

I provide the following article to you students for two reasons: first, my age and education are such that what I say and do pay no attention to what people think or say; secondly, my forty-seven years of teaching experience mean that I have confronted almost everything dirty, sordid and clean and pure about human beings, so nothing surprises me. This particular drug sickness among today's youth and adults is a plague and a tragedy, a tragedy because it kills brain cells and therefore debilitates humans so they are function at lower level than animals; a plague because it has no cure since it is rooted first in free choice and then, perhaps after the second or third "hit" in making oneself a slave to this drug master so it even physically debilitates one so not only people who know you but you yourself do not recognize you.

You can add California and counties such as Sacramento, Sonoma, Yolo, Fresno and many others to the list the Wall Street Journal lists.

New York Times

Across the Rural Midwest, Drug Casts a Grim Shadow

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

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LOVELL, Wyo. — Tucked under the snowcapped wall of the Big Horn Mountains, with its cattle and horse ranches and large Mormon church, this could be "that sleepy little town everyone wants," said Nick Lewis, the police chief. Except for one thing. Lovell, population 2,264, and two nearby towns have become infested by methamphetamine.

In the past two years, about 70 people from this small slice of northwestern Wyoming have been convicted of buying or selling methamphetamine, with more arrests and convictions expected soon, the authorities say. Methamphetamine-related crimes now consume half the time of Chief Lewis's seven-officer force.

Burglaries have mushroomed, one suspected witness's house was firebombed and the State Department of Family Services has taken children away from parents so incapacitated by methamphetamine that they forgot to feed them. Many people have simply quit work and ended up selling drugs to pay for methamphetamine, a powerful manufactured stimulant that produces bursts of energy and euphoria but can lead to depression, violent paranoia and brain damage.

Methamphetamine is also draining precious money out of Lovell, which has already lost three of its four groceries, its Sears, its movie theater and two of its few factories.

What is happening in Lovell is happening across much of Wyoming, the least populated state in the country, where methamphetamine use is now more than twice the national average, according to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Methamphetamine use and crime are also overrunning rural counties in Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, North Dakota and the Texas Panhandle, law enforcement officials say.

In Iowa, rapidly growing methamphetamine use is behind a surge in thefts of tractors and other heavy farm equipment, as well as burglaries in vacant farmsteads, said Todd Johnson, the Audubon County sheriff.

The methamphetamine trade has thrived in Audubon County for a number of reasons. Methamphetamine is easy to cook locally, Sheriff Johnson said, because his county of 450 square miles has only 10 law enforcement officers, and one of the drug's main ingredients — anhydrous ammonia — is an agricultural fertilizer that lies about in abundant supply in bags on isolated farm fields, almost waiting to be stolen.

Home-cooked methamphetamine is now so common in Iowa, and so toxic, that the Legislature has made manufacturing it around children a form of child abuse. In its first count, the Iowa Department of Human Services found almost 500 children who were exposed to cooking methamphetamine in 2002.

Similarly, in Colorado, police officers and firefighters in rural communities often scrub down young children who have been crawling on the floor in houses where their parents have been cooking methamphetamine, said Susan Dreisbach, a research anthropologist at the University of Colorado at Denver.

In Nebraska, crime has increased fourfold since methamphetamine became a serious problem in the mid-1990's, as migrant workers brought in to work in the meatpacking plants began dealing the drug, said Glenn Kemp, the drug investigator for the Adams County Sheriff's office in central Nebraska. "We never had a big crime problem in Nebraska till meth," Mr. Kemp said. "But now we have a lot of stabbings and shootings in our little towns and every homicide goes back to meth."

Law enforcement officials in North Dakota tell a similar story.

"Meth is the single most serious law enforcement issue that North Dakota is facing, and has ever faced," said Wayne Stenehjem, the state attorney general. The number of methamphetamine labs seized in North Dakota jumped to 97 in 2002 from zero in 1998 and will be higher again when the 2003 numbers are tabulated, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration.

Tim Gillespie, the police chief in Emerado, N.D., a town of 500, said he had to draw his gun more last year alone than in his previous 20 years in law enforcement because of methamphetamine-related arrests in which suspects pulled weapons. To the experts, methamphetamine is both a symptom of rural decline, as people give up on faltering farms and factories, and a cause that makes the decline worse. In this dual role, methamphetamine acts much like crack did in big cities in the 1980's, said Mark Kleiman, a professor of public policy at the University of California at Los Angeles.

But on Main Street in Lovell, people do not talk about the ravages of methamphetamine.

"We lie to ourselves," said Pat Crank, Wyoming's attorney general. "We say Wyoming is God's country. We have that big sky, and those mountains. We can't have meth."

Becky Hultgren, a 43-year-old optical assistant in Lovell, knows the bitter truth. She still remembers the day her children came home from high school and said their classmates had told them, "Your aunt is the coolest person in town."

To Mrs. Hultgren, that was not a compliment. She said that her sister, Colet Dover, 41, was a methamphetamine addict who had been giving drugs to her teenage sons and selling it to other students.

Ms. Dover had been fired from her job as a nurse for stealing painkillers from patients. In early October, she was sentenced to seven years in federal prison as part of a joint federal, state and local investigation that has resulted in the dozens of convictions here.

Statistics on drugs in rural areas are sketchy, because law enforcement is spread thin across these vast parts of the nation. But the available figures do tell a story.

From 1995 to 2002, drug abuse arrests fell 23 percent in cities with a population of 250,000 or more, but rose 21 percent in rural counties, according to a study by James Alan Fox, a professor of criminal justice at Northeastern University, using F.B.I. data.

Similarly, for youths 12 to 17, the highest level of drug abuse is in rural counties, according to a 2002 household survey done for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

There is also relatively little research on why methamphetamine has become the drug of choice in the rural West and why it is continuing to surge in popularity.

Bruce Mendelson, a researcher with the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division of the Colorado Department of Human Services, thinks part of the reason is that the wide open spaces in the West make it easier to set up underground labs to cook methamphetamine, a stew that uses anhydrous ammonia, ephedrine and other chemicals.

Methamphetamine is also cheaper than cocaine, Mr. Mendelson said, and its high lasts 8 to 16 hours, compared with a couple of hours for cocaine. "For people in rural areas, doing hard-working blue collar jobs in a bad economy trying to earn a few extra bucks, meth helps you stay up longer and work longer," he said.

Federal surveys have consistently shown that methamphetamine is largely a drug of whites, the less affluent, and those living in rural areas and west of the Mississippi, said Professor Kleiman of U.C.L.A.

Methamphetamine's appeal to the less affluent makes towns like Lovell particularly

vulnerable, because of the profound demographic changes that Wyoming is undergoing. The state is growing older faster than any other state, said Jonathan Schechter, executive director of the Charture Institute in Jackson, Wyo.

"Basically, Wyoming is in a demographic death spiral," Mr. Schechter said. "For the first time, Wyoming now has more people 35 and older than there are 34 and younger."

As the number of school-age children has plummeted, four high schools from smaller towns around Lovell have been consolidated into one. And the decline is continuing. The number of students in the remaining high school in Lovell shrank to 160 this year from 194 in 1999.

The result of this change, Mr. Schechter said, is that people in their 20's and 30's left behind in places like Lovell tend to be less educated, often high school dropouts, and work at low-paying jobs or not at all.

Most of those convicted from the Lovell area fit this description, said Kurt Dobbs, the director of the Division of Criminal Investigation of the Wyoming Attorney General's office.

Another similarity between the methamphetamine problem in Lovell and in states like Nebraska and Colorado, law enforcement officials say, is that the dealers are often Mexican migrant workers, many of them illegal immigrants, who came to work for low wages on farms or in meatpacking plants or mines.

In Lovell, violent crime has not jumped with the advent of methamphetamine, as happened in many cities with crack. But property crime has skyrocketed, as addicts commit burglaries or break into cars.

Ms. Dover wrote bad checks and ran up the debt on her credit cards to \$60,000, said her sister, Mrs. Hultgren. She also spent a \$90,000 settlement she received after her husband died in an industrial accident, her sister said.

Then there is the personal toll. Ms. Dover's two sons, now in their early 20's, have their own addiction problems to overcome, Mrs. Hultgren said.

Last year the sisters went back to the small town in southern Utah where they were born into a Mormon family for their grandmother's funeral. "Relatives kept asking me, where's Colet?" Mrs. Hultgren said.

"I said, 'This is Colet, right here,' " Mrs. Hultgren said. "But they couldn't recognize her; the drugs had aged her so much."