A Closer Look at Stimulant Use
Findings from the Vermont Opioid Use Harm Reduction Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

The Opioid Use Harm Reduction evaluation set out to assess current harm reduction services and behavioral strategies that were being used by individuals to lower the risk of opioid overdose and infectious disease transmission, as well as assess the gaps in their knowledge and use of services and behavioral strategies. Findings indicated that in addition to opioid use, participants reported high use rates of other substances, particularly stimulants, with 71% of participants using any stimulant (crack, cocaine, prescription stimulants, or methamphetamine) within the past 30 days.

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Stimulant use among participants who currently used opioids (N=69)

- Among those receiving MAT, 66% had used crack or cocaine within the past 30 days.
- Among those receiving MAT, 75% had used any stimulant within the past 30 days.
- Among those using any stimulants in the past 30 days (N=57), 65% were receiving MAT through a provider.

Stimulant use is common among people misusing opioids and accessing syringe service programs (SSP)

- Among those who utilized an SSP in the past 90 days (N=29), 90% had used any stimulant in the past 30 days, 66% had used cocaine, and 46% had used crack cocaine.
- Among those who used any stimulant in the past 30 days (N=57), 51% had utilized an SSP in their county within the past 90 days.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Use of stimulants was high among participants. The quantitative data show that crack cocaine use was more prevalent than powder cocaine use in the past 30 days among participants. In the interviews, some participants described having a preference between the two types, while others reported that they would use whichever they could get.

“...it’s kind of like whichever one I can get.”

There was some awareness that crack and powder cocaine could be laced with fentanyl.

“...There has been more talk now that it’s been advertised on TV and stuff where people are still getting to be a little bit more worried about getting the fentanyl overdoses...all the fentanyl overdoses, well, now they’re lacing it where it could be in your coke or it could be in your crack or now it could be in your marijuana.”

“Their’s both the same price. They’re both easy to get, but it seems like over the last couple of years now, it seems like now everybody has moved away from doing the coke snorting to now everybody and their brother now is smoking crack.”
SUMMARY

This brief highlights the intersection of stimulant use, opioid use, overdose, and harm reduction practices. The percentage of opioid-related fatalities involving cocaine in Vermont increased from 36% in 2018 to 43% in 2019 and the number of opioid-related deaths involving cocaine was higher than the number involving heroin for the first time since 2010 (Vermont Department of Health Stimulant Misuse in Vermont Data Brief - https://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/ADAP_Data_Brief_StimulantMisuse.pdf). As can be seen from these findings, there is fairly high overlap among stimulant use and enrollment in a MAT program, and stimulant use and SSP engagement. These service providers are uniquely set up to engage with those using stimulants about prevention, treatment, and overdose risk.

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