THE EMERGING OF XYLAZINE AS A NEW DRUG OF ABUSE AND ITS HEALTH CONSEQUENCES AMONG DRUG USERS IN PUERTO RICO.

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INTRODUCTION

Sentinel drug forecasting systems often fail to adequately identify and assess emerging trends in the use of illegal drugs, resulting in the fact that public health systems are rarely able to adequately mobilize local, regional and national prevention and treatment systems in a timely manner (Clatts et al., 2002). The spread of animal tranquilizers as drug adulterants or recreationally drugs in Puerto Rico is a prime example of an epidemiological problem (Robles et al., 2008). One of these animal tranquilizers, Xylazine, has been recently reported in the mass media and among health practitioners to be an emerging drug abuse problem in Puerto Rico (Rivera-Vargas, 2005). This is an animal tranquilizer, a partial alpha-2 adrenergic agonist with characteristics and toxic actions similar to the phenoxybenzamine and clonidine (Capraro, Wiley, & Tucker, 2001). If used in humans, it is known to produce marked hypotension and bradycardia secondary to vagal stimulation (Hoffmann, Meister, Gede, & Zachwie, 2001). Severe intentional intoxication from Xylazine has been reported from fatal to 4% of the sample reported an increase in the frequency of injection. Results of the focus groups revealed that drug users in Puerto Rico seem to be an emerging public health problem. More research is needed to identify the risk factors associated with Xylazine use and its health consequences.

METHODS

The target population from which the sample was drawn included drug users out of drug abuse treatment, residing in communities of the San Juan metropolitan area in Puerto Rico. A total of 89 drug users were recruited from 12 communities using a variety of outreach strategies. Ethnographic mapping strategies were used to identify drug markets and other venues where drug users were known to congregate. At predetermined sites and times, outreach workers approached a drug user, determined eligibility, and invited the individual to participate. Individuals were considered eligible if they were at least 18 years of age, had used drugs in the last 30 days, and had not been enrolled in drug abuse treatment within the last 30 days. A short questionnaire developed for the study collected information on sociodemographic characteristics, Xylazine use and health-related problems. Two focus groups were conducted to discuss the details related to Xylazine acquisition, use, health-related problems and utilization awareness.

RESULTS

The sample was predominantly male (70.8%) with a mean age of 37.2±9.6 years (Table 1). The mean number of years of drug use was 14.3±9.7, with a mean frequency of drug use of 5.9±4.1 times daily. The prevalence of Xylazine use was 80.7% (Figure 1). Xylazine users were more likely to be males, less than 30 years old and living in the rural area (Figure 2). The main route of administration of Xylazine was injection (84.5%), but 14% reported the use of Xylazine by inhalation (Table 2). More than 40% of the sample used Xylazine in a mixture with speedball. Overall, the mean number of years of Xylazine use was 3.4±2.9. In terms of health-related problems, 21.1% reported at least an overdose episode, and 35.2% reported skin lesions (Figure 3). On the other hand, 28.2% of the sample reported an increase in the frequency of injection. Results of the focus groups revealed that drug users tend to recognize that Xylazine is present in a mixture of speedball based on its effects, taste, color of the drug (dark brown) and odor. Some of the participants reported that occasionally the drug solution crystallized during the drug preparation process.

CONCLUSION

The use of Xylazine among injection drug users in Puerto Rico seems to be an emerging public health problem. More research is needed to identify the risk factors associated with Xylazine use and its health consequences.

REFERENCES


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