EDITORIAL

Pain, Poverty, and Hope: The Charter Issue
of Journal of Ethnicity in Substance Abuse
Peter L. Myers, PhD

Substance Abuse in an Urban Aboriginal Population:
Social, Legal and Psychological Consequences
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This work is the result of a research program developed from a research partnership between the Native Mental Health Research Team of McGill University and the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal, a Native-run urban community-based service organization. The aims of the study were to examine substance abuse as well as physical and mental health among an urban Aboriginal population. The nature and severity of drug or alcohol problems in this population were explored. Data was collected through structured interviews with urban Aboriginal people in the greater Montreal area (n = 202). Results indicate that the majority of the sample were single, unemployed, and had lived in the urban area for a long time (mean of 9.96 yrs). Approximately two thirds of the sample were current alcohol drinkers and cigarette smokers and one third of the sample reported having a current drug or alcohol problem. Results indicate that individuals who abused substances were more likely to live with someone who had a drug or alcohol problem. Substance abusers also had a greater history of legal problems with more convictions, time spent in jail, and were more likely to
be on probation or parole. A large proportion of the sample reported having significant medical problems that required treatment, and substance abusers were less likely to have identification needed to access medical services. Results indicated high levels of psychological distress in the general sample (depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, attempted suicide). These phenomena were augmented by substance abuse problems. In particular, substance abusers had a history of more suicide attempts, and were more likely to have been the victims of abuse.

KEYWORDS. Aboriginal, urban, substance abuse

Drug-Dependent Homeless African-American Women’s Perspectives of Life on the Streets
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Results of this exploratory and phenomenological investigation provide an understanding of the meanings of “living on the streets” for drug-dependent African-American women in a shelter for the homeless in the southeastern United States. Thirty-six interviews were conducted with drifting and impoverished chemically dependent women seeking help for their addictions. The women’s narratives were subjected to qualitative analysis and revealed ways of life that began for them in childhood and continued into adulthood. Victimization, first suffered and later inflicted, was mediated by their chemical dependence and is explained by the Maltreatment-Dependence Mediated Relationship Model (MDMR). Physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as prostitution, robbery, and child abuse and neglect were commonly experienced on imposed on others. Addiction counselors are instructed in ways to help women such as the participants in this study. Building a network of internal and external sources of strength is likely to be a helpful strategy for women to use in such circumstances to develop more successful ways of living.

KEYWORDS. African-American women, drug dependence, homeless, addiction, abuse

Scars, Harm and Pain: About Being Injected Among Drug Using Latina Women
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The practice of being injected by others is one social vector that promotes a higher vulnerability to HIV among injector drug using (IDU) women. This paper suggests that this practice can be interpreted as a strategy used by these women to avoid the bodily damage caused by muscle injection, and thus to reduce its political and economic consequences. Abscesses and scars that are more frequent with muscle injection lead to further subordination within the hierarchies of their social networks, and deteriorate the women’s precarious strategies of income production. Although being injected by another increases the probability of HIV infection, it simultaneously prevents the visible physical damage that subjects these women to greater vulnerability. In the street ideology of this network the moral devaluation arising from the bodily damage implies a moral anatomy that reproduces in this setting the politics of self-care that dominate in mainstream society. This local practice was studied through interviews of Latina IDU women and ethnographic immersion into a social network of drug consumption in the Mission District, San Francisco, California.

KEYWORDS. IDU women, injection process, bodily damage, Latin minority
Cultural Factors Influencing HIV Risk Behavior Among Dominicans in New York City
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Hispanics in the United States have disproportionately high rates of HIV. The existence of ethnically and culturally diverse Hispanic communities indicate that qualitative research on HIV-related attitudes and behaviors within subgroups is needed to develop successful interventions. Findings from interviews with 20 Dominicans involved with drug-related or sex work-related activities in New York City are presented in terms of predominant cultural influences and specific issues regarding sex work, drug use, and HIV/AIDS. Several directions for interventions in the Dominican community are indicated, e.g., outreach efforts sensitive to the stigmatization of behaviors such as needle use and homosexuality, and the encouragement of sex workers to use condoms with their partners as well as clients. Additional information regarding such areas as contraception, family planning, and drug treatment services is needed within this community. A knowledge of cultural norms can serve as a foundation for these intervention and education efforts.

KEYWORDS. Dominicans, HIV risk, AIDS, drug use, Hispanics

Family Factors of Low-Income African-American Youth Associated with Substance Use: An Exploratory Analysis
Chris Stewart, PhD

Objectives: An extensive body of literature has identified several risk and protective risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use. Several facets of family relationships have been identified in the general adolescent and African-American adolescent substance use literature. There are gaps in the knowledge base for African-American rural youth living in poverty and would benefit from further exploration. It is possible that this unique population may exhibit trends not seen in the general population or urban African-American adolescents.

Method: A sample of 826 African-American adolescents, living in rural low-income areas and ranging in age from 14 to 19 years old were given a survey of 294 questions. Topics of the survey ranged risk behaviors such as gang activity and substance use. Only variables concerning the family of the adolescent were used in this analysis. An exploratory analysis was performed to determine the relationship of family relationship variables to African-American rural adolescent substance use.

Results: The results suggest that several factors, namely existence of family rules and parental monitoring, are significant factors in buffering adolescent substance use for alcohol, marijuana and cocaine. These factors proved to be significant across gender.

Conclusions: The parent-adolescent relationship is an important factor influencing adolescent substance use. Also, the quality and type of parental/adolescent relationship is important. This relationship should also be targeted when considering any intervention for treating these adolescents. Further research should be conducted in this domain.

KEYWORDS. Risk factors, protective factors, African-American youth
The Story of CURA, a Hispanic/Latino Drug Therapeutic Community

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There is a serious substance abuse problem in the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States especially in such urban areas as Newark and Jersey City, New Jersey. Since heroin is one of the primary drugs of choice, there is also a high rate of HIV transmission through the sharing of contaminated drug paraphernalia. In addition to drug abuse, there are high rates of crime, unemployment, and early high school dropout. Cultural barriers and poverty interfere with access to appropriate healthcare and drug treatment programs. The predominant residential modality for treating addictions from Chile to China is the therapeutic community. The therapeutic community is a milieu type of therapy that utilizes peer counselors (frequently "graduates" of the program), group pressure, and rational authority figures in a functional "family" setting. Transgressions and irrational thinking are frequently met with abrasive challenges. In an effort to respond to cultural needs, CURA, a Hispanic/Latino program, focuses on "respeto," "dignidad," and "confianza." In order to assess the success rate of this orientation, an archival study was conducted using data from CURA’s residential programs in 1998 and 1999. The retention rates for both clients (50-80 percent) and staff (over 90 percent) are very impressive, far above traditional "graduation" rates (20 percent) for similarly located traditional therapeutic communities.

KEYWORDS. Drug and/or alcohol treatment, cultural diversity, Hispanic/Latino community, Therapeutic Community