

Spring 2018

Assessment of Methamphetamines Use among Refugee Youth in Omaha: Examining Multiple Stakeholder Perspectives

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About the College of Public Affairs and Community Service

The College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) was created in 1973 to ensure that the university was responsive to the critical social needs of our community and state. The College was given the mission not only to provide educational programs of the highest caliber to prepare students for leadership in public service, but also to reach out to the community to help solve public problems.

The College has become a national leader among similar colleges, with nine programs ranked in the top 25 in the nation. Our faculty ranks are among the finest in their disciplines. Faculty, staff, and students are integral to the community and state because of our applied research, service learning, and community partnerships. We take our duty seriously to help address social needs and craft solutions to local, state, and national problems. For more information, visit our website: cpacs.unomaha.edu

CPACS Urban Research Awards

Part of the mission of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) is to conduct research, especially as it relates to concerns of our local and statewide constituencies. CPACS has always had an urban mission, and one way that mission is served is to perform applied research relevant to urban society in general, and the Omaha metropolitan area and other Nebraska urban communities in particular. Beginning in 2014, the CPACS Dean provided funding for projects with high relevance to current urban issues, with the potential to apply the findings to practice in Nebraska, Iowa and beyond.

Assessment of Methamphetamine Use among Refugee Youth in Omaha:

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Spring 2018

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College of Public Affairs and Community Service Dean's Office.





Assessing Methamphetamine Use among Refugee Youth in Omaha*

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* This Study was funded by an Urban Research Grant from the Center of
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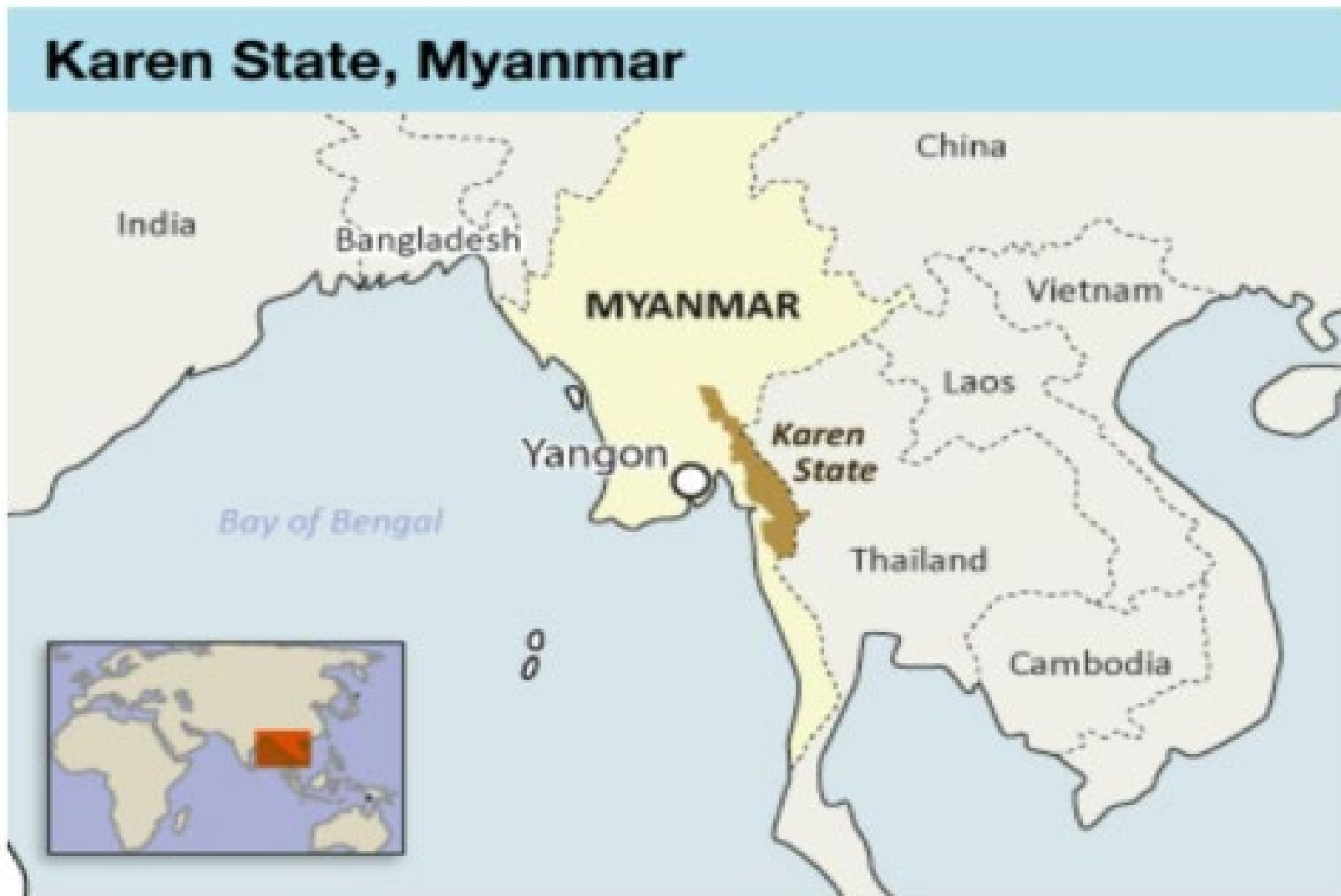
Heartland Family Services

- Provides refugee resettlement services
- Teen Karen refugee in the Juvenile Justice system testing positive for meth in 2014 (co-morbidity)
- What do Karen youth know about methamphetamines, why would they use it, and from where would they get it?





The Karen





The Karen Population

- Karen has been fighting for independence from Burma (Myanmar) since 1949
- Karen seek asylum in U.S. to escape war
- Omaha is home to an estimated 7,000 refugees from Burma, with at least 75% of those being Karen refugees.





Methamphetamine Use in Burma & Neighboring Regions

- Golden Triangle:
 - Half of the world's 15-16 million methamphetamine users reside in Southeast and East Asia (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2007).
 - Thailand has become one of the largest consumers of methamphetamine pills, also known as *ya ba* ("crazy drug"), in the world, with youth consisting of the majority of users.
 - Do the Karen bring their drug using behaviors to U.S?



Methamphetamine

- Methamphetamines are highly addictive substance (NIDA, 2012).
- Correlates of use include:
 - Aggression
 - Memory impairment, dental issues, weight loss and
 - Malnutrition, heart damage,
 - Psychotic behavior
 - Heart damage
 - Stunted emotional and cognitive development





The Needs Assessment

- Small N, so conducted focus groups with Karen Teens using translators Interview Questions:
- What do you know about meth?
- How many kids do you think use meth?
 - a) In Omaha
 - b) In refugee camps
- Why would kids use meth?
- From where would they get meth?



Triangulation

- Also conducted focus groups with teen's parents
- Questions:
 - What do you know about meth?
 - How many kids do you think are using it?
 - From where do you think that get it from?
 - Why do you think they use it.
- Thematic Analysis of focus group data





Sample & Data Collection

- Non-probability snowball sampling with families in the *Ready in Five Program*
 - *Summer of 2016 and 2017*

	Teen Groups (N=11)	Parent groups (n=10)
Females	6	9
Ave. time in U.S.	12 months	12 months
Employment	0	3



- Teen Groups

- Knew what meth was and its affects
- Learned of it in Omaha schools
- Could get it from classmates
- Alcohol and Ya ba (marijuana) is drug of choice)
- Meth use not a problem

- Parent Groups

- Knew what meth was and its affects
- Learned of it in refugee camp
- Could get it from other refugees brought over from camps
- Alcohol and Gla (methamphetamine) perceived drug of choice
- Meth use is problem





Quotes

• Teen Groups

- “I never heard of those (meth) until I came to the U.S. Yeah and we learn from school and stuff.”
- If they see other people do it they will start doing it just to be cool and like stuff like that.”
- “They talk about drugs, like all drugs, but most about weed.”
- “ (Meth) It’s a problem, but not a big of a problem though.”

• Parent Groups

- “We know of other Karen kids in other apartments using drugs but do not know what kind of drugs they are
- “I fear when they grow up they use because of their friends”
- “25-30 teenagers in this apartment complex uses drugs”
- “ I don’t know if the drugs are coming from the camps into the Karen neighborhoods or vice versa.

Factors affecting Perceptions/Accounts

- Sex
 - The males (teen and adult) in our study perceived much more meth use than females
 - Use could be gendered
- Age
 - Adults perceive meth use a greater problem than teens
- Length in U.S.
 - Both groups had same average, yet perceptions vary across groups re: scope of problem.





Summary

- Broader context:
 - Meth use among middle and high school students in Nebraska has remained stable over time
 - 1.1% of all students surveyed in 2012 and 2014 report trying methamphetamines (Radatz, Vandenberg, and Sample, 2015)
- Kids do not see lots of use in their friends (Karen or American)
- Parents introduced to meth use in refugee camp
- Teens learned about meth at Omaha school
- Women found little use in refugee camps
- Men/boys report seeing more use of meth in camps



Conclusion

- More rapid “Americanization” of youth than parents regarding drug use patterns
- Geographic location may matter in terms of apartment complexes, buildings, and other locations in Omaha
- Gender effects on perceptions of drug use
- Meth use appears more likely among those adjudicated as delinquent than in broader Karen youth population



Thank you!
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