

MEDICATING AMERICA: EXPLORING PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE IN A RURAL EAST TEXAS COMMUNITY

PURPOSE

Prescription drug abuse exemplifies a growing social issue in America and on a global scale (White House, 2004; CASA, 2005 as cited in DuPont, 2010; & Prescription Drug Abuse, 2011). There appears to be limited research highlighting the target population's perspective of the problem. The purpose of this research was to explore the target population's perspective as well as contrasting views of prescription drug abuse in Tyler, Texas.

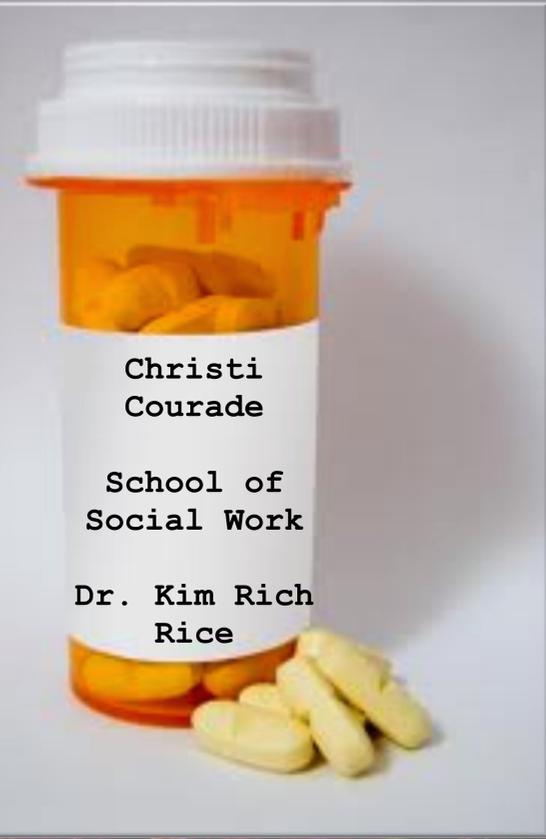
METHOD

- critical literature review of existing data on the topic
- Phone interviews were conducted with the Sergeant of Tyler's Narcotics division, a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor in Tyler, and the Communications manager for the mayor of Tyler.
- Four female prescription drug abusers were interviewed as a group after a Narcotics Anonymous meeting in Tyler, TX.

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FINDINGS

Prescription drug abuse effects multiple populations becoming the second most popular abused drug category in America. There are varying aspects and contrasting points of view concerning contributors and victims of prescription drug abuse. Decreasing the supply side involves enforcing regulations on pharmaceutical companies, doctors, internet facilitators and all related parties. Decreasing the demand side entails educating the public on the dangers of misusing psychotropic drugs. The ONDCP strives to develop policy that takes in account protecting current pain patients who depend on prescription pain medicine to function.

Barriers in the community identified by the target population include:

- Conflict of culture and misperceptions of addiction

- Lack of affordable treatment centers and long term services

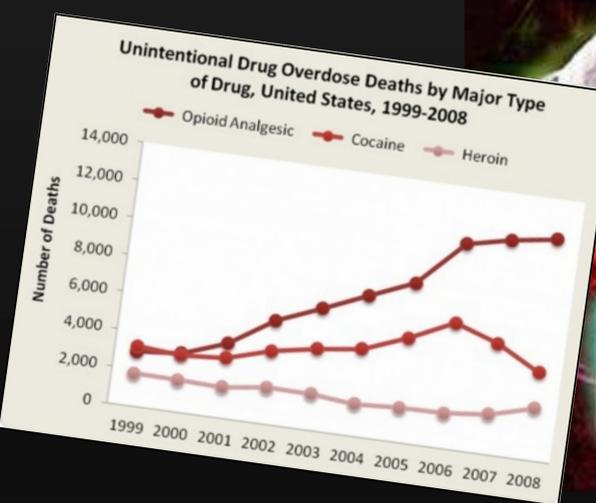
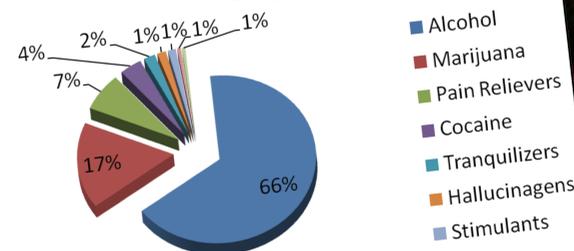
- Deficient knowledge among key community members regarding available services

- Labels such as "junkie," and "hopeless" making it difficult to develop relationships, trust service providers, and obtain employment

More than 6.3 Million Americans Reported Current Use of Prescription Drugs for Nonmedical Purposes in 2003



Americans Over the Age of 12 who are Dependent of or Abusing Alcohol or Illicit Drugs



DISCUSSION

All members were gathered through a convenience sample from a Narcotics Anonymous group and all were Caucasian; therefore information gathered cannot be generalized to all prescription drug abusers. Continued research is needed regarding the effects of demographics, such as gender, ethnicity, and age on increasing the risk of abusing prescription drugs. Due to the fact that the interviewees were mandated at some point to attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings, some of their opinions regarding the surrounding community may have been influenced.

Though responsibility for the issue of prescription drug abuse does not belong exclusively to the community, it is important to consider the impact of the external environment on the individual. Labeling people who suffer from prescription drug addiction may further inhibit recovery and reentry into society. At the national level, it is important that oversight of pharmaceutical companies remain uncorrupted by bias and influence of money and power. The goal of the FDA should be to maintain safety of drugs and reduction of drugs with high risk abuse potential. Future research should seek perceptions from prescription drug abusers from different demographics and attending different treatment programs in the community. Research emphasizing the target population's perspective may help develop integrated intervention methods that empower the individual as well as the community to develop ownership of the issue and its resolution.