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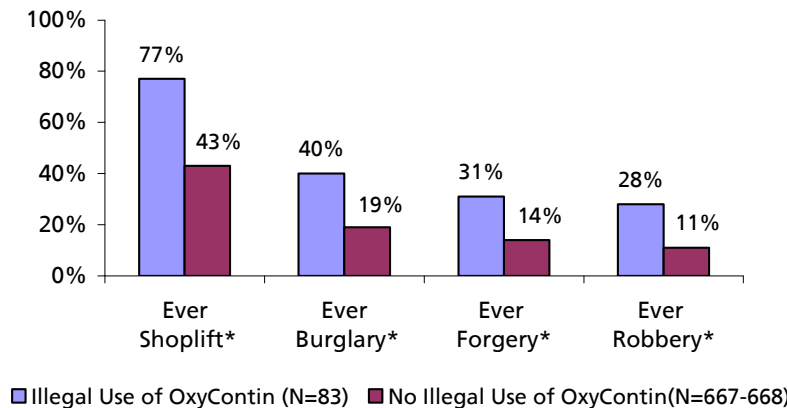
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OxyContin Abuse Poses Risks to Public Health and Safety

Recent national research has confirmed the relationship among increased illegal prescription drug use and criminal activity and emergency department visits¹. According to the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use, an estimated 5.2 million Americans abused prescription pain relievers in the prior 30 days, compared to 4.7 million in 2005².

OxyContin, a strong pain reliever, has received considerable attention because of the increase of its abuse. Abusers of OxyContin will chew the tablet, crush it and snort the powder, or inject it after dissolving it in water. A study conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) revealed that 49 percent of autopsy toxicology results included the presence of OxyContin³. Also of concern is the relationship between illegal use of OxyContin and crime. Several reports indicate that illegal use of OxyContin is associated with pharmacy robberies, healthcare fraud, residential burglaries, and other theft-related crime⁴. One local mechanism to measure the trends in illegal pharmaceutical abuse, including OxyContin, is the Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) project conducted by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). In 2006, 38 percent of arrestees reported having used a prescription drug illegally at some point in their life, with 11 percent specifying that they used OxyContin. Those reporting OxyContin use were more likely to have engaged in a theft-related crime (as shown in Figure 1), which is consistent with the national data.

Figure 1
OXYCONTIN USERS MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN THEFT-RELATED CRIME



SOURCE: SANDAG SAM program, 2006

Significant at $p < .05$.

The DEA has an action plan in place to curb the illegal use of OxyContin. Law enforcement, diversion, and intelligence groups have come together to focus on investigating illegal distribution and use of OxyContin, while also providing education and increasing public awareness of the risks involved with the abuse of this drug. More information about pharmaceutical abuse and other local drug use trends can be found in the bulletin "2006 Adult Arrestee Drug Use in the San Diego Region" at www.sandag.org/cjc.

¹ Office of National Drug Control Policy (2007). **Prescription Drugs** [On-line]. Available at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (2007). **2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Results (DHHS Publication No. SMA 07-4293)**. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

³ Office of Diversion Control (2002). **Summary of Medical Examiner Reports on Oxycodone-Related Deaths**. U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Agency [On-line] Available at http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drugs_concern/oxycodone/oxycotin7.htm.

⁴ Office of National Drug Control Policy (2006). **Synthetic Drug Control Strategy: A Focus on Methamphetamine and Prescription Drug Use** [On-line] Available at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov>.