

feature

So what's good about 'crack' then?

At the Users Voice, we try to write in a balanced way about drugs, but the only pleasure in crack seems to be those few minutes dopamine rush in the brain. Some ask is it worth it financially, legally or of course, health-wise? Or the feeling suicidal for hours after a binge, knowing in my mind it's just my chemistry going back to normal, but still unable to control the feelings of despair, OR is it worth the endless no. of times we get ripped off by dealers?

Caveat: this article largely refers to the crack use of addicted people, who cannot legally afford their 'crack cocaine' habits. Though we recognise that there are crack users who do not become daily users, even they report that once the 'pipe' is in their mouth, it can be very hard to put down. They practise harm reduction by reducing the nos. of hours they 'crack-binge..' thereby giving themselves A life outside of it.!

Lin, (management committee member of the John Mordaunt Trust) & a drug user very concerned about the poisons being consumed by some crack-users notes, "in parts of SE London, the 'rocks' of crack being bought are Benzocaine (present in car petrol) washed up in bi-carbonate of soda – made up into 'rocks' for smoking. Therefore, what some of us are smoking and/or injecting belongs in cars, not our bodies. Lin says she knows several people who have suffered aneurisms, and strokes as a result of doing this.

Preston Peet, NYC peer of ours who mans the Drugwar.com website says, "crack (and possibly methamphetamines also) are the two substances that give me pause when advocating legalization, knowing personally as I do the absolute horror of getting caught up in addictive use of either. Then I remember, of course, that these horrors stem from outrageously inflated prices, bad-cut of the drug and dodging cops – 3 of the fruits of prohibition. That said, personally I avoid crack."

Amongst users themselves, we couldn't find too many crack-advocates.. UV asked people from the UK Harm Reduction Alliance (UKHRA) to comment on what makes it attractive? In a few words – the response was - intensity of experience. Peter McDermott (chair of UKHRA) notes that "...people use crack for the same reason they ride a roller-coaster. It's thrilling, scary, intense and very compelling."

Most drug use has the same root causes: some combination of chemistry, personal predisposition to that particular pharmacology (that may be genetically encoded,) individual psychology and

cultural drug, set and setting. However, the way in which these things combine is probably unique in every individual though the outcomes are often identical. For example, a rich crack-head can get just as paranoid as a poor crack-head; s/he's simply less likely to rob you to pay for the next rock..

At a recent conference, Aidan Quinn of COCA, pointed out that it is possible to use this drug responsibly: he gave the example of a group of women socialising, who, having put the children to bed, used crack, as many fellow-citizens do with alcohol after work..

Another (male) user – employed, white

are stupid enough to read their garbage.)

While we are busy being scared, we are disabled from looking at the bigger picture: the economics of the drug, its origins and how it became at all popular and available.

In a few simple words, there is ample evidence now to suggest that

- a) A minority of white U.S. politicians were instrumental in getting crack widely distributed in many of their urban (often black) ghettos. Read Gary Webb's book, "Dark Alliance."
- b) That it got a stronghold in such communities as it became an 'easy' way to make money whilst unemployed, not to mention supporting your own crack habit.
- c) It became a status symbol for some of these men. Bottom line – if you sold it, amassed the profit and got away with it, you could buy anything, or anyone you wanted. AND sadly (as far as we're concerned) you became a role-model to all your younger 'brothers' who often decided to do the same.



"Buenos Aires Harm Reduction outreach workers are often HIV+ ex-users. The graffiti here, painted by them says "Don't let AIDS enter your life."

and doing-very-well-thank! – reports sporadic use, but no full on 'commitment..

While I understand that it is essential to dispel the BIG myths around this drug, I also ask, how does it help this demonised-more-than-most group of users when 'right-on' people talk about how 'they can control it?' The answer, of course, is that it doesn't BUT it does wake us up to the fact that the gutter-press has an investment in projecting this 'out of control' stereotype year in/year out. I suggest that this 'investment' is mostly about fear.. their fear, and thus ours (if we

There is A LOT more to say about this. As we do not have the space to share it here, let me say this: when I look back at the my crack-binging, unlike heroin, I can think of very little benefit. At least smack made life temporarily-bearable – I didn't have to feel the existential pain 24/7. As I once commented to my female peers in rehab, "seriously women. This drug is just soooo uneconomical; a few minutes after the last 'pipe,' I just wanted another. So what's the crack wiv dis shit?!!" They all fell about laughing, and then silence as they pondered an answer.