

Section III

Aggression

Anecdotal Evidence of the Effects of Amphetamine on Aggression

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The association between methamphetamine and violence has been observed repeatedly. In a recent murder case in Hawaii, a forensic psychologist testified that San Diego is considered the methamphetamine capital of the world, with methamphetamine found in the system of 90% of violent defendants or being part of the precipitating events (*State v. Monte Louis Young*, 1997). The theme of violence runs through all operations associated with the manufacture, sale, and consumption of methamphetamine.

Congressional testimony before the 104th Congress (Subcommittee on Crime, House of Representatives, 1995) provided examples of the strong connection between methamphetamine and violence:

Some of the problems in dealing with this particular drug ... are the high violence potential. I run a tactical team that does high violence entries of primarily clandestine drug lab type entries. There are only several teams that will do this mainly because of the hazards involved. The atmosphere can become very poisonous, explosion, chemical contamination, and violence potential, from the weapon problem with the suspects inside. So, this is one of the things that become very important to what I'm doing. There's, again, weapons involvement. There normally is always high velocity type weapon involvement — Mack 10s, Tech-9s, Uzis, mini Uzis, street sweepers, which is an automatic 12 gauge shotgun, these type of things (pp. 37–38).

In addition, the violence associated with methamphetamine is unparalleled. Some examples of this violence:

- Phoenix, Arizona, police say methamphetamine is largely responsible for the 40% jump in homicides in 1994.
- In Contra Costa County, near San Francisco, police have found that methamphetamine is involved in 89% of domestic disputes in that county.
- In San Diego, rival methamphetamine-smuggling rings were responsible for a series of killings that resulted in 26 deaths. Also in San Diego County, the percentage of methamphetamine detections in [arrestees] rose from 23% in the first half of 1991, to 45% during the same period in 1994.
- In San Luis Obispo, California [in May 1995], local authorities requested DEA assistance in confronting spiraling violence that involved 13 drug-related homicides, committed by gangs engaged in the production and distribution of methamphetamine in that count[y].
- In Tacoma, Washington, police reported that half a dozen homicides were related to a methamphetamine organization which, among other things, pipe bombed the residence of a narcotics detective.

A key question is whether previous violence associated with methamphetamine, especially when it is similar to the instant offense, was the result of a habitual set of violent acts or an isolated event. Historical instances of violence should be examined in terms of variables such as frequency, severity, recency, acceleration, triggering stimuli, opportunity factors, and inhibitions to aggression.

Historical factors that have traditionally indicated willfulness to commit violence in methamphetamine cases include the following:

- Lengthy time delays between triggers to violence and the instant crime
- Performance of complex chains of behaviors in order to execute the violent behavior
- Flexibility of response (e.g., when the perpetrator has multiple weapons with which to inflict harm)
- Predatory vs. reactive violence

Key forensic questions can be formulated as follows:

- Should the defendant have known the likely outcome of the chain of behavioral events culminating in violence?

- Did the defendant know that methamphetamine intoxication in this situation, based on the defendant's history, would likely result in his or her violence to another?

References

State v. Monte Louis Young, First Circuit Court, Cr. No. 97-1 1 94 (May 7, 1998).

Subcommittee on Crime of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, 104th Congress, First Session, October 26, 1995 (Ser. No. 49), *Rising Scourge of Methamphetamine in America*.