



Dateline: Ohio

January 2008-June 2008

Drug Abuse Trends in Rural Ohio: A Targeted Response Initiative PART V: Pharmaceutical Opioids

High Levels of Pharmaceutical Opioid Abuse in Rural Ohio

The OSAM Rural Targeted Response Initiative (TRI) found remarkably high levels of pharmaceutical opioid abuse (See Table 1). For example, users in Williams County ranked pharmaceutical opioids as the “number one drug in the county.” A Pickaway County user commented, “Pills are really a big thing, a really big thing here in Circleville. It’s bad. I think people would trade anything [for pills].” Similar to trends reported in urban regions, users in most rural counties obtained pharmaceutical opioids through “doctor shopping” and personal networks. A Defiance County user said, “Pretty much everybody’s using them because they are so easy to get...Percocets and Vicodin, they’re easy to get. You just go to the hospital and say you got a back pain.” A Preble County user noted, “They are easy to get. [A woman who introduced me to pill use] had an address book full of names that she could flip it open and call any of those people and get me whatever kind of pills I wanted, and they were all here in Preble County.” Participants also indicated that pharmaceutical opioids can be obtained from some older adults who sell their own prescriptions to supplement their limited incomes. A Pickaway County user commented, “A lot of older people are selling their pills...so they can pay for their rent and have extra money in their pocket. ‘Cause they can hardly afford food.”

Similar to urban regions, participants in most rural counties reported that OxyContin® (oxycodone extended-release) and products containing hydrocodone were the most commonly abused pharmaceuticals. Methadone tablets were also reported as highly available in Meigs, Williams, Defiance, and Fulton counties. Participants in most rural regions also reported diversion of Suboxone® (buprenorphine and naloxone) at low levels. Users typically purchase diverted Suboxone® to self-medicate their addiction to heroin or pharmaceutical opioids.

Diversity of User Groups

Illicit use of pharmaceutical opioids was reported among diverse user groups, including middle-aged and older adults, “housewives,” individuals with chronic pain issues, and others.

Similar to urban regions of the state, rural participants reported increasing levels of pharmaceutical opioid abuse among young whites, aged 16-25. In many rural counties, the illicit use of pharmaceutical opioids and other prescription drugs was rated as a major substance abuse problem among juveniles, surpassed only by abuse of alcohol and marijuana. According to participants, juveniles frequently obtain pharmaceutical opioids by stealing them from friends and family members who have legitimate prescriptions. For example, a Medina County participant commented, “We’re finding so many younger age kids 17, 18, 19 years old...kids have accessibility through Mom and Dad’s or Grandma and Grandpa’s medicine cabinet and taking what they need. It’s an increasing trend, and I think we’ll see a lot more...” A treatment provider from northwest Ohio reported, “We’re seeing more adolescents using prescriptions. That’s been a noticeable increase...they steal from parents and grandparents right in that medicine cabinet.”

High levels of pharmaceutical opioid abuse in selected rural areas of the state are consistent with trends in urban regions. The findings suggest the need for a wide range of prevention approaches to address the illicit use of pharmaceutical opioids throughout the state.

Table 1. Availability of diverted pharmaceutical opioids in selected rural counties

County \ Pharmaceutical	Geauga	Portage	Lake	Jefferson	Trumbull	Ashtabula	Medina	Preble	Pickaway	Fulton	Williams	Defiance	Meigs
oxycodone extended release	High	High	High	High	High	High	High	Moderate	High	High	High	High	High
hydrocodone	High	High	High	High	High	High	Moderate	High	High	High	High	High	Moderate
methadone	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	High	High
hydromorphone	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
buprenorphine	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
fentanyl	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low

■ High ■ Moderate ■ Low (white is N/A)

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Regional Epidemiologists located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual reports 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 2008 OSAM Network meeting.

Center for Interventions, Treatment, and Addictions Research

Robert G. Carlson, Ph.D. • Raminta Daniulaityte, Ph.D. • Tamara Hansen Reese, M.P.H. • Russel Falck, M.A. • Lawrence Hammar, Ph.D.
Wright State University Boonshoft School of Medicine • 3640 Colonel Glenn Hwy., Dayton, OH 45435-0001
Phone: (937) 775-2066 • Fax: (937) 775-2214 • www.med.wright.edu/citar/

For more information, visit the ODADAS website: <http://www.odadas.state.oh.us>