



OSAM-O-GRAM



DATE: January 2005

DATELINE: Ohio

Wright State University
The University of Akron

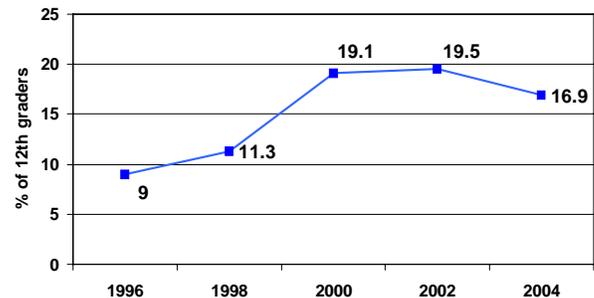
Benzodiazepines and Patterns of Poly Substance Abuse Among High-School and College Age Youth

The OSAM Network continues to report high levels of benzodiazepine abuse **across the state**. Benzodiazepines are central nervous system depressants that are known for their tranquilizing and anti-anxiety effects. Active and recovering substance abusers report high street availability of various benzodiazepines, including Xanax® (alprazolam), Valium® (diazepam), and to a somewhat lesser degree, Klonopin® (clonazepam) and Ativan® (lorazepam).

Benzodiazepine abuse is widespread among very diverse populations of users. As a 20-year-old female heroin user from the **Dayton** area pointed out, "Everybody always wants 'em." Benzodiazepine abuse is common among high school and college age youth. As a 33-year-old recovering user from the **Columbus** area put it, "I'm telling you, a lot of younger people, they get turned on to benzodiazepines, once they try it, they're on it."

High levels of benzodiazepine abuse among high school students are confirmed by the Dayton Area Drug Survey which shows dramatic increases in tranquilizer abuse in 2000. Rates of lifetime prevalence of abuse among 12th graders peaked at 19.5% in 2002, and remained near 17% in 2004.

Changes in lifetime prevalence of tranquilizer abuse among Dayton area 12th graders (Dayton Area Drug Survey)



Benzodiazepines are often abused in combination with other substances, such as alcohol, marijuana and pharmaceutical opioids:

If I ate some Xanax and once they kicked in, I'd smoke a joint, then it would just like pow! It would just kick in really good.... (20-year-old white man)

At age 13 I drank alcohol, and I would take Xanaxes and Vicodins and Percocets and Klonopins, and I'd smoke weed; I didn't get into the heavy drugs until I was 18. (19-year-old white woman)

Data from OSAM Network interviews suggest that some younger users (16-24-year-olds) get introduced to benzodiazepines early on in their drug use careers. In terms of social acceptability and perceived risk, these pharmaceutical drugs are often considered "safe" like alcohol and marijuana. Common patterns of poly substance abuse, the ready availability of benzodiazepines, and low levels of perceived harm associated with their use seem to have coalesced to present a dangerous trend across **Ohio**.

For information regarding the potentially toxic combination of benzodiazepine drugs and buprenorphine, a drug now used in the treatment of opioid addiction, refer to the Ohio Early Warning Network (OEWN) Alert at eBasedPrevention.org (<http://www.ebasedprevention.org/oewn.asp?id=39>).

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 January 2005 OSAM Network meeting.

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