

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park

CESAR Completes First Statewide Pulse Check Pilot Study

CESAR recently completed a pilot study of the Maryland Pulse Check, the first state-level qualitative drug use monitoring project modeled after the Office of National Drug Control Policy's National Pulse Check program. The goal of the Maryland Pulse Check is to obtain qualitative data from interviews with a variety of professionals working on the front lines of the drug problem in Maryland and to provide that information in a timely manner to state and local policymakers, program administrators, and community activists. To determine the feasibility of conducting a Pulse Check project on a state level, CESAR compiled lists of contacts and then conducted preliminary telephone interviews to recruit potential participants. This past fall, CESAR pilot tested the project in two Maryland localities--Allegany County and Baltimore City. Among the findings were the following:

- "Use of inhalants has raised considerable concern among local law enforcement agencies, school administrators, and treatment specialists [in Allegany County]. Of primary concern has been the increasing number of students in the junior and senior high schools who are experimenting by 'huffing' such substances as 'white-out,' gold spray paint, computer cleaner, and nitrous oxide" (p. 7).
- In Allegany County, "recent concern . . . has been raised over the increasing number of adolescents who have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD). Such diagnoses have led to an increase in the amount of Ritalin (methylphenidate) that is prescribed throughout the county. School and law enforcement officials have subsequently noticed an increase in the drug's availability on the black market, for adult and adolescent use" (p. 8).
- In Baltimore City, "treatment, prevention, and ER sources report high rates of polydrug use among their clients. Cocaine and heroin combinations are common. . . . Many also use heroin and cocaine with alcohol" (p. 9).
- "Several treatment and prevention contacts [in Baltimore City] report an increase in Clonidine (an antihypertensive) use among methadone clients during the past three years. Clonidine is said to magnify or intensify the effect of methadone" (p. 12).

The authors concluded from the pilot study that the Maryland Pulse Check is a unique method of collecting information on emerging community drug trends that have not yet registered in the quantitative indicators. CESAR is currently exploring options for funding a future statewide Maryland Pulse Check study.

SOURCE: Heather L. Pfeifer, Margaret Hsu, and Eric D. Wish, *Using Qualitative Research to Examine Emerging Drug Trends: The Maryland Pulse Check Project Pilot Study*, February 1996. Presented at the March 1996 meeting of the American Criminal Justice Society. For more information, contact Heather Pfeifer of CESAR at 301-403-8329.

RESULTS OF MARYLAND PULSE CHECK PILOT STUDY NOW AVAILABLE

To receive a complimentary copy of "Using Qualitative Research to Examine Emerging Drug Trends: The Maryland Pulse Check Project Pilot Study" contact CESAR by phone (301-403-8329), fax (301-403-8342), or e-mail (cesar@cesar.umd.edu).

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