

FINDINGS FROM THE TWO NIDA-FUNDED HUMAN STUDIES

NIDA has funded two major studies of the effects of MDMA on humans, neither actually administering MDMA to the subjects. A sociological description of MDMA users based on their self-reports cost NIDA \$200,000 and was completed over the course of two years by a research group in San Francisco, with Dr. Marsha Rosenbaum as principle investigator and Jerome Beck, Deborah Harlow, Douglas McDonnell, Patricia Morgan, and Lynne Watson as co-investigators. A study comparing MDMA users to non-users for signs of serotonin neurotoxicity is costing NIDA \$500,000 and is halfway through its three year schedule at Johns Hopkins, conducted by Dr. George Ricaurte.

In the sociological study, researchers interviewed 100 MDMA users in depth. Jerry Beck went on to analyze the study for his Ph.D. thesis in Public Health at the University of California at Berkeley. The recently minted Dr. Jerry Beck reviewed the data from 100 MDMA users and concluded in his Ph.D thesis that virtually all the people who were interviewed felt they had benefited from their use of MDMA, and that very few experienced periods of problem use. He observed,

“Based on MDMA’s reputed qualities, one might assume that a significant number of users would eventually experience major problems resulting from abuse and/or dependence in the pursuit of “Ecstasy”. However, the low levels of such problems seen with MDMA are perhaps best explained by limiting factors intrinsic to the experience itself.”

(The NIDA report, which has not been widely publicized by NIDA, is available from MAPS for \$30. Jerry Beck’s Ph.D. thesis is also available from MAPS for \$30.)

A CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS FOR THE JOHNS HOPKINS HUMAN STUDY

The NIDA serotonin neurotoxicity study compares 24 MDMA users, who each must have taken MDMA 10 times or more, with two control groups also of 24 people each. The study measures serotonin levels of the subjects through the analysis of serotonin metabolites found in the spinal fluid, and examines most of the subject’s physical and mental systems wholly or partially mediated by the serotonin system. Since serotonin is involved with the sleep/waking transition, two nights are spent in a sleep laboratory where brain waves are monitored. Various psychological tests are given which explore the subjects concentration, memory, visual and pain perception, appetite, reaction times, etc.

Each MDMA subject is age, sex, educational history, health and socioeconomically matched, more or less, with two controls, one with a similar drug history but without exposure to MDMA and the other without any history of drug use. Needless to say, finding exactly matched controls is the weak part of this experiment. Having people act as their own controls, tested before and after MDMA use, would be an ideal experimental design but would require the actual administration of MDMA and is not permitted.

MAPS has helped recruit many of the subjects for this experiment. Participating in this experiment is one way to make a major contribution to MDMA research. NIDA has set out to find evidence of MDMA-related brain damage and it seems an appropriate response by MDMA users to give them their best shot at finding it, in ourselves. **If you are opposed to animal studies, this is an alternative.**