

Prescription Opiate Use and Heroin – Exploratory Study in a Treatment Setting

Summary of Findings, 2012

Overview/Introduction - An exploratory study was designed and implemented to examine whether prescription-type opiate use is a precursor or gateway to heroin use. The study was conducted with client participants involved in outpatient treatment services. All drug treatment clients who were receiving services during a two-week time frame were asked to complete a survey inquiring about their own prescription-type opiate use; heroin use; and the progression to heroin use of others they know. Demographic information also was collected from survey respondents.

Summary of Findings - A total of 489 drug treatment clients in various types of treatment programs (i.e., Juvenile Drug Court-Youth; Child Protective Services Referrals; Intensive Outpatient; Prop 36; etc.) participated in the survey.

- Survey respondents ranged in age from 12 – 76; with the average age being 34
- Gender of respondents: 55% male; 45% female

Lifetime Heroin Use/Users

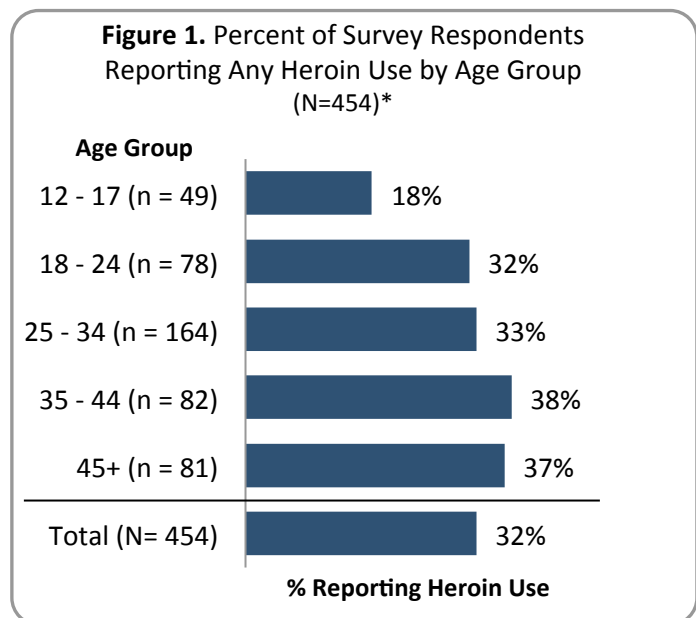
- Among survey respondents, approximately one-third (32%) reported that they had used heroin during their lifetime.

Age Group

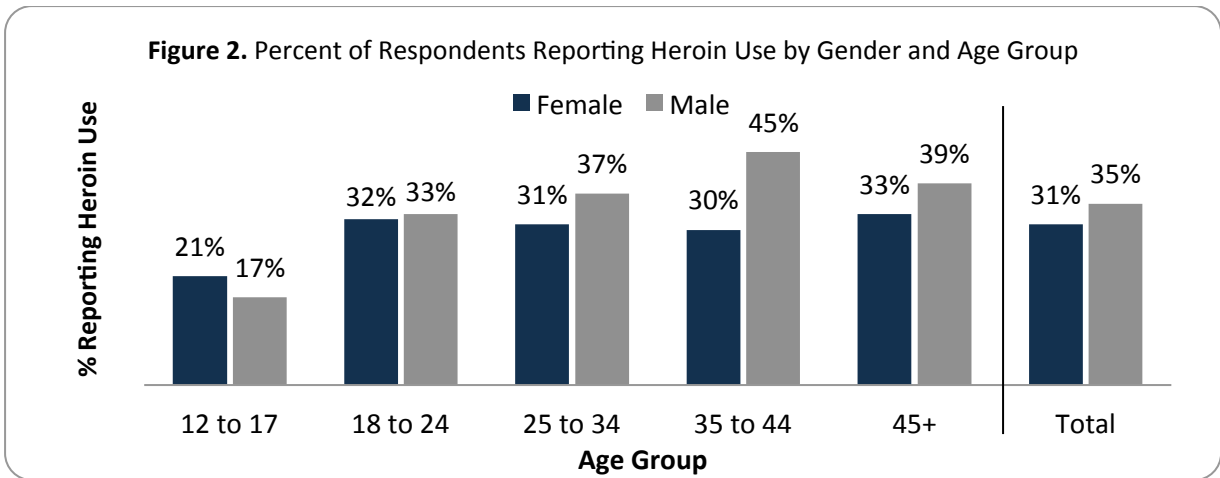
- The highest rate of reported heroin use (i.e., with their lifetime) was among respondents aged 35 to 44 (38%); with the next highest rate among respondents aged 45 and older (37%); followed by 25 to 34 year olds (33%); then by 18 to 24 year olds at 32%.
- The lowest rate of any heroin use was among 12 to 17 year olds (18%).

Gender

- As shown on **Figure 2**, across all ages, rates of any reported lifetime heroin use were higher for male survey respondents (35%) than for female survey respondents (31%).
- Similarly, the reported rate of heroin use was highest among males within each age group. The exception to this was found among the 12 – 17 age category in which females reported higher heroin use than males (21% vs. 17% respectively).



* A total of 475 survey respondents answered the item "Have you ever used heroin?"; however, 21 respondents failed to report their age. Thus this item reflects 454 respondents' age categories.



Frequency of Use Across Lifetime

- When asked about the number of times in their lifetime that they had used heroin, responses ranged from once to over 1,000 times. Of those reporting lifetime heroin use, just over half (52%) reported use between 1-50 times; and slightly more than one-third (36%) indicated their lifetime frequency of heroin use was greater than one thousand times.

Link between Prescription-Type Opiate Use and Heroin

- Of those who reported lifetime heroin use, **45% indicated beginning with prescription-type opiates, then moving on to heroin.**

Table 1. Percent of Respondents that Reported Using Prescription-type Opiates then Moving on to Heroin Use by Age Group

Age Group	# Reporting Heroin Use	Started with Rx	
		No	Yes
12-17	9	33%	67%
18-24	24	42%	58%
25-34	54	46%	54%
35-44	30	67%	33%
45+	29	76%	24%
Total N*	146	55%	45%

* N refers to the number of respondents who indicated heroin usage in their lifetime and responded to the above item.

- The rate of transition from prescription-type opiate use to heroin use was highest among younger survey respondents.
- Among youth aged 12 to 17, the percentage of respondents who indicated beginning with Rx type opiate use then moving on to heroin was 67%; followed by 18 to 24 year olds (58%); and 25 to 34 year olds (54%).
- The rate of transition from prescription-type opiate use to heroin use was 33% among respondents aged 35 to 44, and 24% among those aged 45 or older.

- **Reasons for Using Heroin Instead of Prescription-type Opiates:** Respondents most often indicated that they started using heroin instead of prescription-type opiates because it was cheaper (45%); because other people they know were using it (36%); it was easier to get (34%); or because they weren't getting a good high from the prescription-type opiates anymore (27%).
 - Other reasons (n=18) given for transitioning from Rx opiate use to heroin included curiosity; method of ingestion; to avoid pain longer/better high; because of friends/work; detoxing from methadone; continued after prescription; it became a habit; and "don't know".

Access: Misused Prescription-Type Opiates

- Almost half (47%) of clients reported that they had misused prescription-type opiates.
- As shown in **Table 2**, the majority of clients who indicated that they had misused prescription-type opiates, reported obtaining prescription-type opiates by:
 - Buying/receiving from a friend or family member (61%);
 - Buying them from a dealer (49%); or
 - Misusing prescription(s) that were prescribed to them (42%).

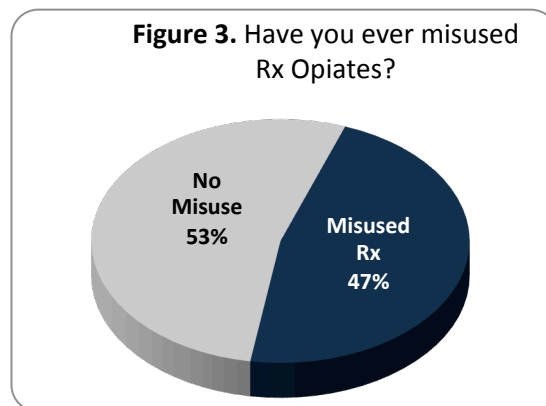


Table 2. If you have ever misused any prescription-type opiates, how did you usually get them?*		
Response	N	%
Bought/received them from a friend or family member	123	61%
Bought them from a dealer	98	49%
Misused prescription(s) that were prescribed to me	85	42%
Stole them from someone	44	22%
"Doctor-shopped"	31	15%
Used a fake prescription	15	7%
Ordered them online	10	5%
Other**	10	5%
Stole them from a pharmacy	6	3%

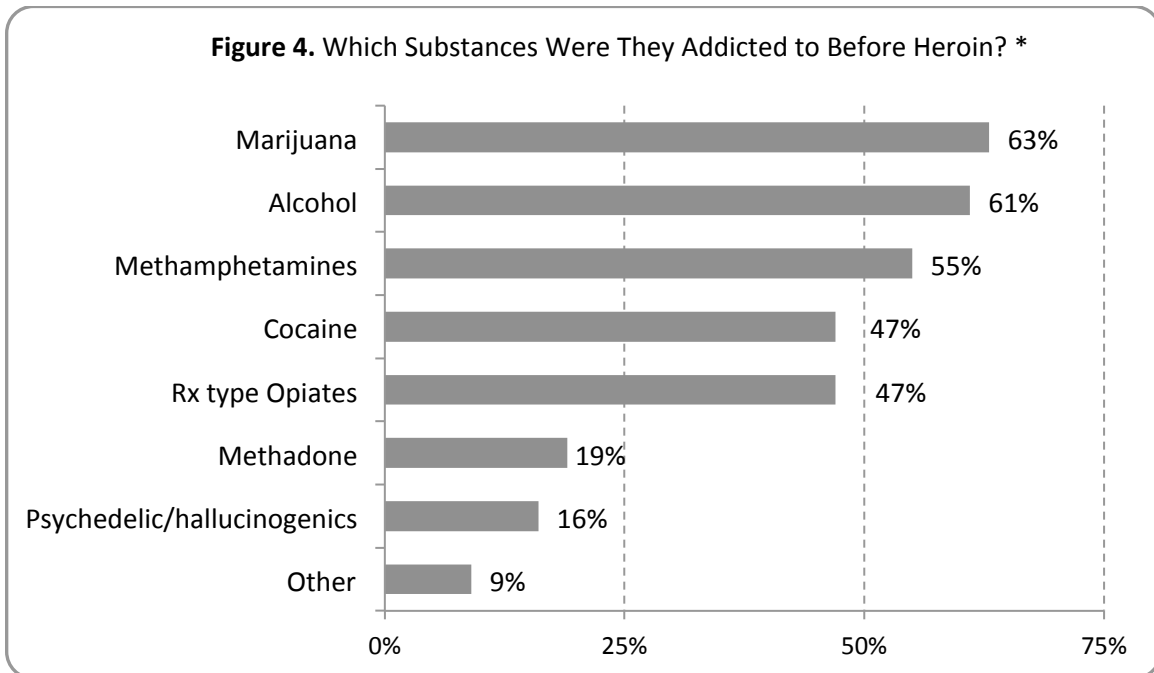
* Percentages do not equal 100%, as respondents selected multiple options.

** Those who indicated 'other' (5%) indicated that they received their prescription-type opiates from sources such as unspecified individuals, trading or selling prescription-type opiates, purchasing them in Mexico, or stealing from an employer.

Perceived Substance Addiction Prior to Heroin Use among Acquaintances, Friends, and Family

Among the clients (n=368) who reported that they knew people who became heroin users, a majority (82%) indicated that they believed that heroin users were addicted to other substances prior to starting their use of heroin.

- **Figure 4** depicts which substances heroin users were believed to be addicted to prior to their heroin use. Marijuana (63%), alcohol (61%), methamphetamines (55%), cocaine, and prescription-type opiates (47% each) were the substances most frequently identified.
- Other substances reported included pills, pain killers, and crack.



* Percentages do not equal 100%, as respondents selected multiple options.

Summary

The current exploratory study was intended to assess the extent to which heroin users in treatment began with prescription-type opiate drug use. The highest rates of reported lifetime heroin use were observed among respondents aged 35 to 44, with the lowest lifetime rates of use being reported among 12 to 17 year olds. Males reported higher heroin use rates than females, except for those in the younger (12-17) age group. Among all respondents reporting use of heroin during their lifetimes, almost half (45%) began with prescription-type opiate use. Most interesting, perhaps, is the finding that the rate of transition from prescription-type opiate use to heroin use, as a percentage of survey respondents, was highest among younger survey respondents (see **Table 1**). Moreover, when survey respondents were asked whether people they knew who became heroin users first began with an addiction to other substances, over 80% reported that the heroin use was preceded by other substances including prescription-type opiates (see **Figure 4**).