

Use back space to return to prior page

Found at <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v10/n021/a04.html>

Original story El Paso Times 1/6/10

Media Awareness Project

US TX: Drug Addiction Trends to Youths, More Violence

URL: <http://www.mapinc.org/drugnews/v10/n021/a04.html>

Newshawk: Herb

Votes: 0

Webpage: <http://mapinc.org/url/ngVQytF3>

Pubdate: Tue, 5 Jan 2010

Source: El Paso Times (TX)

Copyright: 2009 El Paso Times

Contact: <http://www.elpasotimes.com/formnewsroom>

Website: <http://www.elpasotimes.com/>

Details: <http://www.mapinc.org/media/829>

Author: Diana Washington Valdez



DRUG ADDICTION TRENDS TO YOUTHS, MORE VIOLENCE

EL PASO -- Today's addicts use the Internet and text messages to obtain drugs, and they are more dangerous than ever.

"We are seeing younger and more violent addicts," said Chilo Madrid, director of Aliviane Inc., which runs drug treatment centers in El Paso. "It's not unusual to see an 18-year-old who has been addicted for three or four years, who's had two or three sexually transmitted diseases, who's belonged to two gangs and who's been shot at more than once."

Because a drug cartel is parked next door in Juarez, drugs are cheap and easy to come by in El Paso.

Madrid estimated that El Paso has 150,000 addicts. That equates to about 20 percent of the county's estimated population of 742,000. He said the estimate is based on Aliviane clients and information provided by other treatment and recovery programs.

"We do a lot of street research, and we know for a fact that we have 30,000 hard-core heroin users in El Paso, and lot more people who use cocaine on the weekends," Madrid said. Aliviane is considered the biggest provider of drug treatment and rehabilitation services on the border.

On its Web site, the Recovery Alliance of El Paso, which operates the Casa Vida de Salud recovery center, said: "People in every state of this nation -- over 100,000 in El Paso alone -- are affected by this chronic illness."

Lydia Smith, Recovery Alliance's director, said the organization's estimate includes alcoholism and is a conservative figure.

"People still view addicts as junkies living under a bridge," Smith said. "... But we have people who

ran hospital departments in this city who were let go because of addiction problems."

An estimated 23.1 million people nationwide age 12 and older were in need of treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol problem, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. Of them, 2.3 million received treatment at a specialty center, the DEA estimated.

The Substance Abuse & Mental Health Administration reported in 2008 that 9.24 percent of Texans -- 2.2 million people -- abused both alcohol and illicit drugs.

In Texas Region 10, which includes El Paso and five other West Texas counties, 8.52 percent of the population abused alcohol and illicit drugs. The region had a higher percentage of illicit drug abuse, 2.97 percent, than the state's 2.77 figure. The mental health administration adjusted for populations in each region.

"It's hard to come by accurate numbers of addicts in cities," said Jane Maxwell, a senior research scientist at the University of Texas Addiction Research Institute. "It's difficult because they're hidden. I don't think anybody really knows."

Unlike rehab centers that receive public money, private companies are not required to report cases. Maxwell also said researchers needed figures from Mexico to get a more complete picture of the problem on the border.

Nevertheless, Maxwell said, drug abuse surveys and other research point to a need for more resources in Texas to treat people with alcohol and drug addictions.

"When we started out in this field, a hit of heroin (a quarter gram) cost \$25," Madrid said. "Now, people can get the same quantity for \$2.50 a hit. The same is true for cocaine. A hit of cocaine is about two lines."

"They don't go to Juarez or to shooting galleries anymore. People get the drugs by texting on their cell phones. Whereas before, your heroin users were older, we're now seeing kids as young as 16 who are trying heroin and cocaine for the first time."

The notorious Ignacia Jasso, or La Nacha, controlled the distribution of heroin, cocaine and marijuana in Juarez from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s. She passed the business on to her children.

Now, because of drug cartel violence, rehabilitation programs in Juarez are unstable.

Juarez also has about 150,000 addicts in need of treatment, according to Sergio Nogueira, CEO of the Asociacion Mexican de Alcoholicos y Adictos en Rehabilitacion in Juarez.

Nogueira's program was forced to close after extortionists burned down his center last year.

Under the Merida Initiative, the Mexican government said it planned to build 300 treatment centers throughout Mexico to deal with addiction. Nogueira said that Juarez has one such center but that it provides only primary care referrals.

The binational Rio Grande Safe Communities Coalition, which previously concentrated on deterring underage drinking, has added marijuana to its awareness and prevention campaigns.

"We learned from a school survey of seventh-to 12th-graders that youths in El Paso tend to abuse alcohol, tobacco and marijuana," said Mary Ellen Hernandez, the coalition's executive director. "We're trying to find out more about what's going on out there and how to address it."

Madrid said experts still consider marijuana to be a gateway drug to harder drug use.

The Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America says "marijuana use among adolescents has increased gradually over the past two years after years of declining use."

However, alcohol and tobacco are also addictive substances that attract youths from an early age. In Texas, it is illegal to sell alcohol to people younger than 21 and to sell tobacco to those younger than 18.

Hernandez said recent telephone surveys found that El Paso youths could easily obtain alcohol from adults, including their parents. As a result, the coalition launched its "Those Who Host Lose the Most" education campaign aimed at adults.

Among other things, the campaign encourages the public to report to police any parties and other settings where underage drinking occurs.

"We have a big problem in our community with adults providing youths with alcohol," said Adriana Cadena, the campaign's project coordinator.

Providing alcohol to minors is a class A misdemeanor in Texas, punishable by a fine of up to \$4,000, a year in jail and a driver's license suspension for up to six months.

"Some of the kids at parties where there is drinking will text others to let them know that alcohol is available, and the parties start to get out of hand," Cadena said. "The situations can lead to unprotected sex, violence and DWI."

Hernandez said she is concerned that grant money for prevention programs is on the decline. The Rio Grande Safe Communities Coalition and other organizations depend on federal grant money to sustain awareness and educational programs.

Nationally, about two-thirds of the \$15 billion anti-drug federal budget for this year is earmarked for drug interdiction and other law enforcement activities. By comparison, \$1.6 billion was set aside for prevention and \$3.6 billion for treatment.

The amount for prevention is less than what it was in the 2009 and 2008 federal budgets.

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Administration officials said more resources will be needed to treat aging baby boomers, who have a higher prevalence of drug abuse than the rest of the population.

[sidebar]

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Alcohol and illicit drug dependence in the past year by state and regions:

State/region Alcohol Illicit drugs Both

Texas 7.84% 2.77% 9.24%

Region 10 (El Paso) 7% 2.97% 8.52%

Region 11 (Brownsville) 7.34% 3.04% 8.66%

Region 8 (San Antonio) 8.29% 2.60% 9.44%

Region 6-a (Houston) 8.21% 2.55% 9.52%

Source: Substance Abuse & Mental Health Administration, 2004-2008 reports; drugs include marijuana, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants and prescription-type medications.

MAP posted-by: Richard Lake



www.operationnogangs.org