

***New CESAR Special Report Suggests Reasons Why The
Heroin Epidemic In Baltimore Is Not Evident In Available Indicators***

Recently, anthropologists at the University of Maryland at College Park formulated a research strategy to explain the difference between the subjectively perceived heroin epidemic in Baltimore City on the part of knowledgeable professionals and the lack of dramatic increases in the traditional epidemiologic indicators of drug use. A "quantitative" research strategy, one that uses qualitative methodologies to interpret quantitative data, was developed. Interviews were conducted with medical, treatment, and law enforcement professionals and with heroin addicts who had recently entered treatment. Highlights of the findings are listed below:

- Heroin is available, cheap, and easy to get in Baltimore. The hassles of the heroin-using life have been considerably reduced, something researchers called the "hog heaven" model. As one female interviewee put it:

"... two or three years ago you had to get \$25 together. Now you get \$10 together and you're basically doing the same thing."
- Many young heroin users in Baltimore today seem to have gotten into heroin through cocaine. This is contrary to the traditionally perceived patterns of drug use, wherein cocaine and heroin abuse are seen as distinct phenomena. Many of the cocaine addicts needed something that would mellow them out, that would bring them down after they got "coked out."
- Two reasons help explain why the standard epidemiologic indicators had not increased as one would have thought. First, institutional policies regarding drug use are said to have shifted away from providing resources for drug treatment. Second, most indicators are gathered in worst-case institutional settings (e.g., hospital emergency rooms), settings that users seek out as a last resort when their situation turns desperate, and the "hog heaven" situation in Baltimore is less likely to make addicts desperate.
- Combining qualitative and quantitative methods can provide a better understanding of the relationship between human situations and indicators that professionals define to understand them.

Call CESAR at (301) 403-8329 to obtain a complimentary copy of the report, *Investigating Recent Trends in Heroin Use in Baltimore City: A Pilot 'Quantitative' Research Project*, by Michael H. Agar and R. Owen Murdoch, University of Maryland, Department of Anthropology.

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