

Methamphetamine abuse linked to underage sex, smoking and drinking

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Children and adolescents who abuse alcohol or are sexually active are more likely to take methamphetamines (MA), also known as 'meth' or 'speed'. Research published today in the open access journal *BMC Pediatrics* reveals the risk factors associated with MA use, in both low-risk children (those who don't take drugs) and high-risk children (those who have taken other drugs or who have ever attended juvenile detention centres).

MA is a stimulant, usually smoked, snorted or injected. It produces sensations of euphoria, lowered inhibitions, feelings of invincibility, increased wakefulness, heightened sexual experiences, and hyperactivity resulting from increased energy for extended periods of time. According to the lead author of this study, Terry P. Klassen of the University of Alberta, Canada, "MA is produced, or 'cooked', quickly, reasonably simply, and cheaply by using legal and readily available ingredients with recipes that can be found on the internet".

Because of the low cost, ready availability and legal status of the drug, long-term use can be a serious problem. In order to assess the risk factors that are associated with people using MA, Klassen and his team carried out an analysis of twelve different medical studies, combining their results to get a bigger picture of the MA problem. They said, "Within the low-risk group, there were some clear patterns of risk factors associated with MA use. A history of engaging in behaviors such as sexual activity, alcohol consumption and smoking was significantly associated with MA use among low-risk youth. Engaging in these kinds

of behaviors may be a gateway for MA use or vice versa. A homosexual or bisexual lifestyle is also a risk factor."

Amongst high-risk youth, the risk factors the authors identified were, "growing up in an unstable family environment (e.g., family history of crime, alcohol use and drug use) and having received treatment for psychiatric conditions. Among high-risk youth, being female was also a risk factor".

Source: BioMed Central

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