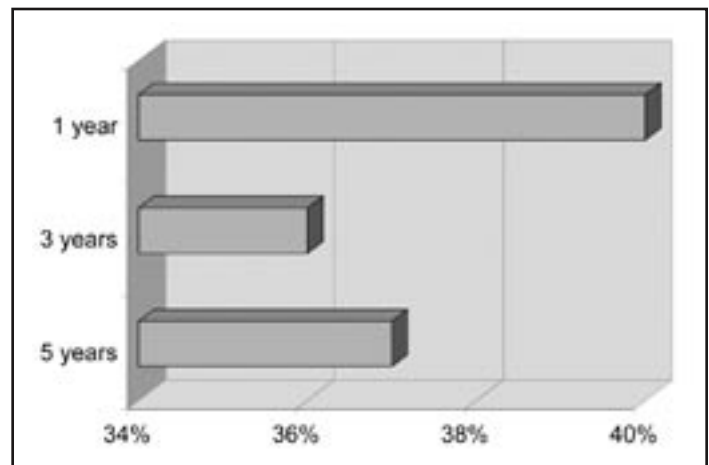
In order to determine the impact of this drug on children of the meth epidemic, the National Association of Counties conducted a survey of county child welfare officials in the 13 states in the country where this activity is administered at the county level. The telephone survey was conducted by Research, Inc. More than 300 counties in 13 states completed the survey. Through these responses, it is clear that out of home placements of children caught up in the meth epidemic are increasing.

County child placement officials were asked if there had been a major increase in the out of home placement of children due to the use or manufacture of methamphetamines starting 5 years ago. Thirty seven percent of the responding officials indicate that there was an increase in that time frame. Although the overall report of an increase was 37%, 54% of counties with populations above 500,000 reported an increase during that time period with the largest increase (69%) reported by the counties in the Southwest. Seventy one percent of responding counties in California reported an increase and 70% of Colorado counties reported an increase for this time period.

For the time period starting three years ago, 36% of responding officials report an increase. Again the counties with populations above 500,000 (64%) reported increases and the Southwest reported the highest (66% of counties). Once again 70% of Colorado counties reported an increase during this time period.

Forty percent of the child welfare officials report increased out of home placements because of meth in the last year. Although this is a subtle increase, it does indicate a growing trend. In the Southwest, 47% of responding officials indicate that they have experienced an increase in the last year. More than 69% of counties in Minnesota reported a growth in out of home placements during this time frame, as did 54% of responding counties in North Dakota.

Figure 4: Increase in Out of Home Placements



Officials in 26% of the responding states estimate that the increase in out of home placements because of meth use, addiction and manufacture was up to 20%, while 4 percent of the counties report an increase of between 75 and 100%.

Seventy five percent of these officials report that up to 20% of the total out of home placements in the last 5 years have been associated with methamphetamine use. In the Northeast, 90% of county officials report up to 20% increase and in the Southeast, 79 percent of county officials report the same percentage increase. In Wisconsin, 100% of the responding officials report increases of up to 20%, while 91% of responding officials in Pennsylvania report the same rate of increase.

The children who are removed from meth homes are often sick and many wind up in foster homes. As these children are moved around in an overburdened social service system, their parents may be in jail, awaiting treatment, or not seeking treatment. County of-

officials were asked if the particular nature of the meth user parent has increased the difficulty of family reunification and 59% said yes. In Minnesota, 90% of county officials said yes and in California, 86 percent of responding counties gave the same response.

An April 2004 article written by Dan Papin, director of Community Services for Washington County for the Association of Minnesota Counties magazines tells the story. According to Mr. Papin, 30 percent of all child protection assessments in his county involve meth use by family members, the primary reason for the department's involvement, another 25% have some form of meth involvement. He also adds that these children often stay in out-of-home placement three times as long as other children.

The reality, as county officials who have experienced difficulty indicated, is that in 48% of these counties there are more families that cannot be reunified, 56% say the families take much longer to reunify than in the past, and in 27% of the counties, officials say recidivism is so great with meth users that the reunification of these families does not last.

Children who are the victims of the methamphetamine epidemic are presenting many unique challenges to social service workers, foster parents, counselors and adoption workers. As a result, 69% of the responding officials from county social service agencies indicate that their counties have had to provide additional and special training for their welfare system workers and have had to develop new and special protocols for workers to address the special needs of these displaced children.

The Methamphetamine Epidemic

In the past 70 years, a new group of drugs have appeared on the horizon. These are not drugs like heroin, marijuana, and cocaine, but rather the synthetic drugs that use amphetamines as a primary ingredient in their manufacture. Known collectively as methamphetamine, they have been nicknamed meth, crank, crystal, speed and many other local or regional variations.

Originally marked to treat nasal congestion, methamphetamine also became widely used for treatment of narcolepsy and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. During World War II, the drug was distributed to soldiers to keep them on the move. In the years after the war both Dexedrine and Methedrine became widely available over the counter drugs. As the usage expanded, they became used by long haul truckers to stay awake, by weight conscious Americans trying to lose weight, by athletes to extend their abilities and to treat depression. As the use of the drugs in this category spread, so did the number of people who became addicted.

In response to this addiction, in 1965 the federal food and drug laws were amended to try to decrease the black market sales of amphetamines. The amendments removed many amphetamine products from the market and made others available only by prescription. As a result of the continuing demand for the drugs, illegal laboratories grew. During this same growth, methamphetamine laboratories started to appear on the West Coast. As these illegal labs have grown they have become the major source of illegal methamphetamines.

For many years meth has been imported into the United States from Mexico, and more recently from Canada, China and Southeast Asia. It is also being made locally in major or “super labs” from bulk quantities of chemicals either smuggled into the country or purchased locally. These super labs were capable of making more than 10 pounds of meth a day. The production started to change significantly about 10 years ago when local law enforcement officials started seeing a proliferation of small labs where meth cooks created small amounts of meth from legally purchased household goods using one of more than 100 recipes available on the Internet. Although producing nowhere near the quantity of meth produced by the super labs, these labs create huge problems for the communities where they are located.

The process of producing meth uses toxic and hazardous materials and produces explosive chemicals as byproducts of the production. These labs affect the environment, the communities and any children, who are frequently present.

The small lab methamphetamine production and market was originally dominated by motorcycle gangs and local producers chiefly in California and the Pacific northwest, but has grown now to include major producers in Mexico who are responsible for the organized trafficking of meth and by the thousands of small producers in nearly all areas of the country. Labs are found just about everywhere, including rural areas, city and suburban residences. Meth can be manufactured in barns, garages, back rooms of businesses, apartments, hotel and motel rooms, storage facilities, vacant buildings and vehicles. A makeshift lab can fit into a suitcase.

What makes this drug epidemic different from others of the 20th and 21st century, is how it started and who is using meth. Meth drug users generally fit two profiles. These are high school and college age students and white and blue collar workers and the unemployed in the age ranges between 20s and 30s in rural and emerging urban areas. Use is equally divided between males and females, and although use is increasing in Hispanic and Native American communities, it has largely been confined to majority white communities. Because meth can be smoked, snorted, injected intravenously, ingested orally or eaten, there are many users who see it has a convenient way to get high.

The growth of the methamphetamine industry in this country has been from the local levels, largely through small labs. Local county law enforcement officials were among the first to recognize the impacts and effects of this new drug on their communities. Western and Midwestern sheriffs and police chiefs were fighting the meth wars long before it became a national problem. The impact of meth addiction on many of these communities has been enormous.

The Criminal Effect of Meth on Communities' Law Enforcement

As you may know, methamphetamine use has risen dramatically in counties across the nation. Formerly a rural problem, it is slowly moving into a more urban setting. At the same time, it has not yet arrived on the national radar screen. The National Association of Counties is conducting a telephone survey of public safety officials in counties to determine the impact of meth use on public safety activities. Can you take a few minutes to answer a few questions that will provide information for a national report that will be released in July?

1. Have arrests where methamphetamine was involved increased in your county?

Yes, in the last 5 years 88% Yes, in the last 3 years 87% Yes, in the last year 67%

2. In your best estimate, what percentage of the total arrests made in your county in the last five years are methamphetamine related?

0 to 10% 36% 10 to 20% 15% 20 to 30% 11% 30 to 40% 10%
40 to 50% 75% 50 to 75% 12% 75 to 100% 5%

3. Based on drug related arrests in the last year, which of the following drugs is the biggest problem in your county?

Cocaine 19% Heroin 3% Marijuana 17% Methamphetamine 58%
Others

4. Does your county facilitate or sponsor a methamphetamine rehabilitation center or program?

Yes16% No 81%

5. What percent of current county jail inmates are incarcerated because of methamphetamine related crimes?

0 to 10% 37% 10 to 20% 13% 20 to 30% 11% 30 to 40% 8%
40 to 50% 5% 50 to 75% 11% 75 to 100% 6%

6. Have methamphetamine lab seizures increased in your county in the last three years?

Yes62% No35%

7. Has the use of methamphetamines in your county increased the workload of public safety staff?

Yes82% No18% *If no, skip to #9*

8. If workloads has increased which of the following are happening (check all that apply).

Paying more overtime 52% Longer shifts 11%
Changed work assignments 13% None of the above 6%

9. Have any of the following crimes increased because of the presence of methamphetamines in your county?

Domestic violence 62% Simple Assault 53% Robbery or Burglary 70%
Identity Theft 27% Don't Know

10. Has your county established an interagency special task force to address methamphetamine issues?

Yes 52% No, but plans are in the works >1% No 40%

11. Is your county a part of an intergovernmental or regional task force to address methamphetamine issues?

Yes 60% No, but plans are in the works No 35%

The Impact of Meth on Children Out of Home Placement

Methamphetamine use has risen dramatically in counties across the nation. Formerly a rural problem, it is slowly moving into a more urban setting. At the same time, it has not yet arrived on the national radar screen. The National Association of Counties is conducting a telephone survey of counties in states that handle child welfare issues to determine the impact of meth use on out of home placements and other child welfare issues. Can you take a few minutes to answer a few questions that will provide information for a national report that will be released in July?

1. Has your county/state experienced an increase in out-of-home placements in the last year due to the use and manufacture of methamphetamine?

Yes, in the last 5 years 37% Yes, in the last 3 years 36% Yes, in the last year 40% No 49%

If no, skip to Question #3

2. If yes, can you provide an estimate of the amount of this increase?

0 to 10% 20%	10 to 20% 6%	20 to 30% 7%	30 to 40% 4%
40 to 50% 3%	50 to 75% 3%	75 to 100% 4%	Cannot provide 5%

3. In your best estimate, what percentage of the total out-of-home placements in the last 5 years have been associated with methamphetamine use?

0 to 10% 69%	10 to 20% 6%	20 to 30% 5%	30 to 40% 4%
40 to 50% 2%	50 to 75% 3%	75 to 100% 2%	Cannot provide 6%

4. Has methamphetamine use increased the difficulty of family reunification?

Yes 59% No 37% Don't know 5%

If no, skip to Question# 6

5. If yes, which of the following apply?

More families that cannot be reunified 48%	Takes longer to reunify the families 56%
Family reunification does not last 27%	Other

6. Has your county had to develop additional training and special protocols for county welfare workers who work with children who have been exposed to methamphetamine?

Yes 69% No 29%

Responding County Law Enforcement Agencies

By State	
Alabama	4
Alaska	5
Arizona	3
Arkansas	9
California	10
Colorado	19
Florida	4
Georgia	26
Idaho	10
Illinois	22
Indiana	16
Iowa	22
Kansas	18
Kentucky	13
Louisiana	7
Maine	1
Maryland	3
Michigan	5
Minnesota	12
Mississippi	19
Missouri	20
Montana	21
Nebraska	19
Nevada	5
New Hampshire	3
New Jersey	1
New Mexico	8
New York	5
North Carolina	13
North Dakota	11
Ohio	9
Oklahoma	7
Oregon	13
Pennsylvania	12
South Carolina	5
South Dakota	16
Tennessee	10
Texas	44
Utah	4
Vermont	2
Virginia	16
Washington	11
West Virginia	2
Wisconsin	6
Wyoming	9
Totals	500

By Population Range	
500,00 and above	7
250,000 - 499,999	13
100,000 - 249,999	36
50,000 - 99,999	36
25,000 - 49,999	96
10,000 - 24,999	153
below 10,000	159
Totals	500

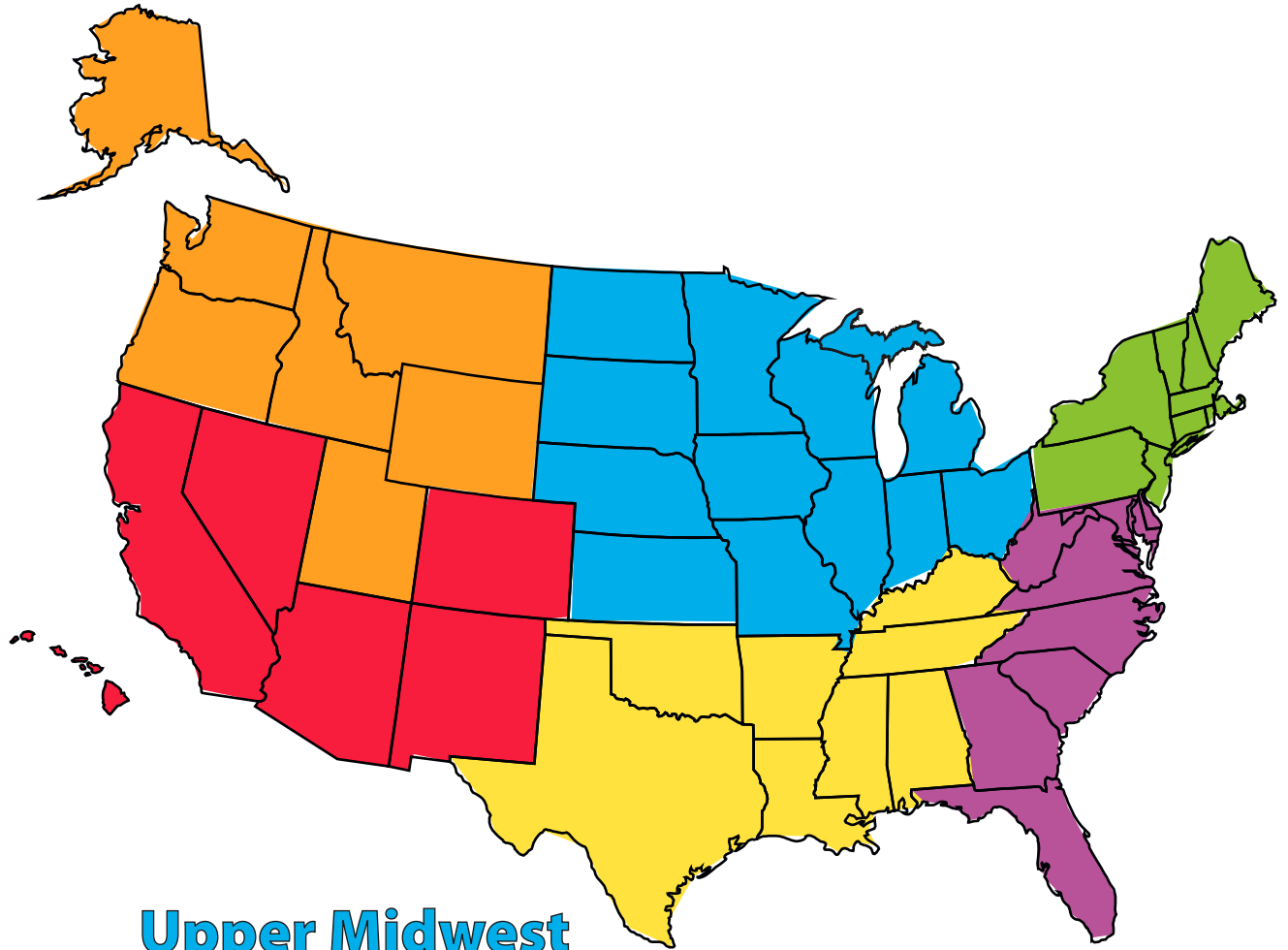
By Regions	
Upper Midwest	176
Northeast	24
Northwest	73
Lower Midwest	113
Southeast	69
Southwest	45
Total	500

Responding Child Welfare Agencies

By State	
California	7
Colorado	23
District of Columbia	1
Maryland	1
Minnesota	39
Nevada	2
New York	25
North Carolina	53
North Dakota	28
Ohio	35
Pennsylvania	23
Texas	1
Virginia	35
Wisconsin	30
Total	303

By Population	
500,00 and above	11
250,000 - 499,999	13
100,000 - 249,999	27
50,000 - 99,999	48
25,000 - 49,999	85
10,000 - 24,999	66
below 10,000	53
Total	303

By Regions	
Upper Midwest	132
Northeast	48
Northwest	0
Lower Midwest	1
Southeast	90
Southwest	32
Total	303



Upper Midwest

Northeast

Northwest

Lower Midwest

Southeast

Southwest