

Assault and Homicide Associated with Amphetamine Abuse

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The author describes the histories of 13 persons who committed homicide while intoxicated with amphetamines. In most of these cases, the events leading to the homicidal act were directly related to amphetamine-induced paranoid thinking, panic, emotional lability, or lowered impulse control. The most important variables associated with these cases included predisposing personality, environmental circumstances, and the use of other drugs.

RECENT STORIES in the news media have linked the use of drugs with a series of bizarre murders. Often it is not clearly stated what type of drug is in question, and in many cases several types of drugs have been used. There is a need to distinguish as clearly as possible the specific types of drugs associated with aggression and violence.

The consensus among those who work closely with problems of drug abuse is that the opiates do not tend to induce unwarranted violence (1). For years, alcohol and sedatives have been associated by most investigators with an increased incidence of violence that is thought to be secondary to a lowering of impulse control (2). Reports from law-enforcement personnel and psychiatrists, as well as from drug abusers themselves, have indicated that amphetamines may also be related to aggressive behavior.

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perhaps more specifically than any other group of drugs (3,4).

I recently examined four persons who committed murder after taking large doses of amphetamines. The interviews were held after the court proceedings were over. I have outlined below three of these cases to illustrate the direct effect of amphetamine-induced paranoid ideation or emotional lability leading to the violent act. These three cases were chosen because of the absence of other variables that often play a part in the violence associated with drug abuse.

Case Reports

The first case illustrates the rapid evolution of paranoid thinking after acute high-dose use (repeated drug use over several hours) of amphetamines in an effort to combat the effects of sleep deprivation.

Case 1. This 27-year-old truck driver shot his boss in the back of the head because he thought the boss was trying to release poison gas into the back seat of the car in which he was riding. "I thought they had gassed me. My boss kept reaching down beside him and pulling on something. I rolled the window down to let the gas out. I got nauseated and passed out due to the gas; I then got up on my elbow and shot my boss, who was driving."

Over the previous 20 hours, in order to make a nonstop 1,600-mile trip, Mr. A had ingested 180 mg. of amphetamine; he had not slept for 48 hours. Mr. A usually used less than 40 mg. of amphetamine on long trips. Six to eight hours before the murder, he had become increasingly suspicious that someone had planted drugs on his truck. At this point, Mr. A called a highway patrolman, related his suspicions in a bizarre manner, and was taken to the local jail for safe-keeping.

While at the jail, he kept seeing a man hiding and watching him from across the street. "Then there were muffled voices in the next room and they tried to gas me. I could hear the hissing. I got down and looked under the door; I saw feet there! I still remember them. Both the jailer and