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Understanding Crystal Methamphetamine Use: Community Impact and Interventions for
Vulnerable Populations

Sean Huss, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Dr. Terri Earnest, Assistant Professor of Sociology,
and Marti Wilkerson, Associate Professor of Rehabilitation Science

Arkansas Tech University

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Statement of Problem

In August 2004, the River Valley Methamphetamine Project (RVMP) organized as a grassroots multi-faceted community action demonstration project to respond to the methamphetamine (meth) epidemic in Arkansas' 5th Judicial District which includes Pope, Johnson, and Franklin counties. The project included over 59 organizations, schools, law enforcement, mental health, child protection, faith based groups, and others. It was action based and focused locally upon increasing awareness about methamphetamine, reducing use, manufacture, and distribution of methamphetamine, and improving treatment for meth users (Wilkerson & Earnest, 2004). Although much was accomplished and the community became positively and collaboratively engaged in the RVMP, the project lacked a social science research component that provided an adequate knowledge base about the scope and depth of meth problems in the communities and counties of the 5th Judicial District.

The purpose of this research project was/is to close the knowledge gap regarding the underlying individual and social problems which complicate the multi-faceted methamphetamine epidemic in Arkansas.

The objectives of the project were/are: 1) To understand the scope and magnitude of public concern about meth for Pope, Johnson, and Franklin Counties in Arkansas, 2) To understand individual level reasons for meth production and use, 3) To determine the extent to which nonviolent misdemeanors and felonies are associated with meth production or use, 4) To measure the extent to which current intervention strategies result in accomplished county-level goals for reducing meth production and use, and 5) To understand and facilitate community action as a response to meth use as well as offer recommendations and alternative strategies for identification and intervention of community and individual level problems.

Research Procedures

The research plan included the following components:

- Community Survey—Develop a survey instrument and measure attitudes and behaviors regarding drug use in the overall county through administration of the survey instrument.
- Interview Recovering Users and Inmates at County Jail—Get life stories of drug users and identify patterns of progression in use, as well as identify strategies that work and strategies that don't.
- Interview Treatment Professionals—Work with these individuals to estimate the scope of meth use in county and to identify further patterns of successful treatment outcomes.
- Build Coalitions—Based on information from community, work with community organizations and leaders not presently involved in the *River Valley Meth Project*, as well as build ties to additional departments at Arkansas Tech University.

Although not completely representative of the full research and project plan, the previous four points represented the main initiatives for Phase I of the research project. Additional needs have been identified and are presently in development or were implemented in process during the Spring 2006 term.

Coordination across two university classes, Research Methods and Prisons/Corrections was arranged to conduct applied research via a community survey. The goal was to use the community survey as a teaching tool in both classes, with the hopes of involving students in an on-going research initiative. The project was included into teaching under the assumption that practical experience would be superior to abstract materials. Under the direction of both Sean Huss and Terri Earnest, the project began in January with the beginning of the Spring 2006 term. Teams from each class were tasked with developing smaller research projects as components of

the much larger effort, where the Research Methods class developed the survey and performed analysis and the Prisons/Corrections class worked on identifying and summarizing relevant literature. The goals were to: 1) complete the bulk of data collection during the Spring 2006 term; and 2) present preliminary findings at a research symposium as part of the final grade for students.

Summary of Findings

Survey construction began in January of 2006, with evaluation of previous community surveys. Previous studies informing survey construction for this project included:

1. Detroit Area Study, 1990: Community Issues by Paul Mohai
2. Developing a Problem-Oriented Policing Model in Ada County, ID, 1997-1998 by John Crank
3. Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods: Community Survey, 1994-1995 by Felton Earls
4. Disorder and Community Decline in Forty Neighborhoods of the United States, 1977-1983 by Wesley G. Skogan.

Additional information was obtained from a literature review on similar studies conducted by students in both classes (see Appendix A for sample literature reviews). Based on the information gathered, a survey instrument was created that contained a total of 282 questions on topics ranging from general attitudes on community issues to alienation, anomia, and perceptions of drugs and drug use.

Initial findings from student reports suggested that items on alienation and anomia were important in explaining perceptions of drug use (and drug use itself), as well as revealed potential problems in the community stemming from low social capital and low efficacy. Put

more simply, some preliminary findings from the survey suggest that members in the community experience lower efficacy, which may be related to attitudes on community action and prevention of social problems. Note that these findings are based on the creation of various indexes and scales created in the classroom and based on extant theory, and a great deal of work with this data is required to uncover substantive findings. In particular, students were limited in their knowledge of certain statistical methods, so instructors aided in the scale creation. But, such scales are not yet definitive and research continues. In fact, researchers are currently working on various publications from the data (with students) in the hopes of further instructing and helping students to introduce their work to a broader academic community for scrutiny. Thus, findings at this point are tentative until more substantive explorations of the data may be made.

Despite the limitations on conclusions at this point, certain features discussed by students did point to the need for greater community action and awareness. This theme was central to presentations and discussions at the symposium held in May. As part of an extension of this initial work, members of the River Valley Meth project decided to organize an effort to promote health and wellness awareness at a recent festival. The goals of the festival were to further encourage student involvement in community activities and to broaden awareness of health related problems in the community at large. One anticipated consequence of this festival was to create a window of opportunity where health messages could be promoted in public discourse, with the outcome being greater community participation on such issues. Unfortunately, this festival was cancelled due to weather, but plans are currently underway to have the festival in the spring of 2007.

In the spirit of sharing information, the sample frequencies and percentages of key variables used to create certain scales and indexes are provided as Appendix B to this report. Once again, analysis is still underway and scale construction is in progress, so no substantive conclusions are being offered at this time. A complete copy of the dataset and copies of any and all publications from the data will be made available to the granting committee when analyses are completed in late 2007.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The *River Valley Meth Project* continues to grow, although money may become a concern. Early efforts from the *Pope County Meth Demonstration Project* were instrumental in helping to put ephedrine and pseudo-ephedrine behind the counter. This effort has reduced meth lab seizures in Arkansas by 50% and reduced meth lab seizures by 79% in Pope County. Despite these positive outcomes, the problem of meth use continues to present problems for individuals, families, communities, schools, law enforcement, and treatment programs. Currently, treatment, child protection, and research are the focus areas of the *River Valley Meth Project*. At this point in time, the community outreach aspect of the project is focusing on an employment program in collaboration with the Pope County Drug Court, treatment agencies, business/industry and temporary agency workgroups. The hope is that the research conducted will provide direction for future plans that are relevant to the community and that will help law enforcement with planning.

Ultimately the goal for the River Valley Meth Project continues to be the prevention of meth use, but a more practical approach for the project is a focus on education, community outreach, treatment efforts, and more research. During the Spring 2006 semester, work toward these goals has caused a leap forward in understanding of the problem in Pope County. Yet, the project

currently stands at a crossroads as efforts continue. The project leaders continue to work to develop stronger research efforts, stronger ties across departments at Arkansas Tech University, and stronger community efforts. Unfortunately, the project continues to be limited by lack of funds. Despite these limitations, the following list may be used to characterize the on-going efforts of the project:

- Project leaders continue to apply for additional funding from Federal sources
- Arkansas Drug Director, Judge Rutledge has promised to aid in any way he can to continue the momentum of the project.
- Preliminary analyses of community surveys are still underway.
- The survey will be streamlined and funds will be sought to conduct a state-wide survey of Arkansas residents.
- A project documentary will continue, with an emphasis on recording interviews with recovering meth addicts and various officials dealing with the meth problem.
- Personal interviews with inmates, recovering addicts, and treatment professionals will continue, although some have been completed thus far.
- Project leaders will work to develop a web-based meth information clearinghouse for various state agencies and local communities in Arkansas.

Other counties in Arkansas now are turning to the *River Valley Meth Project* for guidance on how to conduct their own research modeled on the efforts of Arkansas Tech University researchers. Individuals in private industry now are contacting the *River Valley Meth Project* for information on meth use and how to deal with problems of meth use among their workers. Individuals working in real estate also are contacting *River Valley Meth Project* representatives on how to deal with the toxic chemicals remaining in homes of meth

producers. Further, an art program is being developed to be used in public schools for educating young people on the harms of meth use. Hence, the project will continue with or without additional funds. The continued success of this project will be contingent upon additional funds and support. With additional money and support, the project will bring greater positive attention to Arkansas Tech University and highlight how a community may draw on its educational institutions for guidance in dealing with problems of this nature. Thus, the project moves forward and the guiding hope is that the *River Valley Meth Project* meets with continued success.

Appendix A

Sample Student Literature Reviews

RIVER VALLEY METH PROJECT

TEAM 13

**MORAL PANICS AND DEFINITIONS
OF COMMUNITY RESPONSE.**



LITERATURE REVIEW

Team 13's overall topic is "Moral Panics and Definition of Community Response." We were asked to take a look at collective behavior literature, moral entrepreneurs, general moral fear of certain groups, and how these are related to the reactions of society (e.g. why are we afraid of drug users?). Additionally, we looked at socially constructed myths and cultural constructionism. [REDACTED] addresses cultural constructionism, while [REDACTED] takes a look at how moral panics are actually constructed within societies. Finally, [REDACTED] examines literature on moral entrepreneurs and the role of governments in moral panics.

[REDACTED]

Social conflict and social construction of reality are phenomena that occur in everyday reality, and often go unrecognized. These two mind-altering measures have molded what is acceptable in society, from the way we eat, to how we dress, and communicate. We have become socialized to believe and do certain things according to certain people's beliefs.

The main idea of social conflict is how people arrange in conflicting groups where their interests and status relationships conflict (Hummel, 2006). Therefore, this causes problems in society. With this, society has a hierarchy of power, a chain of command that has specific roles and expectations of each specific social class. People from each social class will have different jobs, attitudes, and experiences as they go on in life.

RIVER VALLEY METH PROJECT

TEAM 11

**LAW ENFORCEMENT'S RESPONSE
TO THE DRUG PROBLEM**

[REDACTED]

LITERATURE REVIEW

As a team of three members, we have compiled a literature review on the topic of law enforcement and the drug epidemic. Each group member was assigned an individual topic. The first topic we will discuss is law enforcements response to the drug epidemic. The second topic to be discussed is what is being done about the current drug problem and what does the public believe should be done. The final topic we will discuss is the public's perception of law enforcement.

Law enforcement's response to the drug epidemic

Today, all over the United States, the production and distribution of methamphetamines is rising. The use of methamphetamines is a problem that affected the West coast originally, but it is spreading east across the United States (Oetjen, 2005). The methamphetamine problem did not arise until the late 1980's (Oetjen, 2005). Law enforcement officers across the Untied States are working together to deal with the rising drug epidemic (Oetjen, 2005).

The drug epidemic is a problem that affects everyone in some shape, form, or fashion. Each state is trying to deal with the rising issue. The DEA is a branch or department of law enforcement that is working hard to deal with the rising drug epidemic (Oetjen, 2005). Ohio is one of the many states that are dealing with a rise in methamphetamines use (Oetjen, 2005). Law enforcement officers in Ohio are learning they must work together and become a united force against the drug epidemic(Oetjen, 2005). Because other states are now dealing with the drug epidemic, new laws are being passed.

RIVER VALLEY METH PROJECT

TEAM 4

CRIME CONTROL AS INDUSTRY

[REDACTED]

Crime Control as Industry

The prison-industrial complex is described as being the public and private business ventures that either affect the correctional system or those that are affected by the correctional system. (Christie, 2000 and Donziger, 1996) Often times these two overlap, for example companies that are affected by the correctional system often affect the correctional system. This is where the heart of the prison-industrial system lies. It is this relationship that has driven what has become an enormous economic boom that generates billions in revenue each year; this is why the prison-industrial complex has become such a hot topic socially and economically. Take, for example, the sheer numbers of companies that are simple engaged in producing either products or services for the correctional system to operate. This can be illustrated by the advertisements seen in correctional institutes and criminal justice magazines and publications. (Christie, 2000) And then there are the services provided at the other end of the spectrum, not the operation of facilities for the housing of *current* inmates, but services for the *released* offender. And on top of all that you must add in the private companies that are not only attempting to win contracts to build prisons for the government to operate, but to win government contracts to *run* their own prisons, for a profit. That is, privatization. (McFarland, McGown, and O'Toole, 2002)

The latter part of the above equation, the privatization issue, has garnered the most attention and sparked the most debate. As overcrowding and cost efficiency become bigger and bigger problems, many different alternatives are being sought to help solve and alleviate this problem. The idea of privatization arose from the Reagan presidency, when which sought free-market solutions. (McFarland, McGown, and O'Toole, 2002) Opponents site several problems

RIVER VALLEY METH PROJECT

TEAM 1

**THE EFFECTS OF DRUG USE ON
SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS**

[REDACTED]

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effects of Drug Use on Family Structure

Disintegration of the family is a great concern in our country today. The effects of drug use and abuse are taking their toll on many innocent lives, some are life threatening.

There are many dysfunctional families because of inappropriate drug use. Abusive situations can start before the birth of a child. An alcoholic mother for instance can give birth to a child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

This could produce a baby which has low birth weight with the possibility of having a number of health problems associated with this. When a mother uses drugs or alcohol before birth, the toxic substances from this usage goes directly to the unborn child (SAMHSA, 2002). Another cause of death to an unborn child is from postnatal violence.

In 2000, a study was conducted by the National Institute of Drug Abuse. This study described children who have behavioral disorders. It was shown that these children have a higher tendency to acquire substance abuse disorders (SAMHSA, 2002). Substance Abuse Prevention programs have shown to be effective in decreasing participation with these substances.

Children can also develop mental problems in the homes of parents who manufacture meth, as well as the possibility that inhalants could also be used. These can cause damage to the nerve cells, lungs, heart and brain (SAMHSA, 2002).

Many factors have been associated with the link between substance abuse and the maltreatment of children. Some of these factors include various individual, familial and environmental risks. Many of the children have either witnessed violence in the family or have been abused themselves (Tomison, 1996). Some of the children have been verbally,

Appendix B

Sample Frequency Tables

Sample *

I feel that the drug laws are too strict

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	140	44.7	46.1	46.1
	Disagree	131	41.9	43.1	89.1
	Agree	22	7.0	7.2	96.4
	Strongly Agree	9	2.9	3.0	99.3
	12.00	1	.3	.3	99.7
	32.00	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	304	97.1	100.0	
Missing	System	9	2.9		
Total		313	100.0		

The government should be more involved in the regulation of drug trafficking

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	5	1.6	1.7	1.7
	Disagree	35	11.2	11.7	13.3
	Agree	179	57.2	59.7	73.0
	Strongly Agree	80	25.6	26.7	99.7
	999.00	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	300	95.8	100.0	
Missing	System	13	4.2		
Total		313	100.0		

Courts in this area deal too harshly with drug offenders

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	129	41.2	42.4	42.4
	Disagree	154	49.2	50.7	93.1
	Agree	18	5.8	5.9	99.0
	Strongly Agree	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	304	97.1	100.0	
Missing	System	9	2.9		
Total		313	100.0		

Drug treatment programs cost too much

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	26	8.3	8.9	8.9
	Disagree	138	44.1	47.1	56.0
	Agree	104	33.2	35.5	91.5
	Strongly Agree	25	8.0	8.5	100.0
	Total	293	93.6	100.0	
Missing	System	20	6.4		
Total		313	100.0		

Drug treatment strategies do not work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	21	6.7	7.3	7.3
	Disagree	165	52.7	57.3	64.6
	Agree	85	27.2	29.5	94.1
	Strongly Agree	17	5.4	5.9	100.0
	Total	288	92.0	100.0	
Missing	System	25	8.0		
Total		313	100.0		

The government should be more responsible for drug rehabilitation programs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	20	6.4	6.8	6.8
	Disagree	87	27.8	29.6	36.4
	Agree	157	50.2	53.4	89.8
	Strongly Agree	30	9.6	10.2	100.0
	Total	294	93.9	100.0	
Missing	System	19	6.1		
Total		313	100.0		

Drug abuse is a disease needing treatment rather than punishment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	35	11.2	11.8	11.8
	Disagree	134	42.8	45.1	56.9
	Agree	104	33.2	35.0	91.9
	Strongly Agree	24	7.7	8.1	100.0
	Total	297	94.9	100.0	
Missing	System	16	5.1		
Total		313	100.0		

More money should be put into drug treatment programs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	15	4.8	5.1	5.1
	Disagree	115	36.7	39.0	44.1
	Agree	138	44.1	46.8	90.8
	Strongly Agree	27	8.6	9.2	100.0
	Total	295	94.2	100.0	
Missing	System	18	5.8		
Total		313	100.0		

Treatment programs bring and unwanted element to the community

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	19	6.1	6.5	6.5
	Disagree	193	61.7	66.1	72.6
	Agree	65	20.8	22.3	94.9
	Strongly Agree	15	4.8	5.1	100.0
	Total	292	93.3	100.0	
Missing	System	21	6.7		
Total		313	100.0		

Medical facilities are well-trained to treat adults with drug addictions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	22	7.0	7.6	7.6
	Disagree	147	47.0	50.9	58.5
	Agree	115	36.7	39.8	98.3
	Strongly Agree	4	1.3	1.4	99.7
	999.00	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	289	92.3	100.0	
Missing	System	24	7.7		
Total		313	100.0		

There are plenty of counselors to provide services for drug treatment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	38	12.1	13.3	13.3
	Disagree	157	50.2	54.9	68.2
	Agree	85	27.2	29.7	97.9
	Strongly Agree	5	1.6	1.7	99.7
	999.00	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	286	91.4	100.0	
Missing	System	27	8.6		
Total		313	100.0		

Meth labs in my community are a problem

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	177	56.5	61.0	61.0
	No	113	36.1	39.0	100.0
	Total	290	92.7	100.0	
Missing	System	23	7.3		
Total		313	100.0		

I could find information on meth from Internet, websites

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	234	74.8	76.7	76.7
	No	71	22.7	23.3	100.0
	Total	305	97.4	100.0	
Missing	System	8	2.6		
Total		313	100.0		

I could find information on meth from Friends

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	75	24.0	24.6	24.6
	No	230	73.5	75.4	100.0
	Total	305	97.4	100.0	
Missing	System	8	2.6		
Total		313	100.0		

I could find information on meth from Hospital/doctor's Office

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	133	42.5	43.6	43.6
	No	172	55.0	56.4	100.0
	Total	305	97.4	100.0	
Missing	System	8	2.6		
Total		313	100.0		

* More data is available upon request.