Substance Use and Treatment Seeking in Rural and Urban Areas of the Texas-Mexico Border

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Household surveys were conducted with 1191 adults living on the Texas-Mexico border, in two urban sites (El Paso, and urban areas of the Rio Grande Valley) and one rural site (colonias in the Rio Grande Valley). Drug use behaviors and treatment seeking varied across sites, although not systematically between urban and rural areas. Binge drinking and alcohol dependence were significantly higher among residents of colonias than urban residents in the same counties, but alcohol abuse, illicit drug use and drug dependence and abuse were similar in all three sites. Colonia residents reported drugs as easier to get than did urban residents, and twice as many colonia as urban residents said they observed a lot of alcohol or drug abuse in their neighborhoods. In all sites, health concerns were the most often given reason for limiting one's own drug or heavy alcohol use; potential problems with friends or family were also important, especially in colonias. Colonia residents were somewhat more likely than urban residents to say they would seek medical or professional help if they had a substance abuse problem. Among those with a substance abuse or dependence problem, urban residents of the Valley were the least likely to have ever received treatment or counseling while urban residents of El Paso were the most likely. However, participation in self-help groups was equally high in all three sites, as was motivation for treatment now if it were affordable and accessible. Barriers to having received treatment in the past tended to be logistic (cost, lack of childcare or transportation) rather than cultural (language or discomfort with providers from a different ethnic background). Supported by NIDA grant #R01-DA-14794.