

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park *

A Check on the Pulse of the Nation's Drug Problem

Since the spring of 1994, Abt Associates, under contract with the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), has conducted *Pulse Check*, a quarterly series of telephone conversations with drug ethnographers and epidemiologists, law enforcement agents, and treatment providers across the nation. The goal is to obtain a current profile of drug use and availability--a quick check on the pulse of the nation's drug abuse problem. The qualitative information is intended to supplement traditional sources of drug abuse data, which often are a year or more old by the time they are released for publication. Following are some of the findings of the December 1994 *Pulse Check*.

- Heroin use is appearing among nontraditional groups, including teenagers, young adults, females, and middle and upper-middle income persons. In addition, alternative methods of use, such as snorting and smoking, are emerging. For example, "in San Francisco, it was reported that heroin is being mixed with marijuana or tobacco, and then smoked" (p. 6).
- Cocaine use remains stable at high levels and is now being used by people of all ages and ethnicities. "In addition, sources in Denver, Los Angeles, and San Francisco reported seeing more women using cocaine" (p. 8).
- Marijuana use is rising among people of all ages and ethnicities, with a specific increase in marijuana use among youth. Treatment providers also report increases in people seeking treatment for marijuana, with "one large rural program for adult substance abusers . . . report[ing] that almost 70% of its clientele have marijuana as their primary substance abuse problem" (p. 11).
- Ethnographers and treatment providers have seen a rise in the use of unusual varieties of hallucinogens, especially among youth. "The Washington, D.C. police contact reported the appearance of a hallucinogen that is extracted from fluid excreted by a variety of toad" (p. 15).
- An increase in amphetamine and methamphetamine use has also been reported, often in combination with other drugs. "In Denver the practice of injecting methamphetamine alone or with cocaine is described as popular, particularly among white young adults" (p. 15).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *Pulse Check: National Trends in Drug Abuse*, December 1994. To receive a complimentary copy of the report, please contact the ONDCP Drugs and Crime Clearinghouse at 800-666-3332.

How Does Geocoding Apply to Substance Abuse Research?

To discover the practical applications of geocoding, order our new report, "Location of Drug-Using Arrestees and Treatment Centers in Washington, D.C.: A Geocoding Demonstration", by K. Petronis, C. Johnson, and E. D. Wish. A copy with black and white maps is available at no charge. A copy with color maps is available for \$15.00. Please contact CESAR for more information.

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