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Wright State University & the University of Akron

Patterns of Benzodiazepine Abuse in Montgomery County

OSAM Network interviews in Montgomery County indicate a continuing trend of high street availability and abuse of benzodiazepines, primarily Xanax® (alprazolam), Klonopin® (clonazepam), and Valium® (diazepam). Benzodiazepines are CNS depressants and often times legitimately prescribed to treat anxiety and sleep disorders. Focus group participants reported diverse patterns of benzodiazepine abuse among a wide range of user populations:

- Adolescents and young adults who take benzodiazepines in conjunction with pharmaceutical opioids, alcohol, and other drugs: *"They're easier to take during the school day, you know, kids bring 'em to school, you can conceal it easily."* (School counselor)
- Young (late teens-early 20s) African-American drug dealers: *"There's a lot of dope boys that using Xans [Xanax®]...with alcohol, weed, and alcohol... and they pop a couple of them Xans."* (Crack user)
- Those who take benzodiazepines to self-medicate anxiety and stress: *"I just use [Xanax®], like, on the week-ends, when I need that relax my nerves or something like that, yeah. I take them two and I'm cool... I know a couple of females that take them so it ain't nothing."* (35 year-old African-American woman)
- Primary heroin users who take benzodiazepines to enhance "the nod": *"People [heroin users] love Xanax... It increases the heroin... It makes you higher."* (Heroin user)
- Crack, powdered cocaine, and methamphetamine users who take benzodiazepines, alcohol and other depressants to come down from a stimulant high: *"[Crack users take] a lot of benzos to come down from the crack... With just crack... I'll get sick smoking... Inside the pressure. I can't cope. And I need something [to come down]."* (Crack user)

Figure 1. Accidental Overdose Death Cases Testing Positive for Benzodiazepines Montgomery County, 2007

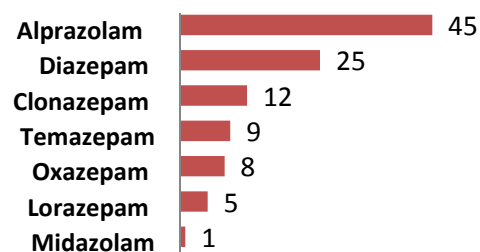
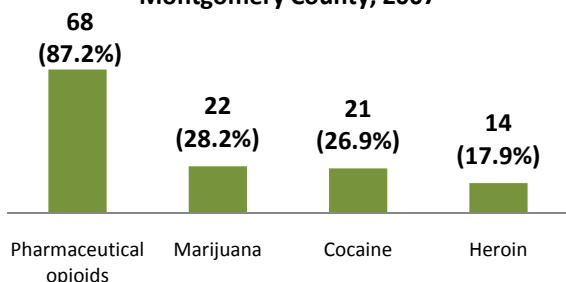


Figure 2. Mentions of Other Drugs Among Accidental Overdose Death Cases Testing Positive for Benzodiazepines (n=78) Montgomery County, 2007



In 2007, the Montgomery County Coroner's office reported 78 accidental overdose death cases that tested positive for benzodiazepines, which comprised about 71% of all 127 accidental overdose deaths in 2007. Consistent with user reports, the highest numbers were for alprazolam and diazepam (Figure 1). Most overdose cases involved multiple drugs. As seen from Figure 2, about 87% of benzodiazepine-positive cases also tested positive for pharmaceutical opioids, 27% for cocaine, and 18% for heroin.

OSAM Network data suggest that benzodiazepine abuse is frequently a part of polydrug practices and remains a serious public health issue among diverse populations.

OSAM-O-GRAMS report key findings of the Ohio Substance Abuse Monitoring (OSAM) Network. Informants located throughout the state use qualitative and quantitative data to provide semiannual monitoring of substance abuse trends. The OSAM Network is funded by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services by contract to Wright State University and by subcontract to the University of Akron. This OSAM-O-GRAM is based on the January 2008 OSAM Network meeting.

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