

Economic and Environmental Issues in Arkansas: **A Policy Perspective**

Methamphetamine – Human and Environmental Risks

Executive Summary

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Introduction

In less than ten years, methamphetamine has grown from a problem limited to the Southwest and Pacific regions of the United States to one of concern in Arkansas. Arkansas' primary drug of concern is methamphetamine. The state is encountering locally-produced methamphetamine as well as the importation of Mexico produced methamphetamine. For several years, Arkansas ranked third in the nation per capita in terms of the number of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories seized, ranking only behind California and Missouri, both of which have substantially greater populations. Not only does the state's rural landscape provide an ideal setting for illicit manufacturing, but the wide availability of precursor chemicals also contributes to the ease of manufacturing methamphetamine. Criminal groups are acquiring thousands of cases of pseudoephedrine via wholesalers and use sophisticated schemes to illegally ship, at a considerable profit, pseudoephedrine to methamphetamine producers.

On February 22, 2005, Act 256 was signed into law. The act regulates the distribution of certain precursor ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine. Lab seizures have been cut in half during the first year following enactment of Act 256. The reduction in lab seizures has not resulted in a reduction in methamphetamine use because of cheap methamphetamine from Mexico.

Methamphetamine production creates serious safety and environmental concerns. Toxic and hazardous waste from methamphetamine production endangers law enforcement personnel, emergency response teams, children (particularly those in the homes of methamphetamine producers), and the environment. The chemicals used in the production process are toxic, highly-flammable, and yield poisonous vapors. Production of 1 pound of methamphetamine yields approximately 5 to 7 pounds of toxic waste. Methamphetamine laboratory operators often dump chemicals in areas accessible to the public. These chemicals contaminate soil, streams and rivers, and public sewer systems. Remediation of laboratory sites costs federal, state and local governments millions of dollars every year. The average cost of cleaning one site is \$5,000; however, costs can exceed \$100,000 for larger sites.

Law enforcement officials in Arkansas report that methamphetamine abuse is a significant problem throughout the state. In response to the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) 2002, all of the 24 law enforcement respondents in Arkansas indicated that methamphetamine abuse was high in their jurisdictions.

Amphetamine-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Arkansas increased by 80 percent from 1,547 in 1998 to 2,781 in 2002, according to the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS). (Nationwide, 95 percent of the amphetamine-related treatment admissions reported to TEDS are methamphetamine-related.) The Arkansas Department of Health reports that the number of amphetamine-related treatment admissions, which includes methamphetamine-related admissions, increased by 64 percent from 1,822 in FY1998 to 2,993 in FY2002

Methamphetamine abuse among adolescents in Arkansas is statistically comparable to the national rate. According to the 2001 Youth Risk Behavior Survey 11.8 percent of students in grades 9 through 12 in Arkansas reported having used methamphetamine at least once in their lifetime, compared to 9.8 percent nationwide.

The manufacture, distribution and use of methamphetamine generate a variety of health and medical concerns. Some of the health risks directly affect those involved in production, delivery or use while others are more indirect and affect others who are not directly involved with the drug. Some of the health-related affects are immediate while others are more closely-related to long-term or chronic use. The manufacture, distribution and use of methamphetamine create risks for cooks, users, family members, friends and neighbors, law enforcement officers and innocent bystanders.

Methamphetamine is one of the most phenomenally-addictive drugs. By some estimates, 98 percent of first-time use results in addiction. More importantly, continued use of methamphetamine results in a more compulsive and uncontrollable desire for the drug to the point of rendering the methamphetamine user powerless over his or her addiction. This

insatiable appetite for the drug affects the user's health, personal relationships, family, career and behavior.

The daily costs for methamphetamine users vary according to personal tolerances and frequency of use. Heavily-addicted users indicate they spend as much as \$400 a day to meet their habit. Obviously, they will have periods where they "crash" and will not use, but if we modestly assume they are using ½ of the month they need \$5,000 to \$6,000 to purchase their methamphetamine.

Very few can afford that kind of habit and even fewer can afford it without changing their lifestyle. Methamphetamine addiction generates property crime and thus costs the public in terms of losses and increased enforcement. Families also bear some of the costs associated with use and addiction. Users will deny themselves and their family basic necessities to liberate income for their addiction.

Methamphetamine users, dealers and manufacturers who are apprehended, convicted and imprisoned generate human costs for themselves and for other family members. The imposition of a prison sentence not only takes years out of the criminal's life, it leaves him or her with a permanent criminal record and strongly impacts the ability to legally carry or own a firearm, join the military or to pursue desired professional careers. Under some conditions, personal assets, such as vehicles, houses and other personal valuables, obtained through methamphetamine profits may be confiscated and sold at public auction.

According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission (USSC), methamphetamine-related offenses now account for 33 percent of the drug-related sentences in Arkansas, compared with 14 percent nationwide.

The increasing use and manufacture of methamphetamine in Arkansas is not only a health and safety issue but seriously impacts the environment while draining public dollars from worthwhile projects and programs.

Methodology

A review of the literature revealed sparse data specific to methamphetamine use and production in Arkansas. The exception was a comprehensive report *The Economic Impact of Methamphetamine Use in Benton County Arkansas*, by the Sam M. Walton College of Business, Center for Business and Economic Research.

Arkansas and other states are just beginning to collect data specific to this problem. Heretofore, methamphetamine data has been grouped with other drugs making it impossible to assign relevance to a specific drug. Arkansas State Crime Laboratory, Little Rock Police Department, North Little Rock Police Department, National Drug Intelligence Center, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Office of National Drug Control Policy have provided information for this project.

Key Findings

We know from the limited available data that almost 12 percent of Arkansas youth grades 9 thru 12 admitted to using methamphetamine at least once. This is almost 2 percent higher than the U.S. rate. Students who used methamphetamines in the past 30 days were more likely than non-users to be suspended, arrested (11 times more likely), and report feeling like a failure.

Methamphetamine users suffer brain damage, cardiovascular problems, extensive dental carries, as well as a host of other health problems. Methamphetamine related crimes represent a high proportion of crimes that require incarceration with about half the counties in the U.S. reporting that methamphetamine is the number one drug problem.

The findings of *The Economic Impact of Methamphetamine Use in Benton County Arkansas* were that the costs of methamphetamine use to Benton County employers were \$20 million to \$21 million, annually. These costs come from six major categories: increased

absenteeism, lost productivity, increased turnover, increased employee theft, increased worker compensation claims and increased healthcare premium costs.

Although methamphetamine use is a major problem in Arkansas, most Arkansans have only limited knowledge of the prevalence, consequences and human and economic costs of the problem.

Conclusion

To better deal with methamphetamine will require better data. There needs to be a focal agency that can capture and assimilate information and uniform and comprehensive facts from all sectors of the state.

There needs to be a concerted effort to educate Arkansans of every age as to the dangers of this terrible drug. Reliable, age-specific and appropriate educational materials can raise awareness of this crisis.