

Comprehensive study of methamphetamine



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A Comprehensive Study of Methamphetamine

When I was a child, my very best friends were my cousins. We all lived less than a mile apart and spent almost every day playing outside in the creek behind our houses, swimming, looking for fossils, or catching crawfish. As the years passed by, those daily trips to the creek became less and less. Soon, many of my cousins were in and out of jail, only stopping by to beg for money or try to sneak away with some of my mother's jewelry. The common thread between them all was one drug: methamphetamine. In my home state of Arkansas, the extreme methamphetamine use is described as a crisis. The problem is largely seen as intergenerational and has been plaguing the area for decades. Much of Arkansas is rural and impoverished, while treatment resources are limited. Methamphetamine is cheap and easy to obtain. This combination of factors makes it very difficult to break the cycle. Seeing how this drug has affected my family and community has filled me with the desire to go back someday and assist in building better resources to battle this issue.

Methamphetamine has been around since 1919, when it was created in Japan. It was widely used in World War II, mostly due to its ability to help you stay away for long periods of time. By the 1950's methamphetamine was being prescribed by doctors to treat everything from obesity to depression. The United States government finally outlawed methamphetamine in 1970. During that period and into the 90's, gangs were the main producers and distributors of the drug until Mexican cartels took over (" The History of Crystal Methamphetamine"). Methamphetamine is completely man-made. The main ingredient in meth is called pseudoephedrine, which is typically

used in cold medicines to treat stuffy nose symptoms. Other ingredients like lithium, drain cleaner, paint thinner, and battery acid are mixed with the pseudoephedrine to “cook” the methamphetamine. Many of these chemicals are very dangerous and not made for human consumption, which makes it all the more concerning that the drug is commonly smoked or ingested. Methamphetamine can be made very easily, but it is not safe by any means. The first step in producing meth is to isolate the pseudoephedrine, then mix it with the aforementioned chemicals. This can even be done simply by placing the ingredients into a soda bottle and shaking it. If done incorrectly, though, there is a chance of causing an explosion (“What Is Crystal Meth Made From?”).

Methamphetamine is an illegal substance in the United States. The U. S. government classifies meth as a Schedule II substance under the Controlled Substances Act. The U. S. Department of Justice-National Drug Intelligence Center states, “Schedule II drugs, which include cocaine and PCP, have a high potential for abuse. Abuse of these drugs may lead to severe psychological or physical dependence.” (“Crystal Methamphetamine Fast Facts”). I agree with the current level of scheduling for methamphetamine. A drug that is so addictive as well as physically and psychologically dangerous needs to be heavily enforced.

Despite the previously mentioned legality, there are still some recognized medical uses for methamphetamine. Specifically Methamphetamine Hydrochloride, known under the prescription brand name Desoxyn. This stimulant is used to treat Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as well as obesity. Today, it is rare for methamphetamine to be prescribed to

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patients and when it is, it is used under close supervision by a physician (“Methamphetamine Hydrochloride-Oral”).

Methamphetamine is a particularly dangerous drug, not only because of the toxic chemicals that are smoked or injected by users, but also because of the dangers during manufacturing. Meth can produce many risky and potentially fatal side effects, including elevated body temperature, blood pressure, and heart rate, heart attack, brain hemorrhage, stroke, and air pressure changes (“Dangers of Crystal Meth”). Places where Methamphetamine is produced, often called Meth labs, have proven even more dangerous. The chemicals used to create the drug are so toxic that they contaminate the surrounding airspace and can be extremely explosive. Working meth labs as well as abandoned meth labs are equally dangerous, as many environmental or human factors can easily set them off and cause fires or explosions (“Dangers of Meth Labs”). These are not the only ways in which methamphetamine is dangerous; addiction is also a huge problem. Meth is a tremendously addictive drug. The high caused by the drug is intense but fleeting, causing users to continually use so that they avoid the negative effects associated with coming down. Methamphetamine stimulates dopamine and serotonin, which are the chemicals your body creates to make you feel good. Upon coming down, these chemicals have been exhausted, which can cause users to feel depressed or anxious. Meth makes you feel excited, euphoric, and energized, but even after just one dose, the after effects can make you feel very low. This plays a huge roll in the addictiveness of this drug (“Why Is Meth So Addictive?”). A study conducted by Rocky L. Sexton, Robert G. Carlson, Carl G. Leukefeld, and Brenda M.

Booth on the use and negative consequences in the rural South (Kentucky and Arkansas) depicts a scary and dangerous situation that occurred while using methamphetamine:

Immediate physical problems can result from taking improperly prepared methamphetamine. Becky (Kentucky) described one such incident: “ He [a “ cooker”] used too much lithium. We couldn’t get up and walk around, we couldn’t talk. Just sat there and shook until finally it wore down.” Tracy (Arkansas) recalled that at one point, some cookers weren’t “ cooking the pills down [properly]. My whole spine hurt down my back. It was like I was paralyzed. My bones just ached, and my head hurt for days.”

(399)

As previously stated, methamphetamine use stimulates the areas in your brain that produce “ feel good” chemicals like dopamine and serotonin. With frequent use, the receptors that give you those chemicals naturally can be severely damaged. In these cases, users cannot feel pleasure without using meth. This can therefore make treatment for addiction rather difficult. The first step of treatment is detoxification, which includes ensuring there is no more meth in the users system and allowing their body to adjust. This can be done in a rehabilitation or outpatient facility, sometimes with the help of other medications. The next step is completing therapy to ensure that they can function in society again and avoid relapse (“ How to Get off Meth”).

The HBO documentary “ Meth Storm” depicts a family afflicted with the negative effects of methamphetamine. It’s centered on Veronica Converse and her children, with the opening scenes showing her helping her son inject

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methamphetamine on the side of a desolate Arkansas road. Throughout the documentary, we see Veronica struggle with her son, Teddy, being in and out of prison for meth while he has two daughters to take care of. Watching her cry for her son and then subsequently injecting meth was absolutely heart wrenching (“Meth Storm”). The film does a fantastic job of showing how addictive methamphetamine really is, and also how things like our socioeconomic status can be a catalyst for addiction. Veronica’s family and families like my own who endure similar situations are exactly the type that I hope to help someday very soon.

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