



HIGH-LIGHT



ALCOHOL AND DRUG NEWS BRIEF FOR EMPLOYERS

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SUGARS



While Western Cape is firmly in the grip of a Tik epidemic, sporadic reports of a new drug has done the rounds, raising fears of a renewed onslaught

Although there had been no cases reported to SANCA (WC) as yet, clients often refer to the drug and a number of queries had been received from concerned community members who confirmed that the drug is being used in some of our service areas.

But the drug appears to be well established in some areas of Kwa- Zulu- Natal where it is creating havoc in the pre-dominantly Indian townships around Durban like Phoenix, Chatsworth and Umlazi.¹ A recent upsurge of the use of this drug has prompted the Organized Crime Unit of the SAPS to host an information blitz to forewarn parents about this substance.



Sugars – Essentially a mixture of heroin (left) and cocaine (right) and inhaled off foil or injected intravenously

Sugars – Unknown perhaps ... but not new

Like Tik, Sugars is not really a new drug - the term simply appears to refer to a **mixture of poor quality heroine and cocaine**. The simultaneous administration of these two substances (smoked off foil or injected intravenously), is referred to in the United States as a *speedball*. This is a potentially lethal concoction: the cocaine acts as a stimulant, raising the

pulse rate, but its effects wear off more quickly than those of either heroin or morphine, which in turn slow down the heart-rate.

As a result, it is possible to experience a delayed "overdose" (technically, severe respiratory depression) when the stimulant wears off and the full effects of the heroin are felt in isolation.

What makes this particular combination so popular ?

Apart from the well documented long and short term risks associated with the use of heroin and cocaine individually, the psycho-pharmacological interaction of these drugs and their combined effects on various systems of the body are still not clearly understood. However, the available evidence seems to suggest that this combination has some unique effects none of which is to be found in the drugs separately, a quality which is plainly evident from the glowing testimonies of users themselves :

"As the last of the mix went into my arm, I started to feel the coke. It's is so hard to describe the feeling as it is almost a bodily feeling that I first experience as a taste in the mouth (cold metallic coke taste which becomes sensation as energy and thrill fill my veins and mind".²

The sedative effects of the heroine appears to have a delayed onset but appears to persist after the frenzied effects of the cocaine has subsided :

"Then I become aware of the heroin. Loyal and strong in the background: purging my body of any residual shivers and shakes, making me solid again. Strong and ready (for what? nothing ever happens apart from it ending). It would be wrong if I gave the impression that the experience of snowballs is entirely two separate bodies of feeling from two separate drugs. There is an area of experience which doesn't come with either if taken on their own."

Moreover, the popularity of the combination also seems to stem from the fact that the depressant effects of the heroin appears to smooth the comedown from the Cocaine or Crack, taking the edge of the agitation and general malaise which follows the use of the latter drugs.



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Chris Farley, famous for his performances on the Saturday Night Live Shows, died in Dec 1997 after a Heroin snorting and Crack smoking binge.



Layne Staley, lead vocalist of the group Alice in Chains, died at age 34 after using a mixture of Heroin and Cocaine.



Actor John Belushi, aged 33 died after shooting up with Heroin and Cocaine.

Sugars – Fleeting fad or the future face of substance abuse ?

If patterns of drug abuse in the United Kingdom has any predictive value in respect of local drugging trends, chances are that the use of Sugars may be substantially higher than what anecdotal evidence may suggest thus far – an alternative scenario may be that euphoric “perks” of this combination have not yet reached the South African shores yet in which case one may expect this frightful two-some to be lurking beneath the surface like a mythological Hydra.

In the Manchester survey referred to above it was found that speedballing was the main drug-taking method of 80 per cent of those interviewed. Ten years ago this proportion was around 25 per cent. *Against the backdrop of this growth, is there any reason to believe that it's trajectory will be any different in South Africa ?*

As individual drugs, Heroin and Cocaine may each have it's unique “charm” amongst users but at the same time it also has a frightful reputation which may be sufficient to repel early experimenters. However, when these drugs are combined and offered under a more trendy and alluring label such as “Sugars”, it obscures the true nature of the ingredients to naïve users.

May this be the vehicle by which new users will be recruited ? And what may happen when the synergistic attributes of this deadly combination are discovered ?

The sad tragedy is that even if we fully grasp the horrendous potential of a new epidemic, there is little one can do on a preventative level without inadvertently knocking over the first domino. We had been warned.



References

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**For more information , please contact
Tertius Cronje @ SANCA(WC)
Tel : 021 – 945-4080
e-mail – tertius@sancawc.co.za**