

PROFILE OF REFERRALS OF ICE USERS TO A PUBLIC DRUG HEALTH SERVICE: TAILORING INTERVENTIONS TO THIS POPULATION

Authors:

JUSTIN HENDRIKS¹, PIP BOWDEN¹, LOGAN HARVEY¹ XIAOJING ZHAO¹, THAO LAM¹

Presenters' email:

justin.hendriks@health.nsw.gov.au

¹ *Centre for Addiction Medicine, Cumberland Hospital, Western Sydney Local Health District, NSW*

Introduction:

In 2015/2016 responding to community concerns about the “ice epidemic”, the NSW government allocated funding for methamphetamine (ice) treatment programs. Our service began developing interventions to target this population using feedback from other locations with existing programs and research findings which suggested ice-users are difficult to engage and struggle to persist in treatment. This study aimed to determine the profile of people seeking treatment for ice use in order to better target treatment and to confirm the belief that ice-use required a distinct treatment methodology.

Method:

Data from over 1400 patient encounters were used to examine the number of ice-using and other patients who failed to attend assessment after making initial contact. Data from 319 referrals to Drug Health Psychology Service were also classified according to primary drug of concern and examined to compare the number of sessions attended, treatment non-initiation and non-attendance.

Key Findings:

Contrary to expectations, there were no significant differences in attendance for assessment after initial contact for ice-users compared with other drugs. In addition, ice-users constituted approximately one quarter of psychology referrals, but they were no less likely to initiate treatment with psychological services after referral and they attended slightly **more** psychological sessions than others.

Discussions and Conclusions:

Despite the stereotype of the distinct health challenge posed by ice users, our research indicates that they engage and persist with treatment at similar rates to others. The implications of this for treatment are discussed, including the challenge to address participation rates for **all** drug treatment programs.