

Journal of Public Policy & Governance



Community Policing Engagement in Decision-Making Against Substance Use Among Young Adults in Vermont, USA

**Davis Clark Modise, Dr. Miller Rijal & Dr. Noah Brown
Lloyd**

ISSN: 2616-8413

Community Policing Engagement in Decision-Making Against Substance Use Among Young Adults in Vermont, USA

¹*Davis Clark Modise, ²Dr. Miller Rijal & ³Dr. Noah Brown Lloyd
^{1,2,3}University of Vermont

*Email of the Corresponding Author: daviscmodise12@gmail.com

How to cite this article: Modise, D.C., Rijal, M., & Lloyd, N. B. (2026). Community Policing Engagement in Decision-Making Against Substance Use Among Young Adults in Vermont, USA, *Journal of Public Policy & Governance*, 10(3), 13-22. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t5441>

Abstract

This study examined community policing engagement in decision-making against substance use among young adults in Vermont, USA. Substance use among young adults remains a major public safety and public health concern, requiring collaborative responses that go beyond traditional law enforcement. The study focused on how police, young adults, families, schools, health agencies, treatment providers and community organizations can participate in shared decision-making to prevent and respond to substance use. The study was guided by the need to understand the role of trust, communication, partnership, and youth participation in strengthening community-based prevention strategies. A review-based approach was used, drawing on existing literature on community policing, public participation, youth substance use, police-community trust and prevention partnerships. The findings showed that community policing engagement improves decision-making by promoting shared responsibility, local problem identification and inclusive planning. The study found that young adults are more likely to cooperate with law enforcement and participate in prevention efforts when police are viewed as partners rather than only as enforcers. The findings also showed that community policing is more effective when linked with public health services, referral systems, school and college programs, youth forums, and local prevention coalitions. However, limited community participation, resource constraints, weak trust, and inconsistent policing practices can reduce the effectiveness of such efforts. The study concluded that substance use among young adults in Vermont cannot be addressed effectively through enforcement alone. Instead, it requires a preventive, participatory and health-oriented community policing model. The study recommended strengthening youth-police dialogue, community advisory committees, public health partnerships, officer training, referral mechanisms and continuous monitoring of prevention programs. The study emphasized that inclusive decision-making can improve trust, strengthen prevention, support early intervention and promote safer and healthier communities in Vermont.

Keywords: *Community Policing Engagement, Decision-Making, Substance Use, Young Adults, USA*

1.0 Background of the Study

<https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t5441>

Community policing engagement in decision-making against substance use among young adults in Vermont is an important public safety and public health issue. Substance use among young adults is not only a law enforcement concern but also a social, health, family, education and community development concern (Fishbein & Sloboda, 2023). Young adults are often exposed to risks linked to peer influence, stress, unemployment, college transition, mental health challenges and limited access to support services. Therefore, addressing substance use requires more than police patrols or arrests. It requires inclusive decision-making where police, health agencies, schools, families, community leaders, treatment providers and young adults work together to identify problems and design practical solutions (Thomson, Harriss, Peters-Corbett, Koppel & Creswell, 2023).

Vermont provides a relevant setting for this study because the state has been identified as having high levels of substance use compared to many other parts of the United States (Erath, LaCroix, O’Keefe, Higgins, & Rawson, 2024). The Vermont Department of Health states that Vermont has some of the highest rates of substance use in the country, while SAMHSA’s NSDUH state data provide substance-use and mental-health estimates by age groups, including young adults aged 18 to 25. These data show why young adults should be treated as a key population in prevention and intervention efforts.

The problem of substance use among young adults in Vermont is complex because it cuts across rural and urban communities. In rural areas, young adults may experience isolation, limited transport, fewer recreational opportunities and reduced access to treatment or counseling services (Thorson-Olesen, Mensink, Goethel, Elwing, Valente, Brako & Rosewood, 2025). In towns and cities, substance use may be linked to social networks, housing insecurity, unemployment, mental health needs, or nightlife environments. This means that a single centralized approach may not work across Vermont. Community policing becomes useful because it allows local communities to identify their own risk factors and decide which responses are most suitable for their context (O’Reilly, 2023)

Community policing is based on partnership, problem-solving, and organizational change. According to Modise (2023), the U.S. Office of Community Oriented Policing Services defines community policing as a philosophy that supports systematic partnerships and problem-solving techniques to address conditions that create public safety problems. In relation to substance use, this means that police officers should not only respond after harm has occurred but should also work with communities to prevent risk, build trust, share information and connect vulnerable young adults to support services.

Engagement in decision-making means that community members are not passive recipients of police decisions (Srirejeki & Khairurrizqo, 2025). Instead, they participate in identifying substance-use problems, discussing causes, setting priorities, choosing interventions and evaluating whether those interventions are working. In Vermont, this can include public forums, youth advisory groups, school and college meetings, local prevention coalitions, town committees and partnerships between police departments and public health officials (Greenberg, M. A. (2024).

When young adults are included in these discussions, decisions are more likely to reflect real experiences rather than assumptions made by adults or institutions.

The involvement of young adults is especially important because they understand the social settings, pressures and barriers that influence substance use in their age group. Young adults can explain why some prevention messages fail, why certain services are avoided and what kind of support feels safe and realistic (Ma, Kieu, Ribisl & Noar, 2023). Their participation can help police and community agencies design responses that are less judgmental and more effective. This can also reduce fear and mistrust between young people and law enforcement, especially where substance use has previously been treated mainly as a criminal matter.

Community policing engagement can support prevention by bringing together police officers, schools, colleges, parents, faith groups, employers, health workers and youth organizations. The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends community interventions involving coalitions or partnerships to prevent substance use among youth because evidence shows that such approaches can reduce cannabis, tobacco, alcohol, binge drinking and other substance use. Vermont also uses community prevention programs to educate communities and reduce alcohol and other drug misuse among youth and young adults (Rose, Shepard, Devine, Gallese & van Eeghen, 2026).

In decision-making, police can contribute useful information about local patterns, public safety concerns, repeat locations of concern and emerging community risks. However, their role should be balanced with input from public health professionals who understand prevention, treatment, harm reduction and recovery. This balance is important because substance use is often connected to mental health, trauma, poverty, homelessness and family instability. A community policing model that works with public health services can shift the response from punishment alone toward prevention, referral, early support and community safety (Obiora, Eziakor & Okafor, 2025).

Community policing can also improve trust when officers are visible in non-threatening roles. For example, officers can attend community meetings, participate in school-based prevention discussions, support local outreach programs and help connect young adults to services instead of waiting until a crisis occurs. Trust is important because young adults are less likely to seek help if they believe police only represent punishment (Skarlatidou, Ludwig, Solymosi & Bradford, 2023). When police are seen as partners in community well-being, young adults and families may become more willing to report concerns, ask for help and participate in prevention decisions.

The need for collaborative decision-making is reinforced by Vermont's wider substance-use challenges, including overdose concerns (Hichborn, Murray, Murphy, Gallant, Moore, McLeman & Marsch, 2025). The Vermont Department of Health reported that opioid-related overdose deaths declined in 2024 compared to 2023, but overdose prevention remains a major public health priority. This shows that progress is possible when prevention, treatment, harm reduction and community action are strengthened. Community policing can contribute to this progress by supporting early intervention, safe referral pathways and cooperation between law enforcement and health services.

Community policing engagement in decision-making against substance use among young adults in Vermont should be understood as a shared approach to public safety and public health. The most effective response is not one controlled by police alone, but one shaped through collaboration with young adults, families, schools, health agencies, local leaders and community organizations (Walker, Smith Lee, Payton Foh, McKoy & Johnson, 2024). Such engagement can improve trust, strengthen prevention, support early intervention, and ensure that decisions are based on the lived realities of young adults. Therefore, community policing in Vermont should prioritize inclusion, prevention, referral, dialogue and evidence-based community partnerships.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Substance use among young adults in Vermont remains a major public safety and public health concern that cannot be effectively addressed through police enforcement alone. Although community policing is expected to promote partnership, trust, prevention and shared problem-solving, many substance-use responses still lack strong participation from young adults, families, schools, health agencies, treatment providers and community organizations. This creates a gap between the decisions made by law enforcement agencies and the lived realities of young adults affected by substance use. Modise (2023) emphasized that community engagement in policing allows the public to participate in and influence policing decisions, while also strengthening trust, legitimacy and proactive crime-prevention efforts.

Despite the importance of community engagement, there remains limited clarity on how young adults are meaningfully included in decision-making processes against substance use in Vermont. Young adults may hesitate to cooperate with police or seek help when they view law enforcement mainly as punitive rather than supportive, which weakens prevention, referral and early intervention efforts. This concern is supported by Selfridge and Lachowsky (2026), who found that youth who use drugs often need stronger, safer and more community-based relationships with police, especially where distrust and limited consultation reduce police legitimacy. Therefore, this study addresses the need to examine how community policing engagement can improve inclusive decision-making, trust and coordinated responses against substance use among young adults in Vermont.

2.0 Literature Review

Modise (2023) investigated community involvement in policing, focusing on how public participation can influence policing decisions, strengthen trust and support police reform. The study used conceptual or policy-based discussion to define community engagement and examine its role in policing. The findings showed that effective policing depends on trust, open communication, community collaboration and proactive engagement through forums, meetings, events, technology, social media and participation in community functions. The study also showed that community engagement helps police build legitimacy, align policies with local values, improve officer safety and support crime reduction strategies. The community policing must include active collaboration and public participation in decision-making, with engagement being proactive and preventive rather than only reactive. The study suggested that governments and

police agencies develop effective community engagement policies, strengthen trust-building practices, use technology and social media to communicate with residents and involve communities in oversight, policy development and crime prevention strategies.

Rijal (2023) examined community involvement in public management planning and decision-making, focusing on how public participation affects the efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness of public service delivery. The methodology used was a qualitative literature review, where the researcher analyzed and interpreted information from various written sources. The findings showed that community involvement is essential in public decision-making because it promotes democratic and participatory governance. The study also found that involving the community helps government become more transparent, accountable, inclusive and responsive to people's needs and aspirations. The community participation should not be ignored in modern public management because it improves the quality and fairness of public services. The study recommended strengthening community participation in planning and decision-making processes to improve public service delivery and promote more accountable governance.

Selfridge and Lachowsky (2026) analyzed community policing as a strategy for improving relations between police and racialized youth who use drugs, particularly in contexts where racial profiling, discrimination and reduced police legitimacy have weakened trust. The methodology used was a rapid review of grey and peer-reviewed literature to identify promising community policing models, strengths, gaps and approaches for improving police-youth relations. The findings showed that community policing may offer a useful way to reimagine law enforcement by building stronger police-community connections, but few programs include comprehensive culturally safe training or meaningful consultation and co-development with affected communities. The study also found that many existing models lack strong evidence-based outcomes and rely mainly on anecdotal support. The community policing has potential to improve relationships between police and racialized youth who use drugs, but current models remain limited in design, evidence and community involvement. The study recommended enhanced law enforcement training in trauma-informed harm reduction, youth psychosocial development, prosocial communication, crisis de-escalation, reconciliation and cultural safety.

A study by Aston, O'Neill, Hail and Wooff (2023) studied the role of procedural justice in community policing, with specific focus on how interactional, procedural and distributive justice influence information sharing between police and young minority groups across Europe. The methodology involved structured interviews with 161 participants, including members of young minority groups and intermediaries who work with minority communities and police agencies across nine European countries. The findings indicated that public confidence and willingness to share information with police are strengthened when police demonstrate respectful attitudes, good communication, accessibility, responsiveness, efficiency, data protection, fair outcomes and equal distribution of policing services. The study also found that information sharing is influenced by both online and face-to-face police-public interactions. The study concluded that building trust in community policing requires more than individual police behavior; it also depends on wider community policing models, fairness, security procedures and institutional responsiveness. The

study recommended strengthening interactional justice, procedural fairness, data protection, equitable policing services and community policing structures to improve public confidence and information sharing.

Li (2023) examined counterterrorism community policing (CTCP), focusing on how police partnerships with Muslim communities in the U.S., U.K., and Australia can be improved to prevent extremism while maintaining community trust. The methodology is mainly a conceptual and analytical approach, drawing on critiques of CTCP, behavioral economics, Nudge Theory and a case study of Muslim communities. The findings showed that CTCP has often faced legitimacy problems because counterterrorism policing can weaken trust and confidence among Muslim communities, especially when political and media narratives link Islamist ideology too directly with domestic terrorism threats. The article argues that community engagement can be improved through indirect encouragement, assistance, facilitation and trust-building rather than heavy police visibility. CTCP can be more effective when communities are encouraged to cooperate voluntarily and when police reduce their dominant role in grassroots engagement. Community representatives should take a more active frontline role, reducing police visibility to a supportive background role and avoiding political or media narratives that stigmatize Muslim communities.

Nur and Margaret (2024) study investigated the implementation of community policing in drug abuse prevention in Cikaret Village, focusing on the Drug-Free Village Program carried out by the Narcotics Investigation Unit. The methodology used was a qualitative case study approach, where data were collected through observation, interviews and document review. The findings showed that community policing was implemented through partnerships between the police, community members and stakeholders, with the community empowered to participate as members of the Drug-Free Village task force. The program generally helped reduce the intensity of drug abuse cases, although it faced challenges such as low community participation, limited budget for positive activities, weak police-community approach and low patrol intensity. The community policing can support drug abuse prevention when police and communities work together through structured partnerships. The study recommended strengthening synergy among police, community members and stakeholders to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of community policing in drug abuse prevention.

Grace, Lloyd and Page (2025) studied police decision-making in cannabis possession cases, focusing on how young, ethnically minoritised, urban males and other “suspect” groups are policed in a Northern England force area. The study examined police decision-making practices in cannabis possession cases within one police force. The results indicated that cannabis possession was often discovered accidentally after police attention had first been drawn to individuals, vehicles, behaviours, or locations considered suspicious, rather than through direct cannabis-related investigations. Once cannabis was detected, officers often felt compelled to act because of public and managerial pressure, perceived harms linked to cannabis and the visibility or smell of public cannabis use. Police responses to cannabis possession are shaped by suspicion, discretion, public pressure and force guidelines, but there is inconsistency across different police areas. The study suggested prioritising consistency in cannabis policing guidelines to reduce unequal

outcomes and avoid situations where individuals receive criminal records in some areas for actions that may not be criminalised elsewhere.

Mangai, Masiya and Masemola (2024) study is police perspectives on community engagement strategies for crime prevention in South Africa, with specific focus on Johannesburg metropolitan police stations. The methodology used was a qualitative research approach, where unstructured interviews were conducted with station commanders and visible policing officers across 10 Johannesburg metropolitan police stations. The findings showed that community policing strategies such as community-policing forums, sector policing, street patrollers and social media use can effectively involve communities as partners in crime prevention. However, the study also found challenges such as limited resources and difficulties in policing certain regions. The study concluded is that community policing partnerships can strengthen police-community relations, improve public trust and enhance crime prevention outcomes. The study recommended improving and adapting community policing strategies to the South African context by addressing resource limitations and strengthening practical collaboration between police and communities.

3.0 Research Findings

The study found that community policing engagement improves decision-making against substance use among young adults in Vermont by promoting shared responsibility between police, young adults, families, schools, health agencies and community organizations. This is important because substance use among young adults is not only a policing issue, but also a public health and social development concern that requires joint planning and local participation. The finding agrees with Modise (2023), who emphasized that community engagement allows citizens to participate in and influence policing decisions, while Rijal (2023) found that community participation makes public decision-making more transparent, accountable, inclusive and responsive to people's needs. Therefore, the study found that inclusive decision-making helps communities identify real causes of substance use and develop practical prevention strategies.

The study also found that trust between young adults and law enforcement is central to effective substance-use prevention. Young adults are more likely to cooperate, share information and seek support when police are viewed as partners rather than only as agents of punishment. This finding is supported by Aston et al., (2023), who found that interactional, procedural and distributive justice help build public confidence and improve information sharing with police. Similarly, Selfridge and Lachowsky (2026) found that youth who use drugs need stronger, safer and more community-based relationships with police, especially where distrust and discrimination affect police legitimacy.

The study further found that community policing is more effective when it is implemented through partnerships and prevention-based programs rather than enforcement alone. Police engagement in local forums, youth advisory groups, school prevention activities, referral systems and public health partnerships can help reduce substance-use risks among young adults. This finding is consistent with Nur and Margaret (2024), who found that a Drug-Free Village Program reduced drug abuse cases through police-community-stakeholder partnerships, although limited

participation and resources affected implementation. Mangai et al., (2024) also found that community policing forums, sector policing, street patrols and social media can strengthen community participation in crime prevention, while Grace et al., (2025) showed that clearer and more consistent police decision-making is needed in substance-related cases.

4.0 Conclusions

The study concluded that community policing engagement plays an important role in strengthening decision-making against substance use among young adults in Vermont, USA. Substance use among young adults requires a collaborative response because it is connected to public safety, health, family, education, peer influence, mental health and community development. The study therefore establishes that police alone cannot effectively address substance use without the active involvement of young adults, families, schools, health agencies, treatment providers and community organizations. Inclusive decision-making helps communities identify local risk factors, build practical prevention strategies and create responses that reflect the real experiences of young adults.

The study further concluded that trust, communication, and partnership are central to effective community policing against substance use. When young adults view police officers as partners rather than only as enforcers, they are more likely to share information, seek help and participate in prevention activities. The study also concludes that community policing is most effective when it focuses on prevention, referral, public health collaboration, youth participation and consistent decision-making rather than punishment alone. Therefore, community policing in Vermont should be strengthened as a shared and preventive approach that supports safer communities and healthier outcomes for young adults.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommended that community policing agencies in Vermont should strengthen inclusive decision-making structures that actively involve young adults, families, schools, colleges, public health agencies, treatment providers, local leaders and community-based organizations in addressing substance use. Police departments should move beyond enforcement-based responses and adopt preventive, participatory and public-health-oriented approaches that allow communities to identify local substance-use risks, set intervention priorities and design practical solutions that reflect the lived experiences of young adults. The study further recommends the establishment of regular youth-police dialogue forums, community advisory committees, school and college prevention partnerships and local substance-use prevention coalitions to improve trust, communication and information sharing between young adults and law enforcement. Police officers should also receive continuous training in youth engagement, trauma-informed response, harm reduction, mental health awareness, cultural sensitivity, crisis de-escalation and referral procedures so that their interactions with young adults are supportive and non-threatening. In addition, community policing programs should strengthen collaboration with healthcare providers and recovery services to ensure that young adults struggling with substance use are connected to counseling, treatment, rehabilitation and social support rather than being treated only through

punitive measures. The study also recommends adequate funding, staffing, monitoring and evaluation of community policing initiatives to ensure that prevention programs are sustainable, evidence-based and responsive to changing substance-use patterns in Vermont.

REFERENCES

- Aston, E. V., O'Neill, M., Hail, Y., & Wooff, A. (2023). Information sharing in community policing in Europe: Building public confidence. *European journal of criminology*, 20(4), 1349-1368.
- Erath, T. G., LaCroix, R., O'Keefe, E., Higgins, S. T., & Rawson, R. A. (2024). Substance use patterns, sociodemographics, and health profiles of harm reduction service recipients in Burlington, Vermont. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 21(1), 76.
- Fishbein, D. H., & Sloboda, Z. (2023). A national strategy for preventing substance and opioid use disorders through evidence-based prevention programming that fosters healthy outcomes in our youth. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 26(1), 1-16.
- Grace, S., Lloyd, C., & Page, G. (2025). 'What discretion do you need?' Factors influencing police decision-making in possession of cannabis offences. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 25(2), 569-590.
- Greenberg, M. A. (2024). Youth involvement in public safety in the United States: Mitigating youth violence through community programming. Springer Nature.
- Hichborn, E. G., Murray, O. B., Murphy, E. I., Gallant, T. E., Moore, S. K., McLeman, B. M., ... & Marsch, L. A. (2025). Patient centered medication treatment for opioid use disorder in rural Vermont: a qualitative study. *Addiction Science & Clinical Practice*, 20(1), 3.
- Li, E. (2023). Can "Nudge" Salvage Community Policing against Terrorism?. *Terrorism and political violence*, 35(1), 135-155.
- Ma, H., Kieu, T. K. T., Ribisl, K. M., & Noar, S. M. (2023). Do vaping prevention messages impact adolescents and young adults? A meta-analysis of experimental studies. *Health Communication*, 38(8), 1709-1722.
- Mangai, M. S., Masiya, T., & Masemola, G. (2024). Engaging communities as partners: policing strategies in Johannesburg. *Safer Communities*, 23(1), 86-102.
- Modise, J. M. (2023). Community engagement in policing: A path to more meaningful, knowledgeable, and successful public consultation. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 8(6), 3894-3906.
- Modise, J. M. (2023). Systematically Review and Synthesize Police Community Relations to Jointly Combat Crime Through Community Policing, Community-Oriented Policing, and Problem-Oriented Policing. Newbury Park, California.

- Nur, H. A., & Margaret, M. (2024). Implementation of community policing by the Narcotics Investigation Unit of Polresta Bogor Kota in drug abuse prevention. *Journal of Law, Politic and Humanities*, 4(4), 635-648.
- O'Reilly, C. (2023). Doing the right thing? Value conflicts and community policing. *Policing and Society*, 33(1), 1-17.
- Obiora, C. A., Eziakor, M., & Okafor, J. C. (2025). Community Policing And Crime Management In Anambra State, Nigeria, 2014–2023. *Int'l Journal of Education Research and Scientific Development*, 7(2), 87-120.
- Rijal, S. (2023). The importance of community involvement in public management planning and decision-making processes. *Journal of Contemporary Administration and Management (ADMAN)*, 1(2), 84-92.
- Rose, G. L., Shepard, M., Devine, D., Gallese, C., & van Eeghen, C. (2026). Clinical screening and peer interventions to prevent substance use in at-risk adolescents: A longitudinal single-arm trial protocol. *Contemporary Clinical Trials Communications*, 101647.
- Selfridge, M. E., & Lachowsky, N. (2026). Innovative community policing models in response to discrimination of racialized youth who use drugs. *Race and Justice*, 16(2), 407-432.
- Skarlatidou, A., Ludwig, L., Solymosi, R., & Bradford, B. (2023). Understanding knife crime and trust in police with young people in East London. *Crime & Delinquency*, 69(5), 943-970.
- Srirejeki, K., & Khairurrizqo, K. (2025). The role of community engagement as corruption control strategy in local governments: insights from Indonesia. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 38(7), 872-894.
- Thomson, A., Harriss, E., Peters-Corbett, A., Koppel, K., & Creswell, C. (2023). Barriers and facilitators of community-based implementation of evidence-based interventions in the UK, for children and young people's mental health promotion, prevention and treatment: rapid scoping review. *BJPsych Open*, 9(4), e132.
- Thorson-Olesen, S., Mensink, A., Goethel, A., Elwing, A., Valente, J., Brako, P., & Rosewood, P. (2025). Challenges And Strategies For Maintaining Sobriety In Rural Areas: A Consensual Qualitative Analysis. *Wisconsin Counseling Journal*, 38.
- Walker, I. A., Smith Lee, J. R., Payton Foh, E., McKoy, P., & Johnson, M. H. (2024). “Resilience looks like me”: Community stakeholder perspectives on resilience in Black boys and young men exposed to community violence. *American Psychologist*, 79(8), 1092.