

Middle Class Drug Users Turn To Heroin

In what some characterize as an act of rebellion against the flashy cocaine culture of the 1980s, New York City's middle-class drug users are turning in greater numbers to heroin, finding it cheap, potent, easy to buy and free of the harrowing stigma associated with the 1960s junkie.

When Patricia Marback, a stockbroker and mother of two, died of an apparent overdose recently after a night of snorting heroin with her husband in their New York Upper West Side apartment, friends and colleagues were shocked. But the death of Marback, who typified success in many ways, also exemplifies the drug's growing clutch on the professional class.

At rehabilitation centers and hospitals around the city, doctors and drug counselors report treating a growing number of professionals and college students for heroin addiction. At the same time, emergency rooms have seen a steady increase in heroin overdose patients in the last few years.

Although heroin's resurgence first hit the West Coast five years ago, when it was embraced by Hollywood trendsetters and grunge musicians tired of cocaine's manic high, the drug's popularity has made a bold leap from the ghettos of New York to the plush Upper West Side apartments of the city's young urban professionals.

"We're seeing more lawyers, bankers, stockbrokers," said Dr. Robert B. Millman, director of alcohol and substance abuse services at

the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic of the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center.

"It has become a frequent phenomenon in the affluent working population. Twenty years ago, people would run out of the room if someone had it. Now it's reasonable to think that young, successful people know someone else who has done it."

For many college-educated drug users, most of whom have experience with cocaine, switching to heroin is no longer as unconscionable as it seemed a few years ago for one primary reason: the drug can now be snorted.

Snorting the drug, rather than injecting it intravenously, has vanquished many users' fears of contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, from dirty needles and way-laid visions of dope fiends, track marks coursing down their arms, searching for a sturdy vein to shoot up. Heroin has been civilized in the eyes of many middle-class users.

Addicts and doctors say the growing fascination with heroin among the upper and middle classes is also rooted in distaste for the immediate past: a cliché image of the driven, money-grubbing materialism of the 1980s, a decade in which introspection was cast aside for corporate networking, social climbing and ruthless ambition.

In its place, they say, a counter-culture has arisen, one that mimics the soul searching of the 1960s with its emphasis on feeling and decompressing.

"This is a cultural rejection of the cocaine 1980s," said one recently recovered 29-year-old college-educated heroin addict who is a musician.

"Those values are repulsive to me. I hated everything about it. Cocaine makes people violent and righteous. Heroin makes you peaceful and lucid and calm and thoughtful, dare I say, clairvoyant. It's the greatest high in the world."

Indeed, much of heroin's mystique is wrapped up in nostalgia for a milder, more creative drug culture that harkens back to people like Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Miles Davis and the late Jerry Garcia, the Grateful Dead leader who had a relentless battle with heroin.

And in a drug world devastated by the harshness of crack-cocaine in a smokable form - heroin is also an attempt, among some users, to romanticize and reclaim at least one type of drug once again.

"Cocaine was always the drug of the affluent, said John Galea, supervisor of the street studies unit for the New York Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. "Even freebasing cocaine was a rich person's habit," he said, referring to the practice of smoking cocaine powder treated with ether and reduced to a crystalline base.

"But when crack took over and became this monster it has become," he continued, "crack took the place of heroin on the totem pole. Crackheads are now at the bottom of the totem pole."

Dr. David M. Ockert, executive

director of the Parallax Center, an outpatient chemical dependency treatment center, has noticed an increase in college-educated users.

"We're coming off a generation where it was OK to snort cocaine," he said. "Now you have this white powder and no HIV fears. It has taken it out of the ghetto. And this has allowed a lot of people - the very broad middle class - access to it without the stigma."

Heroin, although more expensive than crack, is cheaper than cocaine, and the high can last six hours or more, as opposed to just a short while. One glassine envelope, which usually contains somewhat less than a quarter of one gram of heroin, costs \$10 on the street.

As of late, it has become just as easy to find in New York as crack, users and state substance-abuse employees say.

"There is much more heroin on the street than I have seen before," said the musician, who lives near New York's East Village. "It's all over the place. It's literally available on my doorstep."

Investigators said that they found two glassine envelopes of heroin in the Marbacks' apartment and that Marback told them he had bought those and three others that the couple had already consumed at 106th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, near Columbia University.

In their quest to lure more customers away from cocaine and increase their profits, heroin makers and dealers have refined and marketed the drug in a way that makes it

seem less harmful and dangerous to most new users.

Ten, 15 and 20 years ago, users usually needed to inject the drug intravenously because of its low quality. Back then, the drug they bought was only 3 percent to 10 percent pure. The rest consisted of dilutants. Today in New York City, a major marketplace for some of the country's most powerful heroin, the drug's potency has in some cases reached 80 percent. The heroin recovered by the police from the Marback's residence tested nearly 80 percent pure, said Patrick Harnett, commanding officer of the Police Department's narcotics division.

But the drug has also become more dangerous for new users. Higher potency increases the likelihood of overdose, especially if people treat heroin like cocaine, which requires larger doses to get high. In addition, buyers don't always know what has been mixed with the heroin. In the last two weeks alone, eight people have showed up for treatment at the Metropolitan Hospital Center on the Upper East Side after overdosing on heroin that was cut with scopolamine, a drug used for motion sickness and nausea, said Dr. Rania Habal, an emergency room physician at the hospital.

The heroin's street name is Black Magic. Some of the emergency cases had just started using heroin, Dr. Habal said.

For some new users, there is also a certain thrill in braving the barrier between the routine and the forbidden: the intermingling of Wall Street

with the hardcore avenues of drug addicts can be just as alluring as the powder itself.

"One of the things I found myself missing most is the adventure of copping," said one woman, another recently recovered addict, about buying heroin on the streets. "Having grown up in a middle-class Midwestern suburb, the fact that I could handle brutal kids dealing brutal drugs and not get killed or held up is an achievement."

What also makes heroin so appealing to users is the drug's subtlety, doctors and former addicts say. Unlike hallucinogenics, and to a certain extent cocaine, heroin works upon the body in more subdued ways. Users can still complete their legal briefs, do the laundry and sit around a table with friends at a restaurant, and the odds are no one will ever know.

That false sense of security, however, belies the drug's intense hold on the body and mind.

With no frame of reference, former cocaine users mislead themselves into thinking they can handle heroin's clutch.

They are almost always mistaken, former addicts say.

The young woman, an administrative assistant for a human rights group who kicked the habit after a one-year struggle, said she was aware of the potential for addiction, she just didn't realize its power.

At one point, she even injected the drug because it was less expensive to get high that way.

Bank Robber Captured

Portland Police arrested a suspect Wednesday morning August 9, 1995 in connection with two Northeast Portland bank robberies. Robbery detectives and FBI agents subsequently charged the man with a total of four bank robberies.

Portland Police and FBI agents responded to the Washington Mutual Savings and Loan at 3030 NE Weidler about 9:10 a.m. on the report of a robbery. Shortly thereafter, officers were dispatched on another robbery at the Bank of America at 6901 N. E. Sandy Blvd. As officers arrived witnesses described the suspect and the direction he fled.

Near N. W. 70th and Sandy Blvd. a construction worker notified officers that a man had run up and stolen his Ford Pickup. Officers followed

the suspect to Providence Hospital, where a witness observed him drive into a parking lot. Officers searched the area, but did not find the pickup or suspect.

FBI agents had furnished officers with a bank surveillance photo of an individual wanted in connection with the August 7th robbery of the Hayden Island First Interstate. This suspect closely matched the description of the suspect in today's robberies.

Sergeant Greg Hendricks was returning to Central Precinct on E. Burnside St. After assisting in the search of Providence Hospital. He observed a vehicle near S. E. Grand Ave., with two men in the front seat and one crouched down in the back. As Sgt. Hendricks watched the man

in the back looked directly at him. Sgt. Hendricks had a photo of the suspect and realized that it was the person in the car. With several other officers, the vehicle was stopped eastbound on I-84 near the Lloyd Center. All three subjects were initially taken into custody.

Allegedly, the suspect, identified as William E. Spicer, DOB 11-27-67, left the stolen pickup near N. E. 66th Ave., and Glisan St. and obtained a ride from the other men. They were later released.

Investigators said that they did recover money and have charged Spicer with bank robbery for the incidents on Wednesday, and also in connection with robberies at two other financial institutions during the last week.

Call For Human Rights Award Nominees

The Metropolitan Human Rights Commission is looking for nominations for its annual recognition awards, scheduled for Oct. 26.

The organization presents the Russell A. Peyton award each year for "outstanding service and commitment to protecting the human rights of all persons within the city of Portland and Multnomah County."

Organization officials said nominees should have demonstrated his or her commitment over a long period of time and in a way that serves to support the rights of a broad spectrum of people.

The commission will also give a Business Diversity Award for outstanding results in recruiting and maintaining a diverse workforce.

A Non-profit Diversity Award will go to a public service organization that "demonstrates its core values by incorporating cross-cultural actions into its daily activities and maintaining a diverse workforce."

One of the most uplifting events of the award dinner is the Community Harmony Award.

"Throughout our community there are many people and organizations who cross ethnic and cultural lines to respond to injustice and promote harmony as a routine part of their daily lives," commission officials said.

The commission will recognize these kinds of efforts in a booklet that will be distributed at the dinner.

Nominations may be submitted to the commission by writing an account, up to one page in length, highlighting the person's or organization's achievements

and sending it to the commission office at 1120 S.W. Fifth Ave., Room 516, Portland, OR 97204-1989.

The deadline for submission is Friday, Sept. 1.

The award dinner is known for its excellent food and diverse participants.

Commission officials said it's a wonderful way to support the civil and human rights of everyone.

The event will be held Oct. 26 from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Beaumont Middle School on Fremont and 42nd Avenue in northeast Portland.



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