

The Crisis Of Methamphetamine And Its Management: Preparation, Participation, And Prevention

Judith Cunniff, National University
Daniel T. Cunniff, National University
Kenneth D. Kay, National University

ABSTRACT

There is a drug crisis in the United States that is growing at an alarming rate. Its participants work in our businesses, government agencies, and schools. California leads the nation in drug use and until recently, Fresno County was the leader in methamphetamine production. This drug crisis is having a paralyzing effect causing loss of income, dysfunctional families, poverty, child abuse, increase in crime and death. California's Governor Schwarzenegger has supported various preventative initiatives and eradicating measures; however, the methamphetamine problem is well entrenched and keeps appearing in unsuspecting areas. This paper addressed how and where methamphetamine is produced, who participates in its use, ethical issues and decision making, and how we may prevent it from spreading.

Keywords: methamphetamine, crystal, crank, speed

INTRODUCTION

*M*ethamphetamine (meth) is a societal weapon of mass destruction.” This was the campaign message that Fresno County, California, Sheriff-elect Margaret Mims used in her campaign last fall. In addition, she went on to say, “...the gangs and criminals entering our country illegally are a driving force behind the meth industry. Meth is the catalyst that feeds the gang activity in the County....” (Mims, 2006).

To understand the nature of this industry, the writers will present a brief overview of its history and development.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Methamphetamine, crystal, crank, or speed, is a synthetic stimulant, which can be smoked, inhaled, or injected. Meth can be found in either a rock form or a white powder (dissolvable in water). First synthesized in 1887 by a German chemist, meth was not used therapeutically until the 1930s when it began to be promoted by American pharmaceutical companies and was thought to be non-addictive. Meth, when it was first produced, was used to treat asthma, schizophrenia, and narcolepsy. During the Second World War, the Nazis used the drug to keep their troops and aviators awake. In the 1960s and 1970s, students and homemakers used the pills to give them more energy and keep them alert. As the after effects of this drug began to emerge, legal production of the drug was restricted. Because the intermediate input drugs used to produce this meth, ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, were easy to purchase in Mexico, illegal drug laboratories began to be constructed in the rural western and southwestern United States (Hohman, 2004).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Meth has grown to become the drug of choice because it is relatively inexpensive, easy to produce, and has a lingering “high”. According to the 2005 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 10.4 million (4.3%) Americans aged 12 or older have used meth at least once in their lifetime for non-medical reasons (Drug Facts, 2007). In California, meth is the primary drug threat, and Hispanics and Caucasians are almost the exclusive consumers. Purity levels of the drug can range from 10% to 100% pure (DEA, 2006). Methamphetamine can quickly become addictive because repeated use lowers the brain’s ability to manufacture dopamine, which leads to increased cravings for the drug. Withdrawal or “crashing” can include depression and apathy, which can cause the user to switch to other drugs such as marijuana to ease the downward descent. Meth can cause problems while using the drug and lead to severe, future, medical conditions such as coronary heart disease, brain hemorrhage, malnutrition, strokes, and long and short-term psychoses, which have a potential for violent behavior (Hohman, 2004).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Fresno County, California, is in the middle of the agricultural area known as the San Joaquin Valley. Two major transportation routes traverse the county, Interstate 5 and California Highway 99. Both routes are used for narcotics transport from Mexico to California and on to the Northwest and Midwest. In addition to the truck routes, the Central Valley also has rail, bus, cargo, and shipping port facilities. The county has a population of about four million people, but with the advent of the planting or harvesting seasons, the population swells (HIDTA 1999). Because of all of the agricultural fields and orchards in the Valley, meth labs and some super labs, capable of producing 200 pounds at a time, have emerged in the rural areas, and the noxious fumes produced and the late hours that these labs are working have plagued farmers. The operators of these drug labs are alleged to be stealing some of the chemicals from the farmers in order to “cook” their drugs.

Add to this the fact that Fresno County is one of six San Joaquin Valley counties with the highest poverty rates in California and among the highest in the nation. Almost 20% of its population or approximately 165,000 people are believed to be living below the poverty level, which is a household income in 2006 of \$16,242 or less. Experts believe the poverty rate is high in the Valley because it is a low-wage economy, with many unskilled workers and weaknesses in the educational system. It is estimated that 53% of the adults 25 years and older and living in poverty do not have a high school diploma. Many of these workers are employed in the agricultural industry although other industries are impacted as well (Branan, 2007).

The percentage of people consuming drugs in Fresno County is three times the national average, attributed largely to the increase in meth use. The Mexican drug cartels, which have located in the Valley, are contributing 80% of the country’s meth (Barbassa, 2004). Statistically, 70% of those in drug treatment programs in Fresno County are there for meth addiction. The purpose of this study is to show the need for awareness on the part of private and public employees and take action against their drug epidemic.

METH AND THE WORKPLACE

It is estimated that 77% of the employees in the workplace use meth. People, when they are using, feel like “superheroes”, and can be more productive, confident, and are able to accomplish tasks faster (Costello, 2004). People who temper their usage, “maintenance users”, are more difficult to detect, because they exhibit the characteristics of increased concentration and the ability to work longer hours—traits desired by their managers. However, meth can also bring on erratic behavior, more need for sick days, increased health costs, decreased productivity, and greater chances for accidents. Furthermore, it is not just the poverty-level workers who are addicted to the drug, one in four lawyers who are admitted for treatment are addicted to meth (Costello, 2004).

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

To “do” drugs is an individual decision. Research has shown that an alarmingly high number of people in all walks of life choose to use meth and still function on their jobs. Eleven percent of the jail population were arrested on drug charges. Thirteen percent of juveniles were arrested because of drug usage or sale. (U.S. Department of Justice, 2001). We hear of government and school leaders being arrested on drug charges on a regular basis because they made an unethical decision. A national survey of state prison inmates found that almost thirty percent of those in prison for violent offenses admitted that they were under the influence of an illegal drug when they committed the crime (U.S. Department of Justice, 1999). Ethics can be defined as how a moral person should behave. A leader must be moral and ethical in order for an organization to be an effective ethical and moral place. Ethical behavior is doing what is right and good and acting with virtue (Maxcy, 2002). Drug users do not often think logically, they are often governed by their emotions. They are unlikely to consider the consequences of their actions as to what the impact their decision will have on them, their family or their organization. They have little or no interest in what is just and fair or what is best for the common good (Lashway, 1996). Some leaders in organizations are increasing awareness of ethics by forming ethics committees that advise employees on ethical issues and develop ethical codes.

LEGAL ASPECTS

Drug tests have been used in the courts. Some examples of drug testing include police officers being required to take a random test. If he or she fails, and the officer cannot provide a medical reason for having drugs in his/her system, the officer will be fired. Train crews involved in accidents are required to submit to drug and alcohol testing. Students participating in high school athletics are required to submit to random drug tests. If they fail the first test, they must participate in a drug rehabilitation program. If they fail a second test, they can no longer be on the team.

The Supreme Court has ruled in two cases involving drug testing of employees (*Skinner v. Railway Labor Executives Association* and *National Treasury Employees Union v. Raab*). Both involved jobs sensitive to public safety. Railroad employees were subject to testing after train accidents, and U.S. Customs officials were subject to tests if they applied for promotions or transfer to a post directly involving drug interaction or requiring them to carry a firearm. In both cases the Court found that mandatory blood or urine tests do not violate the Fourth Amendment.

In schools, drug testing was addressed in *Vernonia School District 47J v. Acton* and the Board of Education of Independent School District No.92 of Pottawatomie County v. Earls. Here the Court found that random drug testing of students participating in district-sponsored extracurricular activities did not violate the Fourth Amendment (Hails, 2005).

Legislatures often enact criminal statutes based on the recommendations of regulatory agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Information is updated in their website at www.usdoj.gov/dea/agency/agency.htm.

METH AND HEALTH ISSUES

Long-term usage of meth can lead to severe brain damage with users suffering memory loss and cognitive ability similar to those with Parkinson’s disease (Costello, 2004). It can also lead to anxiety, insomnia, mood disturbances, paranoia, hallucinations, and delusions, which could result in homicide and/or suicide. Users may also suffer from “crank bites” or the feeling that bugs are crawling under the user’s skin resulting in incessant scratching and infection. Meth users have a 50 – 60% chance of overcoming their addiction (Costello, 2004). In addition to the destruction the drug causes on the body, it can also lower the mental resistance and people are likely to become infected with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C (HVC) through questionable sex partners and the shared use of needles (Farabee, 2004). According to Bennett and Hess, secret drug laboratories present physical, chemical and toxic hazards to law enforcement officers engaged in raids on the premises. Deterrents such as booby traps and attack dogs have been common (Bennett & Hess, 2004).

METH AND CHILDREN

Beyond the deleterious effects of the drug on the user or users themselves, children are secondary victims of this drug. Drug use may lead to prenatal damage, neglect, malnutrition, physical, mental, and sexual abuse of the child by the parents or other adults living or visiting the family, and caustic burns, poisoning, or death if a child is in the proximity of the corrosive chemicals needed to “cook” the drug. The child may also suffer developmentally because they do not have good role models to follow nor the attention and social encouragement needed to succeed. If a child is found in a drug environment, the child may have to undergo body and clothing decontamination and be separated from its parents and have its care taken over by Child Protective Services. The forceful seizure of the child and separation from its parents could have long-lasting, psychological effects on the child.

METH AND THE COMMUNITIES

The immediate community is drawn into the drug problem by increased crime, dysfunctional families, truancy, deteriorating housing, increased traffic and congestion around a drug house (where drugs may be sold), the presence of undesirable people in the neighborhood, and the chances of fires from the improper use of the explosive chemicals. The larger community is affected by the increased costs of apprehending these drug users and pushers; treatment programs [whose admissions increased fivefold from 1992 to 2002 (Brecht, 2005)]; juvenile diversions or detention; incarceration (30% of the prison population is addicted to drugs); and the increased medical costs of treating HIV and HVC.

METH AND ITS ERADICATION

Governor Schwarzenegger in his Governor’s 2007-08 California State Budget allocated \$1,717,139 to the California Multi-Jurisdictional Methamphetamine Enforcement Team, which currently works in conjunction with the federally funded Central Valley High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Program to intensify the current methamphetamine eradication efforts of participating law enforcement agencies through providing additional resources for investigators and prosecutors specializing in methamphetamine offenses, as well as support staff, equipment, training, and facilities.

The recommended treatment for meth abuse is cognitive-behavior intervention in an intensive outpatient setting. The clients come to understand the cues triggered by meth use, participate in 12-step programs, undergo urine testing, individual and family therapy, and attend social support groups (Hohman, 2004).

The governor also increased his funding to the schools with the largest total investment in education in California history--a per student investment of \$11,584. New programs underway have found the positive effects that peer groups have on helping to prevent and rehabilitate juvenile offenders, and more programs are planned for the future (Juvenile Justice, 2003).

The Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), with police officers teaching antidrug messages in schools, is the most popular drug prevention program ever conducted in the United States and adopted in 44 foreign countries. In a 1998 study by Rosenbaum and Hanson, the results showed no difference in drug usage as a result of the program (Empey, Stafford & Hay, 1999).

METH AND ITS BENEFICIARIES

While the governor has been generous in his allocation of monies for the task forces and education programs, parents, schools, and communities must be vigilant and supportive to contain and eradicate this problem. Fortunately, because the meth task forces and statewide agencies have clamped down on the meth lab productions in the agricultural fields and foothills and apprehended many of the drug cartel leaders, many of the Mexican criminal drug manufacturers have moved their operations to Mexico (Drug Facts, 2007).

METH AND THE MEXICAN CONNECTION

While the United States has been successful in eradicating the drug labs from California's Central Valley and the Southwest, Mexico has quickly taken up the production of methamphetamine. It is estimated that Mexican drug traffickers control 80% of the meth on the U.S. streets with most of the supply being smuggled in from Mexico (Tobar, 2007). And now the United States is exporting the expertise of its drug traffickers. Some fugitives and ex-convicts from the United States, who were just finishing serving their sentences dating from the early era of the methamphetamine trade, are working in Mexico.

The availability of pseudoephedrine and other chemicals have made it easy for the drug traffickers to produce their drugs. Mexico's importation of cold medicines has risen from 92,000 tons in 2002 to 150,000 tons in 2005. Restrictions have cut the legal imports by 50%, but U.S. authorities believe significant amounts are still being struggled through corruption-ridden Mexican ports.

In January 2006, Mexican authorities busted the largest laboratory ever discovered in the Americas (Marosi 2006). The methamphetamine was produced in a fortress-like compound, which was ringed by high brick walls. In this compound were 11 custom-designed pressure cookers capable of producing 400 pounds of the drug per day.

In Mexico City, in March of this year, Mexican authorities confiscated more than \$200 million in U.S. currency from methamphetamine producers in one of the largest drug cash seizures in history. The seizure reflected the vast scope of the illegal drug trade, which links Asia, Mexico, and the United States. In the seizure, two of the seven people arrested were Chinese Nationals (Tobar, 2007).

METH AND THE GLOBAL CONNECTION

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, methamphetamine and its chemical cousins are used by 26 million people world-wide, more than heroin and cocaine combined (Schoofs, 2007).

Like traffic in heroin and cocaine, the methamphetamine economy has become a global phenomenon with the largest share of chemicals routed through Hong Kong and shipped into Mexico from factories in China and India. The U.S. is concerned about China's involvement in the supply of these chemicals (Marosi, 2006). Gangs in South Africa have found a way to barter the protected species of abalone for methamphetamine to the triads of Hong Kong (Schoofs, 2007). These chemicals are then shipped to Mexico to feed the "super Labs" that make methamphetamine to supply the American users.

CONCLUSION

Supply and demand are the ultimate drivers for the illicit drug market and an approach incorporating prevention, treatment, and market disruption is the best way to obtain an equilibrium on the supply and demand of illicit drugs. As long as there is profit in the production and sale of the methamphetamine business, the best authorities can do is put pressure on the industry and reduce its presence in specific areas. Meth may never be completely eliminated, but only monitored and managed, and it is up to every citizen to do their part in controlling this problem.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Judith R. Cunniff is a candidate for a Masters in Public Administration from National University. She holds a B.S. in Foods and Business from the University of Illinois and graduate work from the Institute of Technology in Chicago. As a buyer for major food chains in Chicago and Denver, Judy has distinguished herself as an experienced human relations person. Additionally, Judy has been an executive secretary and administrative assistant to company presidents and a university Regional Dean. Her experience as a Real Estate Agent and Office Manager/Notary/Paralegal enabled her to develop contracts and memoranda of agreements with different organizational entities. While working with the staff of National University at the Fresno, California Academic Center, she has been given customer service awards by her peers. She has researched and written papers on the

impact of the prison system in California's Central Valley, Unionism, the Homeless, Women in Crime, Elder Abuse, Predatory Lenders, Ageism, and the problem of methamphetamine usage.

Daniel T. Cunniff, Ph.D., is the Lead Faculty for Educational Administration at National University's Fresno, California, campus. He received his B.S. and M.A. from Northern Illinois University and his Ph.D. from Walden University. He has taught at Portland State University and California State University in San Marcos. He was the recipient of a 2006 President's Professoriate Award for outstanding contributions "above and beyond" his regular work assignments presented by the Chancellor of National University. As an international business analyst, he was an independent consultant to major Fortune 500 companies, including organizations in Indonesia and Canada. He was an Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education in Fairbanks, Alaska; Educational Advisor of Education Television in American Samoa; Principal and Acting Superintendent in San Diego County; and an Elementary Principal and teacher in the Chicago suburbs. Dr. Cunniff is also the Coordinator of the International Academic Professor Exchange Program for National University, which is based in La Jolla, California. This position has enabled him to present papers on various educational and business topics at international conferences in Las Vegas, Nevada; Mazatlan, Mexico; Panama City, Panama; Belfast, Northern Ireland; Toronto, Canada; and Cambridge University, England.

Kenneth D. Kay, L.L.M., J.D. is lead faculty for the Department of Professional Studies at the Fresno campus of National University. Mr. Kay received his JD in 1980, and his LLM in 1985, from Pacific/McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific, Sacramento, California. He is active in his community. He hosted a Central California radio show for two and a half years, wrote a published novel about street crime, and made numerous television and radio show appearances. In the year 2000, the California assembly caucus leader drafted Mr. Kay to run against an incumbent in the 30th Assembly District race. Mr. Kay has substantial connections with community leaders, especially those in the criminal justice community. He is passionate about working with community leaders to suppress the criminal element and bring a better living environment to all of the citizens' areas of the Central Valley of California. In the past year, Ken has presented to the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration at their Annual Conference in Sacramento on Legal Pitfalls facing California's School Administrators and on the Importance of Partnering at National University Spring Symposium in La Jolla, California.

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