

know how many people can afford to do it if they don't deal."

This senior says he feels fairly safe selling cocaine in Chapel Hill, even though trafficking cocaine is a felony. "The police in Chapel Hill are human. But it is scary when you buy it from someone. You meet a lot of people buying it, and you might even buy it from someone you don't know.

"What you buy is never really pure," he explains. He says cocaine is usually cut three or four times with other substances before it gets to the user. Procaine (a local anesthetic), lactose (milk sugar) and manitol (a crystalline alcohol) are commonly cut with cocaine, he says.

Speed, or amphetamines, also sometimes is cut into cocaine, he says. "I know one guy who cuts stuff into coke depending on who he's selling it to. And everyone always sells grams that are already weighed. There seems to be little ethics involved in this business," he says. "Everyone's always getting ripped off. But the nature of the drug is that everybody likes it so much that nobody cares."

Witkin says what is sold as cocaine on the streets is rarely more than 30 percent or at the most 50 percent pure cocaine.

This dealer says he does cocaine whenever he can get it. "When I have it, I do it every day until it runs out and then I buy some more," he says. The only side effect that bothers him about the drug is its effects after it wears off—what he calls "terminal burnout." "You don't feel physically sick, like with a hangover. But you get eight hours of sleep and you can't figure out why you're so tired."

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A cocaine dealer

That tiredness, says Witkin, is one of several mild withdrawal symptoms, which may also include an increased appetite and increased dreaming. "So in a sense, there is mild physical dependency," he says. "But there's no indication that tolerance develops. You don't need to take higher doses to get the same effect."

Witkin says that psychological dependence does occur with cocaine use. He defines psychological dependence as "dependence whereby a person will engage in some behavior to obtain a substance."

Though the dependency that develops with cocaine use is relatively mild compared to the dependence that develops with such drugs as heroin or morphine, Witkin says that when taken in larger quantities, cocaine has extremely toxic effects. "Tremors can develop, even convulsions, because the brain is so out of kilter. The most prominent cause of death is respiratory failure. After being so excited, the respiratory centers in the brain depress, and there's no stimulus for breathing. The fatal dose in man is estimated at 1.2 grams, but there has been reports of toxic effects with as little as 20 milligrams," he says. "The death can be immediate, especially when cocaine is administered intravenously."

When a person takes cocaine every day for a long period of time, he can experience paranoid psychotic reactions, too. "Sometimes the person may feel like he's being persecuted. He may have hallucinations, like aliens are following him," Witkin says.

Repeated doses of cocaine also usually result in blocked nasal passages, and heavy chronic use can cause a permanent runny nose.

Of three users interviewed, two say they have seen a person go into convulsions after he had injected cocaine, but after several minutes the convulsions stopped and he was OK. Witkin says valium can be used to counteract the effect of cocaine convulsions.

None of the users say they have ever seen anyone use cocaine so regularly that he developed psychotic reactions. No one they know has enough money to buy that much, they say.

Views vary greatly on cocaine laws

By PAM KELLEY

North Carolina House Speaker Carl Stewart (D-Gastonia) announced last week he is planning to form a committee to prepare legislative initiatives for dealing with the state's drug problem.

Stewart said the committee would discuss stiff prison sentences for drug users, drug education for some offenders and additional funding for more undercover operations and law-enforcement officers. The group will then report its findings to the 1981 session of the General Assembly.

Also last week, the Drug Abuse Council, a panel of experts whose studies were funded mainly by the Ford Foundation, said the nation might as well accept some use of drugs as inevitable and cautioned a return to what it called the alarmism of the Nixon administration's war on drugs. The council said that despite the growing use of mind-altering drugs in America, most people who use drugs do not abuse them and pose no threat to society.

These two pronouncements are indicative of the contradictory views the government and coke users hold about cocaine.

Under federal law, the first offense for possession of cocaine can carry a penalty of one year in jail, a fine of \$5,000, or both. Cocaine trafficking carries penalties of a maximum of five years imprisonment or a \$25,000 fine.

Under North Carolina state law, possession of less than one gram of cocaine is a misdemeanor punishable by up to two years imprisonment. Possession of more than a gram is a felony punishable by up to five years imprisonment. To sell or to intend to sell cocaine is a felony that carries a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment.

In this state, 40 agents work in the drug investigation division of the State Bureau of Investigation, says Cuyler Windham, SBI assistant director in charge of drug investigation. "We aim for the traffickers," he says, "but you can't always start at the top." SBI agents do undercover work to catch cocaine traffickers. Many times they pose as buyers. "We're finding it's available pretty easily," he says. In the first six months of 1979, \$42,000 worth of cocaine was confiscated in North Carolina.

Orange County Assistant District Attorney Carl Fox says that many people in the state court system don't view cocaine possession as that serious of a crime, primarily because it is not physically addictive. "But when it comes to people who sell cocaine—that's pretty serious," he says. "They will most likely go to jail."

George Hoffman, owner of George's Cheep Joint on Franklin Street and a self-proclaimed drug user, says the government's stand on drugs is totally worthless, because



its laws are not enforceable. He advocates legalizing drugs like cocaine and selling them in ABC stores to people over 21.

"I think drugs should be taxed. They're a luxury item," he says. "Think of all the money the government could make by selling cocaine."

Fox says that it is the stiff penalties for cocaine possession, not its costs to manufacture, that make it such an expensive commodity.

Laboratories in this area can buy cocaine for research purposes from commercial manufacturers for only \$12 for 7 grams.

University behavioral pharmacologist Jeff Witkin agrees that the government has overplayed the dangers of cocaine. He also points out that cocaine has been incorrectly classified by the government as a narcotic. "Narcotics are drugs that produce relief from pain—like the opiates and morphine. That isn't cocaine's primary effect. Its central effect is a stimulant effect on the central nervous system."

Fox says cocaine is classified as a narcotic under the North Carolina Controlled Substances Act. The North Carolina Drug Commission makes that classification.

The state drug commission also ranks cocaine on the second of six drug schedules in that act. Fox says it is placed that high on the drug schedules because it is psychologically addicting and it has a high potential for abuse. Even if few users abuse it, he says, the potential is still there.

Pam Kelley is University editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

A registered nurse who works in the emergency room of North Carolina Memorial Hospital says she cannot recall treating anyone for a cocaine overdose. "It's probably very rare in this area," she says.

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Jeff Witkin

Even though cocaine can be very dangerous when taken in large amounts or when injected, Witkin says he believes it is the safest of recreational drugs. "Certainly people could take it safely. For the most part, there aren't many problems with snorting it," he says. "It's probably safer than marijuana because it is so rapidly dissipated in the body. Alcohol and marijuana hang around in the body much longer. The good thing about cocaine is that it is so short acting."

"But while there may not be any physical problems, subtle psychological things can result. Anytime you take anything that alters your state of consciousness, you are still going around in a different world, even though it's not bizarre," he says.

Dr. Mario Perez-Reyes, an associate professor of psychiatry who is preparing to do research on the way cocaine is broken down in the body when it is smoked,

says that cocaine's cost makes it a difficult habit to keep, and therefore there are no rehabilitation programs for it in this area. "There might be in high abuse areas like New York or California," he says.

Lucy Minuto, Student Health Services health educator, agrees, saying she also does little work with cocaine users. "Right now, everybody on campus is directing their efforts toward alcohol," she says.

And Linda Miller, of the Charlotte Drug Education Center, says although the center encourages people not to use any drugs, it has put more emphasis on more dangerous drugs.

Even though area drug educators regard cocaine as one of the lesser evils of the drug culture, there are no prospects of legalization or even decriminalization of cocaine, and Witkin says he doesn't see any in the near future. Despite its continuing illegal status, Hoffman of George's Cheep Joint says that cocaine use will continue to flourish. "The laws are unenforceable," he says. "It's just like Prohibition. People will continue to do it."

And the UNC senior who now deals cocaine and has been using it intermittently since he was a senior in high school says he feels no guilt about breaking the law. "It's not like I'm hurting anyone, not like I'm robbing or murdering. I'd feel more guilty about going 70 in a 55 zone. When you do that you're endangering someone else's life. I'm not forcing anyone to buy this. For \$100 a gram, how could I?"

Pam Kelley is University editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*.