

Crank Babies

Methamphetamine drugs may be the worst drugs to hit America. These are drugs like ice, crystal, speed and crank. A national household survey estimates almost nine and one-half million Americans have tried one of these drugs. Well, researchers now are looking at how they impact the most defenseless lives of all...newborn babies.

AH, THE MIRACLE OF LIFE. TEN LITTLE FINGERS, TEN TOES AND WHAT A CUTE NOSE! PARENTS HOPE FOR A GIRL OR A BOY. BUT MOST OF ALL... PARENTS WANT THEIR CHILD TO BE AS HEALTHY AS THIS ONE.

New mother

"...just hoping that he was nice and healthy, and everything is okay. Yeah. He's been really healthy."

IT DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK OUT THIS WAY. IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA 20 OUT OF EVERY 1,000 BABIES BORN WILL HAVE SOME KIND OF MAJOR BIRTH DEFECT. AND THAT NUMBER INCREASES WHEN MOTHERS ABUSE DRUGS DURING PREGNANCY.

Dr. Michael Sherman/Neonatologist

"You are talking about four times more birth defects with cocaine. You are talking about six times more birth defects... if you are talking about methamphetamine."

WHAT IS METHAMPHETAMINE? IT'S A GROUP OF ILLEGAL AND DANGEROUS DRUGS THAT ARE SNORTED, SWALLOWED, SMOKED OR INJECTED AND CAUSE THE BRAIN TO BE FLOODED WITH DOPAMINE, WHICH IS A CHEMICAL THAT STIMULATES PLEASURE.

THE TEMPORARY PLEASURE FROM DRUG USE COMES WITH A COST. MEMORY LOSS, PSYCHOSES, BRAIN DAMAGE, HEART DAMAGE, HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE, INSOMNIA, AND INTENSE PARANOIA ARE JUST SOME OF THE POSSIBILITIES. AND WHAT DOES METH DO TO A NEWBORN BABY?

Dr. Sherman

"Effects on the brain and spinal cord, such as spina bifida, effects on the heart, effects on the kidneys, where you may have water or malformation of the kidney, particularly. There is a high occurrence of problems with the development of the intestines. There might be skeletal abnormalities, where they might have club foot, or developmental abnormalities or missing parts of their arms or legs as a consequence of this abuse."

DR. MICHAEL SHERMAN, CHIEF OF NEONATOLOGY AT UC DAVIS MEDICAL CENTER, IS STUDYING HOW DEVASTATING THE EFFECTS OF METH CAN BE TO NEWBORN BABIES.

Dr. Sherman

“This is called gastroschisis – it’s where there is a hole in the abdomen. All of the intestines are outside the body. This is a common birth defect in mothers who abuse methamphetamine and cocaine before birth...particularly methamphetamine.”

THIS LITTLE ONE’S HEART MUSCLE WAS SO UNDERDEVELOPED IT STOPPED WORKING SHORTLY AFTER BIRTH.

Dr. Sherman

“This is where she had her first surgery, and she then had the surgery again. And here...down here...is where the pacemaker is.”

AFTER RECOVERING FROM SEVERAL HEART SURGERIES AND EVEN NEEDING A PACEMAKER TO SURVIVE THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF LIFE, THIS DRUG-EXPOSED BABY STILL HAS MANY MORE BATTLES TO OVERCOME.

Dr. Sherman

“But the long-term consequences of its effects in the development of the brain may last for years and years and years.”

Myrna Terry, foster parent

“There was a time when this child could only sit for about five minutes.”

FOSTER PARENTS LIKE MYRNA TERRY KNOW THOSE CONSEQUENCES. SHE TAKES DRUG-EXPOSED INFANTS STRAIGHT FROM THE HOSPITAL NURSERY INTO HER HEART AND HOME. SHE LOVES AND CARES FOR THE BABIES WHO ARE VICTIMS OF THE EFFECTS OF DRUG ABUSE.

Myrna

“The sleepless nights... we went through that...seemed like forever because even when his body was rid of the drugs, he still had problem with sleeping. Sleep disorder has always been a problem for him.”

Dr. Sherman

“The babies may often have sleep disturbances...because it does effect transmitters in the brain. So these babies have been described as occasionally irritable babies.”

THE EFFECTS OF METH ON BABIES CONTINUE LONG AFTER BIRTH. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THESE CHILDREN START SCHOOL?

Dr. Sherman

“It is difficult to assess how they are going to do at school. Will they have learning disabilities, will they be hyperactive? What will be the really long-term consequences?”

“Don’t use drugs. This can result in a very serious problem for your baby.”

Myrna

“Think of the damage that not only you are imposing on yourself but this innocent child, and the way society looks at this child.”

These drugs are affecting and, in fact, ruining millions of lives. Researchers have just begun to look at the immediate effects of meth, but the long-term effects to children born to meth-addicted mothers are still unknown.