

In 2023, the RCORP Wilson County Project, along with DrugFree WilCo, the MTSU Center for Health and Human Services, and the Public Health Program, surveyed community attitudes toward drug users at the Wilson County and Tennessee State Fair. Most participants in the survey were from Middle Tennessee, with Wilson County contributing the largest proportion.

2023 Highlights



Minimal change in perceptions of a drug user's profile from 2022 to 2023.



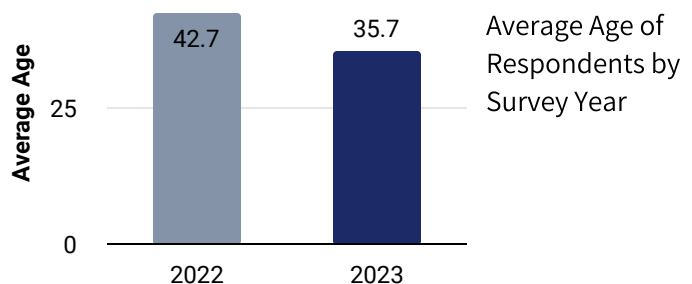
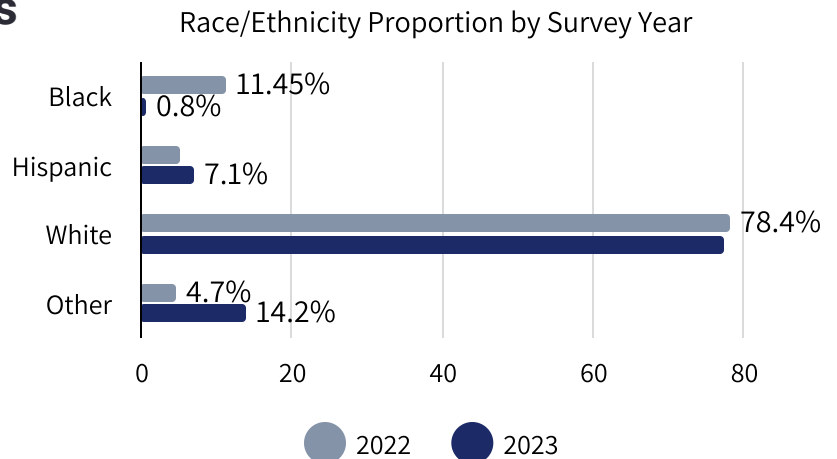
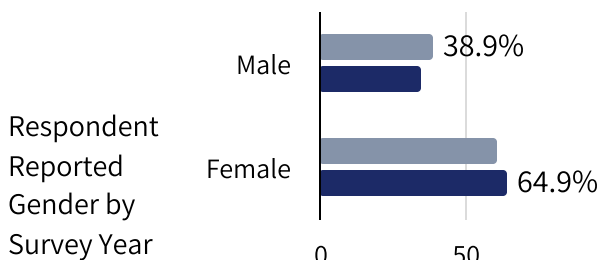
Wilson County saw social distance stigma fall, and acceptance of treatment and understanding of drug use improved.



Individuals with affected loved ones exhibit lower drug stigma and greater belief in treatment effectiveness.

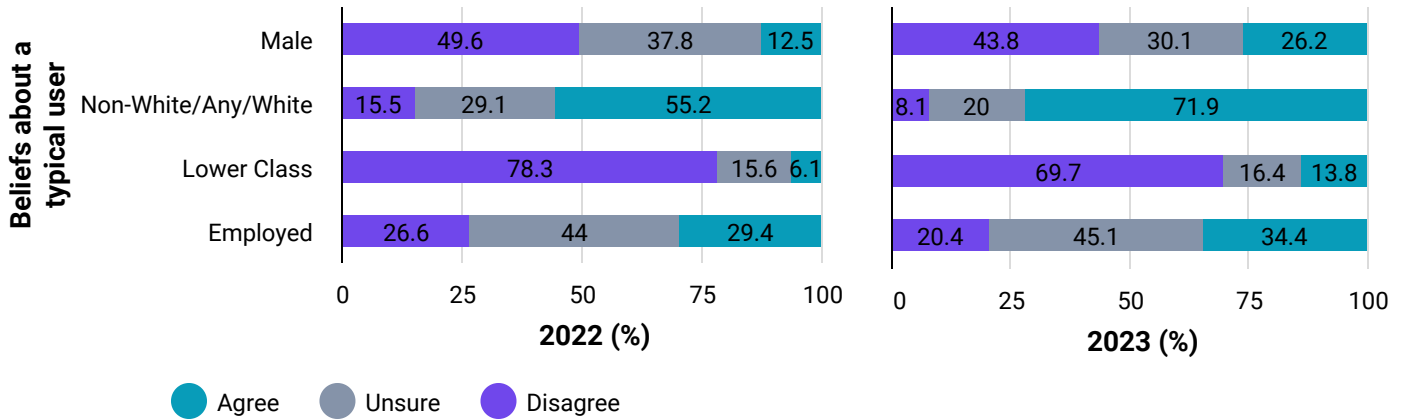
Data Collection / Demographics

At the fair, RCORP staff and MTSU student volunteers, using a questionnaire that included a new query about personal connections to substance use disorder, assessed perceptions of drug use and the visibility of DrugFree WilCo billboards. They engaged adults, offering both digital and paper survey options. The 2023 survey revealed a younger average age of 35.7, a higher female participation, stable white representation, fewer black respondents, and an increase in non-disclosures on race from under 5% to 15.2%.



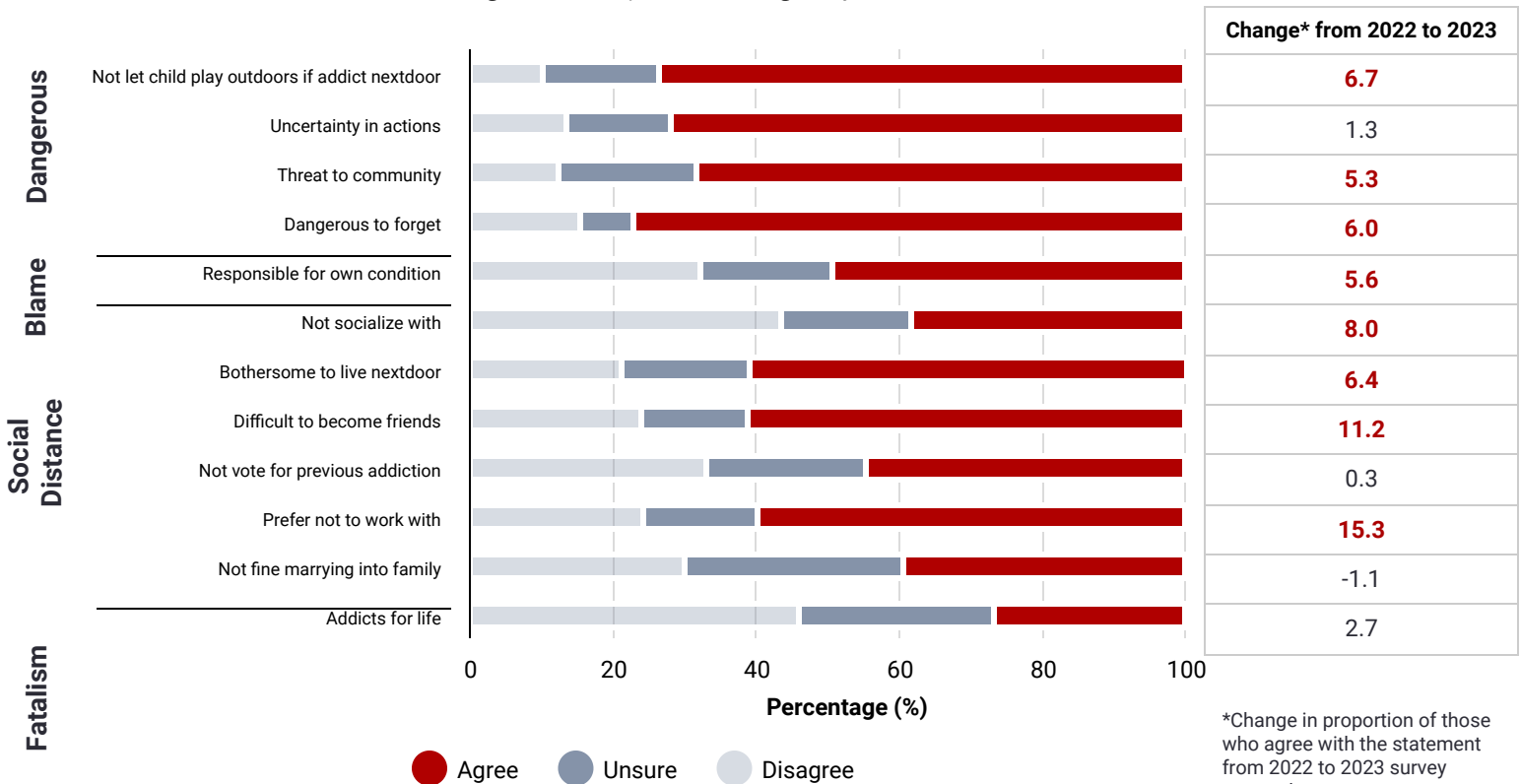
Our survey inquired about participants' views regarding the typical profile of a drug user, focusing on attributes such as gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and employment status. Our findings show that the variation in these perceptions is marginal from 2022 to 2023 within our sample.

Beliefs (gender, race, socioeconomic status, employment) About a Typical Drug User by Survey Year



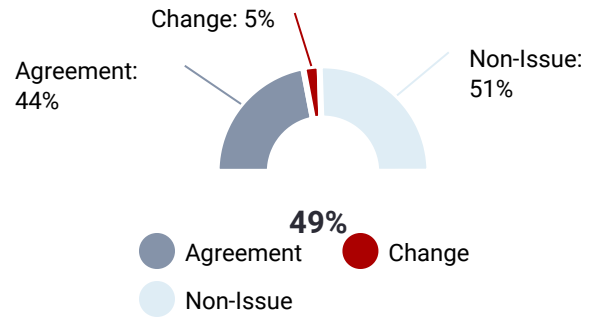
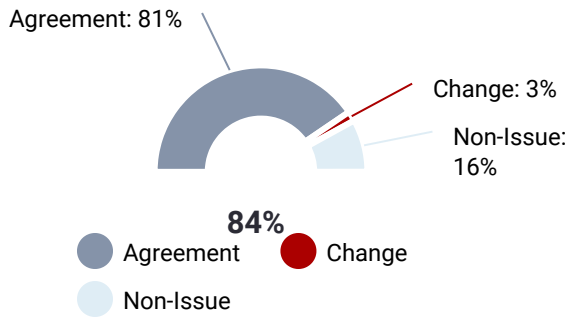
Upon examining stigma domains toward individuals who use drugs—specifically views on dangerousness, blame, social distance, and fatalism—our data indicated a relative increase in stigmatizing attitudes compared to the previous year. Notably, there was a significant uptick in the number of respondents who expressed reluctance to befriend or work with drug users. However, when comparing the responses of Wilson County residents to those living elsewhere, there was no significant escalation in stigma concerning dangerousness, blame, or fatalism. Additionally, our analysis showed a modest yet significant decrease in the stigma related to social distance among Wilson County participants, along with a marked improvement in the acceptance of Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) effectiveness and the recognition of drug abuse as a disease (page 3).

Stigma Item-Specific Changes by Year and Across Domains



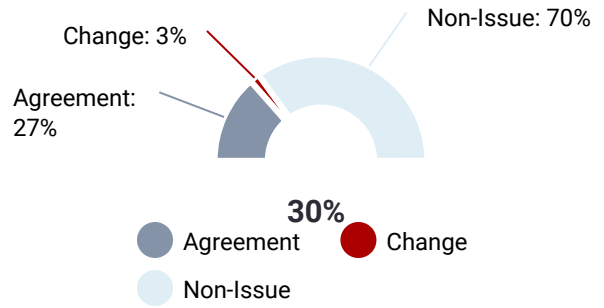
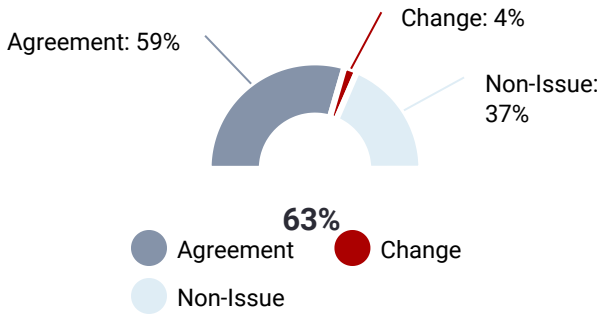
*Change in proportion of those who agree with the statement from 2022 to 2023 survey respondents.

Stigma Domain Changes from 2022 to 2023



Dangerous

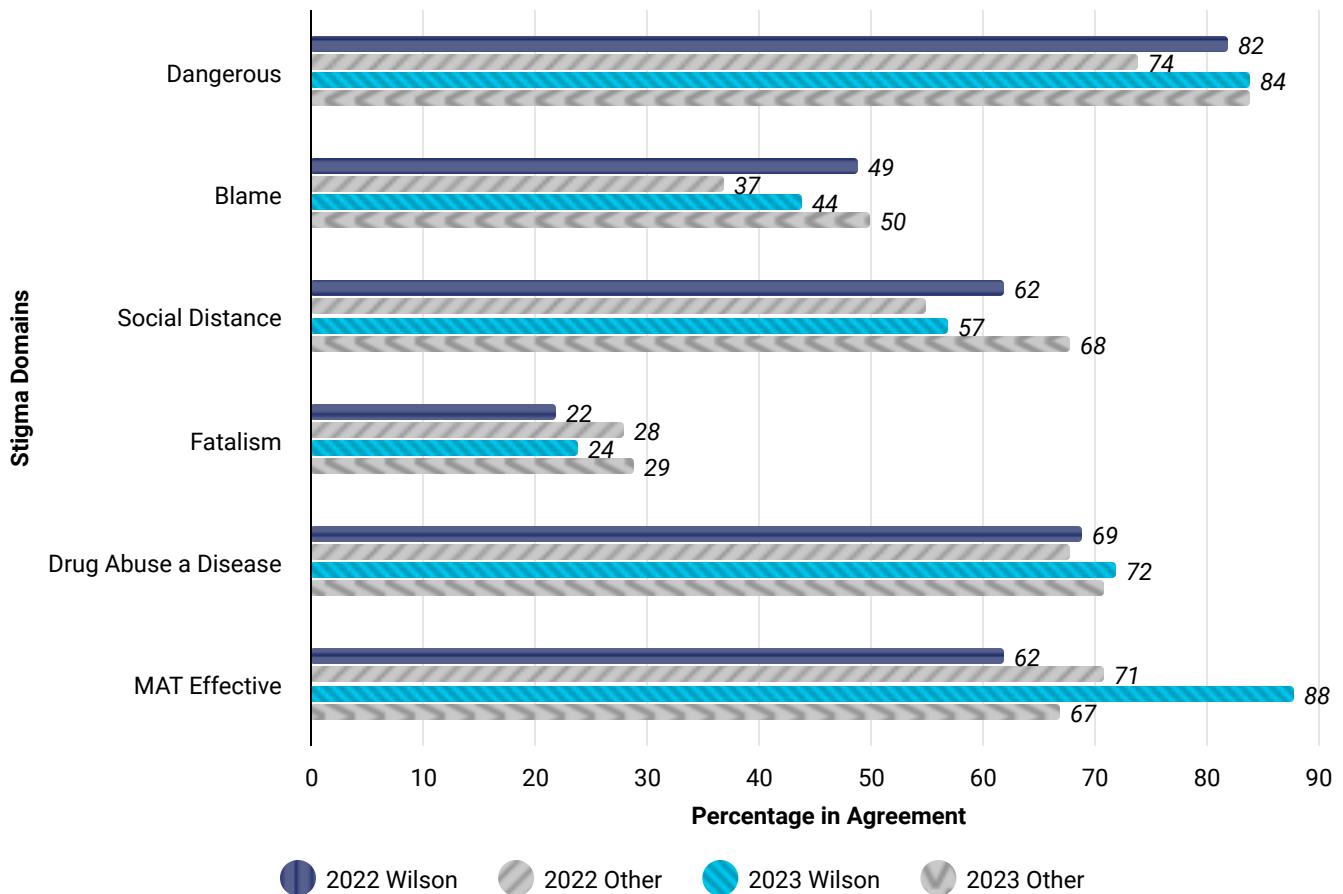
Blame



Social Distance

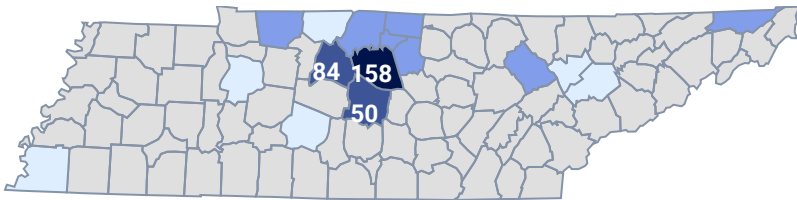
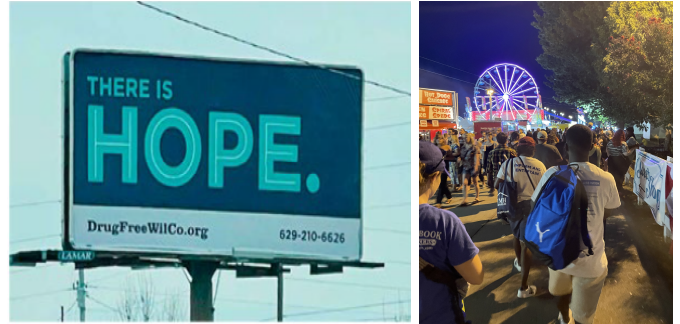
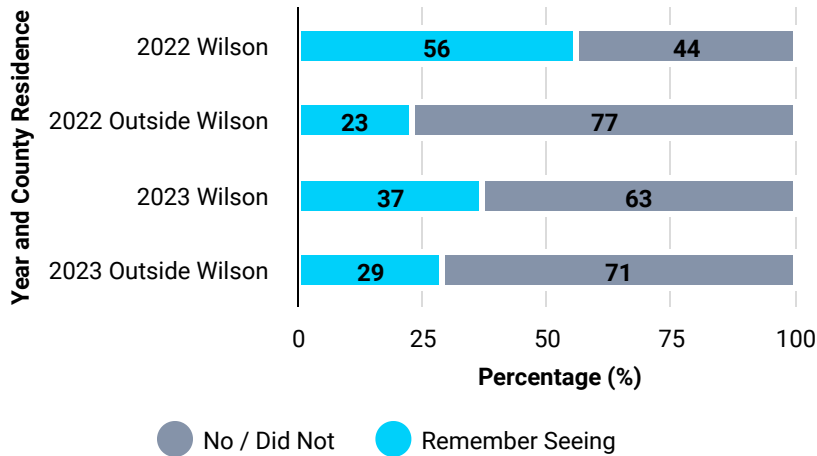
Fatalism

Stigma Domain Changes from 2022 to 2023 by Wilson County Resident Status



A billboard campaign aimed at reducing stigma towards individuals using drugs and promoting recovery and treatment efforts ran from March to December 2022. We surveyed respondents in August 2022 and again a year later in August 2023 to see if they remembered seeing any of the billboards. As anticipated, Wilson County residents showed better recall in both years, with 37% still remembering the billboards after more than a year. Notably, there was an increase in recall among respondents from outside the county.

Billboard Viewing Recall by County and Year



Map of Where Respondents Reside, 2023



Throughout five days of data collection, a total of 2,250 recruitment cards were distributed. On three of those days, paper surveys were additionally offered. In total, 407 surveys were completed online and 28 on paper, amounting to 435 surveys. Surveys that were mostly incomplete, lacked informed consent, or were missing significant sections were excluded from the final analysis. After meticulous data cleaning, we had 387 complete and usable responses. Analysis was conducted using Stata Version 17 (College Station, TX) and QGIS 3.26 (Boston, MA).

1223-2660: Middle Tennessee State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, status as a protected veteran, or any other category protected by law. See our full policy at mtsu.edu/iee.

This publication is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$333,000 with 0% percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov. The survey methodology and data collection processes received approval from the MTSU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board under protocol number: 22-1072 1q.

Closer examination revealed that a significant portion of these respondents were those who had a loved one or friend affected by substances. Overall, the data indicates that individuals with a close friend or family member involved in drug use tend to have lower levels of stigma across all domains, and are more likely to believe in the effectiveness of Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) and recognize drug abuse as a disease.

Stigma Domain Level by Affected Loved One Status

