

## A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

### *International Trends in Drug Abuse: Highlights from a Recent Community Epidemiology Work Group Meeting*

Since 1976, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has been sponsoring the Community Epidemiology Work Group (CEWG), a network of epidemiologists and researchers that meets semiannually to discuss both current and emerging substance abuse problems in the United States. In addition, the CEWG "provides a forum for the discussion of related patterns and trends in other selected areas and regions of the world" (p. 1). At the 43rd CEWG meeting held last December, representatives from Australia, Canada, China, India, Mexico, South Africa, and Thailand presented information about drug use trends in their countries. Following were among the highlights of their presentations:

- In **Australia**, marijuana is the most popular illicit drug, followed by amphetamines. While cocaine is not readily available in Australia, heroin is, especially among the arrestee population. Nineteen percent of youth in detention centers and 40% of adult prisoners have used heroin at least once in their lifetime.
- Marijuana is the drug of choice in **Canada's** cities--48% of youth aged 15-19 in British Columbia use marijuana, and 61% of treatment clients in Toronto reported marijuana as a major problem. In addition, powder cocaine and crack use were reported as serious problems in several cities.
- Cocaine is the most common drug of abuse among treatment clients in **Mexico**, followed by marijuana and inhalants.
- In **South Africa**, marijuana and methaqualone are the most frequently abused substances, often used in combination. There are also reports that crack cocaine, powder cocaine, and heroin use are increasing.
- As a result of a brief heroin shortage in 1996, many addicts in **Thailand** began injecting the drug, and there are reports of lower purity heroin being diluted with barbiturates and benzodiazepines. In addition, methamphetamine use continues to be popular, especially among students, and the number of methamphetamine laboratories in Thailand has increased.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Community Epidemiology Work Group, "Epidemiologic Trends in Drug Abuse Advance Report," December 1997. To obtain a copy of the report, contact the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) at 800-729-6686. For more information about the CEWG, as well as State Epidemiology Work Groups (SEWGs), visit the CEWG home page on the world wide web ([www.cdmgroup.com/cewg](http://www.cdmgroup.com/cewg)).

• 301-403-8329 (voice) • 301-403-8342 (fax) • [CESAR@cesar.umd.edu](mailto:CESAR@cesar.umd.edu) • [www.cesar.umd.edu](http://www.cesar.umd.edu) •  
CESAR FAX is supported by a grant from the Governor's Office of Crime Control & Prevention.  
CESAR FAX may be copied without permission. Please cite CESAR as the source.