

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Methamphetamine Use in the Western United States: An In-Depth Look

Over the past several years, the Office of National Drug Control Policy's Pulse Check series has reported the increase and spread of methamphetamine use in West Coast states. To gain more in-depth information concerning this trend, a special Pulse Check study was conducted in six states that appear to have been affected the most by methamphetamine--Arizona, California, Hawaii, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington. Drug ethnographers, law enforcement officials, and treatment providers in each state were interviewed to determine the nature and extent of methamphetamine use in this region.

What is the Level of Methamphetamine Use?

Ethnographers, law enforcement officials, and treatment providers in all six states reported that methamphetamine use was a high-priority problem. On average, 27% to 55% of treatment admissions in each of the states were methamphetamine users. In several areas, methamphetamine has surpassed alcohol and cocaine as the primary drugs of abuse among treatment admissions. Interestingly, all states reported that the primary reason for methamphetamine clients' entry into treatment was legal problems, such as "aggressive behaviors like fighting or bizarre or inappropriate behaviors which prompt others to call the police" (p. X).

Who is Using Methamphetamine?

In five of the six states, the majority of methamphetamine users are described by sources as white males in their 20s and 30s who are blue collar workers or unemployed. However, there have been recent increases in use among youth, Native American and Hispanic populations. Hawaii was the only one of the six states to report a wide range in the types of users; "while many [treatment] programs report that users are young (teens and twenties), there is a range of jobs, ethnicities, and education levels reported" (p. IX).

How is Methamphetamine Being Used?

Patterns of use varied across the six states. According to treatment data, snorting and smoking were the most common modes of ingestion in California and Arizona, while the majority of treated users in Oregon and New Mexico preferred snorting or injecting the drug. In Hawaii, no treatment programs reported that clients injected; 81% reported that clients smoked the drug. Treatment providers in Washington reported that clients were equally likely to smoke, snort, or inject methamphetamine. Some unique modes of ingestion were also reported. In California, "putting methamphetamine into coffee in what is termed 'biker's coffee' is reported by ethnographic sources as popular among young professionals interested in the drug's energizing and appetite suppressant effects" (p. III). Eating methamphetamine (putting methamphetamine on paper or food and chewing it) was reported by a law enforcement source in Washington State.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *Pulse Check: National Trends in Drug Abuse*, Summer 1997. To receive a complimentary copy, call the ONDCP Drugs and Crime Clearinghouse at 800-666-3332. For more information, contact Dr. Dana Hunt of Abt Associates at 617-492-7100.

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