

Note: This is an English-language translation of a Spanish-language story. I spotted a trend among numerous police reports and started to put together a story. Reporters from my company's television station and English-language newspaper followed my lead and developed stories of their that complimented my work.

## T-Bars, Another Drug In Area Schools

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By **SERGIO CHAPA** / *Al Día*

Janet Gonzalez knows that deadly things can come in small packages.

The Oak Cliff mother said her son Eric Gonzalez, 16, almost lost his life last Monday from an overdose of a drug known among area teens as T-bars.

According to police reports, T-bars are a prescription medication sold under the brand name Xanax or its generic name alprazolam.

The police reports reveal that use of this drug is increasing among Hispanic teenagers. One indication of that consumption is the number of arrests for unlawful alprazolam possession increased from 21 in 2001 to 160 in 2006.

In the first three months of this year, Dallas police have arrested 56 adults and teenagers for possession of T-Bars.

Among the most recent arrests were two students from Oak Cliff schools.

Jeremy Morris, an 18-year-old student at the Dallas Can Academy on East Twelfth Street, was arrested on March 1.

Daniel Hernandez, another 18-year-old student at the Redirections Alternative School on Village Fair Drive, was also arrested for possession of the drug.

According to information from WFAA, a young Hispanic teen from the Pleasant Grove area of Dallas died on Sunday from what appeared to an overdose of the drug.

The incident was not reported to police because the boy died at a hospital.

Dallas County Medical Examiner's records obtained by the Dallas Morning News revealed that at least two teenagers died from the consumption of T-bars last year.

In another incident, Tiburcio Garcia, father of a 14-year-old Sergio Garcia, said his son is recovering at a local hospital after an overdose from the drug on Wednesday.

"He was acting up in school, he didn't want to attend," the father said adding that his son was already under probation for a crime that he did not care to specify.

## **A Mother's Story**

Janet Gonzalez said her son ran away from home before the incident occurred because she is a strict mother and wanted him to stay away from drugs and alcohol.

Regardless, Gonzalez said she ran to her son's side when she found out about his overdose at a house in Cockrell Hill where he had been staying. She said Eric's skin was blue, he wasn't breathing and he didn't have a pulse.

"If I hadn't called 911 at the very instant, I would have lost my son," she said. "The doctors told me that he had alcohol and drugs in his system. He was connected to an artificial respirator."

The concerned mother thought Eric was recovering and making progress but the teenager took off again to live at his girlfriend's house where he was arrested for an alleged theft.

Gonzalez wanted all parents to know that T-bars are a dangerous drug.

"It was his first experience (with the drug) and it almost cost him his life," she said.

Eric could not be reached for comment on Friday, but he allegedly told his mother that the drug can be found everywhere.

## **Dangerous Habit**

James Gilley, owner of Gilley's Pharmacy on West Jefferson Boulevard in Oak Cliff, said Xanax is not classified as an addictive narcotic but it can be habit-forming.

"In my opinion, it can lead to addiction," he said.

Gilley said the drug comes in bar-shaped tablets of 0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 1 mg, and 2 mg, of which the latter is the most popular among young people because it can be broken into pieces.

The anti-anxiety drug is used as a muscle relaxant, but Gillery said over consumption or mixing it with alcohol or other drugs can relax the heart to point of death.

Gillery said that even his own granddaughter has seen abuse of T-bars at her school in Midlothian.

"It's in all the schools," he assured.

According to the 2017 National Drug Threat Assessment from the U.S. Department of Justice, the abuse of alprazolam and other prescription medications is one of the fastest growing sectors of drug abuse.

## **Pharmacy Parties**

Julian Bernal, who oversees the Dallas Police Department's Narcotics Division, said the use of T-Bars has not reached the same level of abuse in schools as "cheese" heroin, but worries officials all the same.

He added that police have information about the existence of pharm parties or pharmacy parties where teenagers raid their parties medicine cabinets and consume the pills amongst themselves.

Yet police have not actually found any of those illegal parties.

Even though the drug is available without a prescription in Mexico and Internet pharmacies, Bernal said the most common source is a parent's medicine cabinet.

Carlos Cruz, a local drug and gang expert, said police have not been able to locate the parties because they are always among close friends.

"They are intimate parties among friends, one or two or three kids," he said.

Cruz said that T-Bars are probably not the only drug being consumed at those parties.

"They raid their parents' medicine cabinets looking for whatever medication they can find," he said. "Many times, the parents get sick, recover and stop taking their medicine but keep the pills for years."

Cruz said the typical consumer of T-Bars or children who participate in pharm parties are unsupervised children whose parents are probably too tired or distracted from work.

After the overdose of her son, Janet Gonzalez said she is in favor of school inspecting all students in search of drugs or weapons.

"The inspections bothered me before," she said referring to a middle school where Eric's sister attends classes. "But now it doesn't matter. This is very dangerous."

*Rebecca Lopez from WFAA and Jason Trahan from the Dallas Morning News contributed to this report.*

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