

The Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring Network (OSAM) January 2006 Meeting

Executive Summary

Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services

This Executive Summary reports highlights of the OSAM Network meeting held in Columbus, Ohio, February 3, 2006. The report is based on substance abuse trend data collected and analyzed by Regional Epidemiologists (REPIs) in Athens and surrounding counties (rural southeast), Akron-Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo, and Youngstown. Regional Epidemiologists interviewed active and recovering drug users, substance abuse treatment providers, and law enforcement personnel, and collected available statistical data to compile their regional drug trend reports. In addition, for the first time, crime labs in Columbus, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo, and labs of Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI&I) in Richfield (covering Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown), London (Southern and Central Ohio), and Bowling Green (Northwest Ohio excluding Toledo) were surveyed to collect additional data on drug purity and availability. Researchers at Wright State University and the University of Akron reviewed their reports and compiled this summary of major findings.

CRACK COCAINE

- **Availability of crack cocaine remained high in all reporting areas of the state. Crack injection was reported as increasing in several areas across the state.**

As in June 2005, drug users and crime lab professionals reported high availability of crack cocaine in most urban areas of the state. Continuing increases in crack availability were observed in the rural southeast, a trend that had first been identified in June 2004. Crime lab professionals reported high purity of crack (above 60%) in most reporting areas of the state. According to drug users, crack prices remained similar to the previous reporting period, and averaged \$40-\$50 per gram or \$100-\$150 per 1/8 ounce. Increases in crack-cocaine abuse were reported in the Cincinnati and Athens areas. Other areas of the OSAM Network continued to report consistently high levels of crack-cocaine use. According to drug users and treatment providers, the majority of the crack using population consists of middle-aged individuals of lower socioeconomic status, primarily African-American. However, most areas of the state continue to report increasing diversity in the user population. The Cincinnati, Akron, Youngstown, and Cleveland areas reported potential increases in crack use among suburban whites and professionals. Drug users, treatment providers, and law enforcement professionals from all reporting areas of the state continued to report cases of crack-cocaine abuse among adolescents. Increases in crack-cocaine abuse among Hispanics continue to be reported in the Columbus and Dayton areas. Smoking crack cocaine remained the primary method of use. In the current period, reports of crack injection were obtained in the Akron, Athens, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Dayton areas.

POWDERED COCAINE

- **Most reporting areas of the state continued to report high levels of availability of powdered cocaine and potential increases in abuse among young individuals (age 16-25).**

In most areas of the state, users reported the availability of powdered cocaine to be high, while crime lab reports indicated moderate availability of the drug. An exception was the Akron area, where users reported powdered cocaine availability as moderate, and the Cleveland area, where

powdered cocaine availability was moderate according to users and low according to the crime lab reports. Crime lab professionals in most reporting areas of the state indicated high purity of powdered cocaine (above 60%). Drug users in most areas of the state reported prices of powdered cocaine as low as \$40-\$60 per gram. In contrast, prices in the Athens, Akron, and Cleveland areas were reportedly higher, reaching \$80-\$100 per gram. According to drug users, treatment providers, and probation officers, powdered cocaine use was reportedly increasing among youth (16-25 years old) in most OSAM areas. The increasing social acceptability of powdered cocaine is believed to be partially associated with increased use of the drug. High levels of powdered cocaine abuse were reported in Cleveland's Hispanic community.

HEROIN

- **Most areas of the state reported moderate or high availability of heroin. Young whites (age 18-25) continued to be characterized as the most prevalent group of new heroin abusers.**

Drug users and crime lab professionals reported moderate or high heroin availability in all areas of the state, except Athens and Toledo, where heroin availability was reported as low. The most common form of heroin available was described as brownish or beige powder. Availability of black tar heroin was reported. Heroin prices varied significantly across geographic locations: Dayton and Youngstown areas reported prices as low as \$100-\$150 per gram, but prices in the Athens, Columbus, and Cincinnati areas were reportedly higher, reaching \$180-\$200 per gram. Data from Ohio crime labs indicated moderate purity (30-60%), except in the southeastern part of the state where purity was found to be high (above 60%). Young whites (age 18-25) continued to be reported as the most prevalent group of new heroin users. According to drug users and treatment providers, pharmaceutical opioid abuse continues to be seen as one of the common pathways to heroin abuse and addiction. Increases in heroin abuse were reported among Hispanics in the Cleveland area. While injection remained the primary mode of administration, intranasal inhalation was believed to be more common among relatively new heroin abusers. Concurrent cocaine and benzodiazepine use was reportedly a common practice among heroin abusers and could be on the increase in several areas of the state.

PHARMACEUTICAL OPIOIDS

- **Vicodin®, Percocet®, and OxyContin® continued to be the most commonly abused pharmaceutical opioids. Early reports of buprenorphine diversion and abuse were obtained from users in Columbus and several crime labs across the state.**

According to users, treatment providers, and law enforcement professionals, Vicodin® (hydrocodone), Percocet® (oxycodone), and OxyContin® (oxycodone controlled-release) remained the most commonly abused pharmaceutical opioids in the state, with street availability estimated to be moderate or high. Availability of diverted methadone tablets or wafers, was estimated to be low or moderate. Reports about buprenorphine abuse were obtained from active users and crime lab professionals in Columbus. BCI&I labs in Richfield and London also reported cases of buprenorphine diversion. Cases of Kadian® (morphine controlled-release) availability and abuse were reported by active users in Cincinnati. Prices for oxycodone, methadone, and hydrocodone products continue to be reported at \$0.50 -\$1 per milligram of opioid content. For example, a 20-milligram OxyContin® tablet reportedly sold for \$10-\$20, a tablet of Vicodin® ES (7.5 mg of hydrocodone) around \$5, and a 10-milligram methadone tablet could be purchased for \$5. Significant increases in pharmaceutical opioid abuse among white high school and college-age individuals continue to be reported in all OSAM reporting areas.

MARIJUANA

- **High availability and abuse of marijuana continued to be reported across the state.**

According to users and crime lab professionals, marijuana availability remained high across the state. Users typically reported increasing access to better quality marijuana. Consistent with the previous reporting period, 1/8th ounce of marijuana sells for \$25 - \$80, depending on the quality of the drug. The perception that marijuana is a *safe* and socially acceptable drug persisted among diverse user groups.

METHAMPHETAMINE

- **Users and crime lab professionals reported significant regional variation in methamphetamine availability and abuse.**

Active users and crime lab professionals reported significant geographic variation in methamphetamine availability across the state. According to crime lab reports from BCI&I London (southern/central Ohio) and BCI&I Richfield (Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown areas), methamphetamine availability was high. Crime lab reports from Cincinnati and Dayton indicated moderate availability of the drug. Active drug users from the Columbus area perceived relatively low methamphetamine availability in the area. Data from the crime lab in Columbus supported this perception. The availability of methamphetamine in the city of Toledo was believed to be low, as reported by active users and crime lab professionals. However, availability of the drug in areas surrounding the city was thought to be high. All reporting areas of the state reported seeing two distinct types of methamphetamine—whitish powder and shiny glass crystals. Powder-type methamphetamine was prevalent statewide, except Columbus, where glass-type methamphetamine was described as more available. Methamphetamine purity was estimated to be moderate (30-60%) by most reporting crime labs. Crime lab data from the rural southeast and areas surrounding Toledo indicated purity to be high (above 60%). Typical methamphetamine prices continued to be reported at around \$80-\$100 per gram. Smoking and intranasal inhalation were reported as the most common modes of administration. Several areas of the state were reporting more instances of methamphetamine injection. User groups continued to be described as young, white, college-age youth in the “rave” or party scene, middle-aged whites of lower-/middle-class backgrounds in both urban and rural environments, and gay men in larger urban areas of the state.

PHARMACEUTICAL TRANQUILIZERS

- **Benzodiazepine availability and abuse remained consistent at moderate or high levels.**

According to drug users and crime lab professionals, street availability of benzodiazepines, such as Xanax® (alprazolam), Klonopin® (clonazepam), and Valium® (diazepam) remained at moderate or high levels in most areas. According to drug users, benzodiazepines were commonly abused in combination with other substances, especially alcohol.

HALLUCINOGENS

- **Availability and abuse of MDMA/ecstasy varied significantly across different regions of the state, with potentially increasing availability and decreasing prices noted in the Columbus area. The Cleveland area continued to report high availability of phencyclidine (PCP).**

Since 2003, MDMA/ecstasy abuse was decreasing in Ohio. However, in the past two reporting periods, potential increases were noted in Athens, Akron, and Cleveland. In the current reporting

period, crime lab professionals in most areas of the state reported moderate availability of MDMA. Columbus and suburban Toledo areas were exceptions, as both users and crime lab professionals reported high and potentially increasing availability of MDMA in those areas. Reports were mixed in Cincinnati, where MDMA availability was reported as low according to crime lab professionals, but perceived as high by active drug users. MDMA continued to sell for \$10-\$25 per single dose. Users were described as being primarily white high-school and college-age youth.

Similar to the previous reporting period, users and crime lab professionals reported the persistence of PCP abuse among localized groups in the Cleveland area.

Low to moderate availability and abuse of LSD and psilocybin (mushrooms) was described across the state. Users were described as primarily young (18-24) white individuals.

Full OSAM reports are available at: <http://www.odadas.state.oh.us>.