



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 III. Patterns of Heroin Use

Almost all users (95%) believed that they had become addicted to heroin. Participants reported rapid escalation of their heroin use from about one bag (costing about \$20) to several bags per day (costing up to \$200 or more). Although 41 began using heroin intranasally, 32 of them (78%) eventually switched to injection use of the drug. For example, a 29-year-old white woman commented:

I had such a high tolerance then. I'd do probably three caps, and snorting it...it was pointless to me. It's like I was chasing a never ending road, ya know. And I couldn't get high enough, I couldn't get rid of the pain.... A friend of mine was shootin' it, and he told me that you feel it a lot faster, ya know. And pretty much that's how I ended up shootin' heroin.

Patterns of heroin use	No. (%)
Perceived addiction to heroin?	
Yes	55 (94.8%)
No	3 (5.2%)
Use of other drugs with heroin?	
Yes	50 (86.2%)
No	8 (13.8%)
What other drugs with heroin?	
Powdered cocaine	27 (46.6%)
Benzodiazepines	16 (27.6%)
Marijuana	11 (18.9%)
Crack	11 (18.9%)
Alcohol	4 (6.9%)
Pharmaceutical opioids	3 (5.2%)
An experience of heroin-related OD?	
Yes	24 (41.4%)
No	34 (58.6%)

The majority of heroin users reported concurrent use of other drugs, most commonly powdered cocaine (as a speedball) and benzodiazepines (e.g. Xanax®, Valium®). These substances were typically used to intensify or prolong the heroin high. About 40% reported a heroin-related overdose, and the majority of these participants used other drugs in combination with heroin when they overdosed. Benzodiazepines were the most frequently reported drugs involved in overdose cases. For example, a 24-year-old white woman indicated:

It got to the point where I would do the heroin, and I wouldn't get high. It would just, just make me feel normal. And then I'd take the Xanax® to try to get high, and then I'd OD.

The majority of users reported that their heroin addiction resulted in numerous social, legal, and financial repercussions. Most resorted to illegal or "demeaning" activities to obtain money for drugs, including stealing from

family and friends, pawning their belongings, overcharging customers, shoplifting, drug dealing, and prostitution. For example, another 24-year-old white woman who was in recovery from heroin abuse commented:

I stole five checkbooks from my family, stole stuff from stores, and then my boyfriend would return it. I never got introduced to... tricking [prostitution]. I never did that, but what makes me sick is that I would have [done it]....

The majority of "new generation" users experienced rapid progression of heroin addiction. Although many of these young individuals initiated heroin as a way to cope with their addiction to pharmaceutical opioids, heroin use eventually brought more disruption to their lives, including an increased risk of overdose and initiation of injection drug use.

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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