

Students get better marks in the war against drugs

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Seattle police have seen and heard almost everything. But they're still shaking their heads over the 10-year-old who, while riding his bicycle, sold marijuana to Seattle junior-high students for the playfield pusher.

Drug counselors tell of the 15-year-old whose parents gave him cocaine for Christmas.

And a 17-year-old Bremerton student said he snorted lines of cocaine on his school desk.

These stories are true.

But amid the heartache and frightened talk of students drained of their young lives by drugs, somebody forgot to check the patient's pulse.

While not minimizing a serious national drug problem, some top government researchers say the current anti-drug hysteria is a little late out of the gate.

Except for cocaine, particularly in its more potent "crack" form, the national youth drug craze peaked years ago.

"The trends are, for the use of most drugs, the rates are going down," said Richard Clayton, a University of Kentucky professor who conducted a survey for the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Experts say Seattle students' drug use mirrors national trends. Several national studies show illicit drug use among high-school seniors was highest in 1978-79. Drug use, except for cocaine, declined for several years and has leveled off. For example, 54 percent of high-school seniors interviewed nationally in 1979 had used illicit drugs in the previous year. By 1985, it was 46 percent.

High-school seniors in the West and Northeast use drugs more than students in the rest of the country, studies show. And cocaine use, which has been increasing, although modestly, is also higher among seniors in the West and Northeast.

David Hawkins, director of the University of Washington Center for Social Welfare Research, studied fifth-graders in 18 Seattle schools last spring and found drug use crawling down the age ladder: 22 percent had tried alcohol, 3 percent had tried marijuana.

But in the rush to fret first and

sort out second, who had time to talk to the kids? Students say some high schools are drug stores, that they can buy anything there. There are, though, other voices.

"Before, there was an attitude that to be in, you had to use drugs," said one Shorewood High School junior. "Now it's becoming OK to say no."

With a clear decline in parental and societal tolerance of teen drug use, something, more likely a lot of things, have started working. The youth drug craze is by no means over, but reason is beginning to take hold.



Photo illustration by Juni Lee



■ NORTHWEST / B Alcohol leads the list of drugs that kill, followed by prescription and over-the-counter drugs.
■ SCENE / D 1: These are horror stories, but except for cocaine, the youth drug craze started declining years ago.
■ TOMORROW IN THE SEATTLE TIMES: How educators are trying to turn students' attitudes against drug abuse.

