



# OSAM-O-GRAM



DATE: June 2006

DATELINE: Dayton, Ohio

Wright State University & the University of Akron

## Targeted Response Initiative on Young Heroin Users in Ohio Part II: Initiation to Heroin Use

The majority of heroin users had extensive histories of multiple drug use, including alcohol, marijuana, powdered cocaine, pharmaceuticals, LSD, MDMA, crack, and other drugs. Many reported first drug use between the ages of 12 and 13. Heroin was the last drug that participants tried. The average age at which heroin was used for the first time was 21 years.

Almost 65% of the participants believed they were addicted to non-prescribed pharmaceutical opioids before trying heroin for the first time. About 70% of these participants reported that OxyContin® was the pharmaceutical drug they most commonly abused before transitioning to heroin. Four interrelated factors contributed to their transition to heroin: 1) rapidly increasing tolerance to pharmaceutical opioids; 2) decreasing

availability and high street prices of OxyContin®; 3) high availability and comparatively low prices of heroin; and 4) a commonly shared belief that heroin is the “same thing as OxyContin®,” which

diminished stigma and initial fears associated with its use. For example, a 29-year-old white woman from Dayton commented:

*I was sick one time and couldn't find any pills.... I was really, really sick... and I laid sick for quite some time. And I couldn't work, and I couldn't do much, and a friend of mine that was already usin' heroin turned me onto the heroin. And he said that it would take the dope sick away. And from there on, you know, it's cheaper, it's quicker....*

About 64% of participants reported using heroin for the first time in the context of close social relationships--with a boyfriend or girlfriend, a relative, or a close friend. Over 70% initially used heroin by intranasal inhalation.

In summary, these data show that many participants had very extensive drug use histories before initiating heroin use. Nevertheless, pharmaceutical opioid abuse appears to be a critically important factor contributing to the eventual transition to heroin among the “new generation” of heroin users in Ohio.

Substance	Lifetime use (%)	Mean age at first use (SD)
Alcohol	98.2%	12.6 (2.0)
Marijuana	98.2%	13.3 (1.9)
Pharm. opioids	96.4%	17.6 (3.6)
Powdered cocaine	92.7%	17.1 (2.8)
Benzodiazepines	75.9%	17.4 (4.2)
LSD	66.7%	16.3 (2.9)
MDMA	63.0%	19.0 (3.3)
Crack	60.0%	19.6 (4.0)
Methamphetamine	57.4%	19.8 (3.9)
Psilocybin	51.9%	17.6 (3.1)
Ketamine	44.4%	18.8 (4.0)
Pharm. stimulants	33.3%	17.6 (3.4)
Inhalants	27.8%	16.5 (4.4)

First heroin use	No. (%)
Age at first heroin use	
Range	14 - 30
Mean (SD)	21.1 (3.9)
Administration at first use	
Intranasal inhalation	41 (70.7%)
Injection	17 (29.3%)
Addicted to pharmaceutical opioids before first heroin use?	
No	21 (36.2%)
Yes	37 (63.8%)
If yes, pharmaceutical opioids used most frequently:	
OxyContin®	27 (71.1%)
Vicodin®	5 (12.2%)
Percocet®	2 (5.3%)
Other	4 (10.5%)
Who introduced to heroin?	
Close friend	22 (38.6%)
Casual friend	12 (21.1%)
Boyfriend/girlfriend	8 (14.0%)
Relative	6 (10.5%)
Dealer	5 (8.6%)
Other	4 (7.0%)
How long before second heroin use?	
Within a week	47 (82.5%)
More than a week later	10 (17.5%)

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the June 2006 OSAM Network meeting.

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