

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland at College Park

***National Pulse Check Quarterly Reports Reveal a
Change in Traditional Cocaine and Heroin Drug Markets***

Data from the Summer 1995 and the Fall 1995 *Pulse Check* reports show that cocaine use has stabilized or declined across the nation and heroin use has increased, especially among young and middle-income adults. While cocaine use remains a serious problem in many areas, attitudes toward the drug may be changing. Ethnographers in Florida and Delaware indicate that cocaine use is "not as popular among adolescents and young adults as it once was"; it "is not seen as fashionable" (Fall 1995, p. 8). On the other hand, ethnographers in many areas report increased heroin use among teens and young adults, particularly middle-class suburbanites. Teens interviewed in Chicago say they "prefer heroin over cocaine because they perceive it to be a drug which makes the user 'calm, not crazy'" (Fall 1995, p. 5).

The declining demand for cocaine, coupled with the increasing demand for heroin, has apparently affected the drug markets. Traditionally, heroin and cocaine are sold by separate distributors, often in different areas of a city. However, an increasing number of sources, including the District of Columbia and Philadelphia, are reporting "double-breasted" dealing or "one plus one" sales, in which cocaine and heroin are sold by the same person (Fall 1995, pp. 6-7). In some areas where cocaine is seen as "going out of style", this may represent a transitional market trend in which dealers are "switching the product line and offering both drugs during the transition" (Summer 1995, p. 9). In New York and Atlanta, ethnographers report that some former crack sellers have switched over completely to heroin sales (Summer 1995, p. 7).

This deviation from the traditional single drug market has already had noticeable effects on heroin quality. Individuals who have not previously dealt heroin may not know enough about the drug to cut and package it properly. In New York, users report that inexperienced dealers often cut the heroin inconsistently; heroin from the same dealer may range in purity from 2% to 30%. In addition, it has also been reported that new heroin dealers may adulterate the heroin with "crazy stuff" not typically used to dilute heroin (Summer 1995, p. 7). These practices could result in an increased number of heroin overdoses or "increased numbers of heroin users appearing at emergency rooms for problems related to the substance with which heroin is mixed" (Fall 1995, p. 6). Increases in the number of heroin-related emergency room visits in the Baltimore Metro area have already been reported (see CESAR FAX, Volume 4, Issue 48).

Pulse Check uses quarterly conversations with police, ethnographers and epidemiologists working in the drug field, and providers of drug treatment services across the country to develop an up-to-date picture of what is going on in the world of illegal drug use. To receive a complimentary copy of the Summer 1995 or the Fall 1995 report, please contact the Office of National Drug Control Policy's Drugs and Crime Clearinghouse at 800-666-3332.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), *Pulse Check: National Trends in Drug Abuse*, Summer 1995 and Fall 1995.

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CESAR FAX is supported by a grant from the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention.

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.. 301-403-8329 (voice) .. 301-403-8342 (fax) .. CESAR@cesar.umd.edu (e-mail) ..