Demographic and Behavioral Correlates of Prescription Drug Abuse in West Virginia

Elizabeth R. Earley*, Keith J. Zullig and Laura Lander, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV*

Purpose: Prescription drug abuse (PDA) accounts for more abuse than all illegal drugs combined in West Virginia (WV). WV also has the highest rate of unintentional PD overdose deaths in the US. Individuals succumbing to PD poisoning deaths have multiple risk factors, yet little is known about the etiology of pain. Thus, this study aimed to examine behavioral and demographic differences among three pain sub-populations of PD abusers: those who reported physical pain, those who reported both physical and emotional pain, and those who reported no pain.

Methods: Data from callers to the West Virginia Prescription Drug Abuse Quitline with complete information on the variables of interest were utilized (N=354). A chi-square test for homogeneity was employed on selected variables testing the differences among each pain sub-population.

Results: Significant differences were observed between these pain sub-populations. The physical and emotional pain group had a significantly higher proportion of callers who abused both opiates and benzodiazepines ($\chi 2$: 12.0272; $p<.05$). Combining medications is a risk factor for respiratory depression, overdose, and death. The no pain group showed a significantly higher proportion of intravenous administration ($\chi 2$: 30.6394; $p<.0001$) and was significantly younger than the other two groups ($\chi 2$: 47.1168; $p<.0001$), suggesting that this population is an abusive, but less dependent group of abusers.

Conclusions: Preliminary evidence suggests that the physical and emotional pain group is a high-risk population for PD abuse. Increased treatment options and better pain management for patients is needed in WV. Future research should better operationalize these sub-populations.