

# Cocaine use related to level of education achieved

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The decreased use of cocaine in the United States over the last 20 years mostly occurred among the highly educated, while cocaine use among non-high school graduates remained constant, according to a study by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

The study authors suspect that the inverse relationship between cocaine use and education is related to access to health warnings and resources. They also concluded that the emerging disparity highlights the need for improved interventions that target persistent cocaine users who are lower educated. The study is published in the October 2007 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

“Much like smoking, people with a better understanding of the impact cocaine has on health are more likely to modify their behavior,” said Valerie S. Harder, MHS, lead author of the study and a PhD-candidate in the Bloomberg School of Public Health’s Department of Mental Health. “Better educated individuals also may have more resources and access to health care services, such as drug treatment programs.”

The researchers used data from the 1979-2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health to compare cocaine use and educational achievement for adults aged 19-50 years. Adults were categorized as non-high school graduate, high school graduate or college graduate and as either recent-onset or persistent cocaine users.

The proportion of non-high school graduates using cocaine has remained

consistent from 1979-2002. Early data suggests that high school and college graduates were more likely to start and persist in their use of cocaine, as compared to non-high school graduates. During the late 1980s, the proportion of high school and college graduates classified as persistent users dropped dramatically and fell below that of non-high school graduates. During the same time period, first time cocaine use steadily decreased among all adults regardless of their level of educational achievement and remained low.

“It isn’t enough to simply try to stop individuals from using cocaine the first time,” said Harder. “More drug intervention programs that target non-high school graduates are necessary to reduce persistent cocaine use in that population.”

Source: Johns Hopkins University

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