

Ecstasy is reportedly big at Stanford

By David Perlman
Science Editor

More than a third of all Stanford University undergraduates may have used the illegal drug called ecstasy, according to a student poll that was reported yesterday.

The drug, which is widely popular on campuses across the country, induces a sense of euphoria that some students call a "yuppie high" and reportedly curbs anxiety. The government has banned it, although some psychiatrists have praised it as a useful tool in promoting insight and self-awareness.

In a letter in the current issue of the New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Stephen Peroutka, a Stanford neurologist, reported that 39 percent of 369 students interviewed in a random survey said they had used the drug at least once. Some said they had taken it 25 times or more, but four to five times was the average use, the poll showed.

The survey was conducted anonymously under Peroutka's supervision by two undergraduates who stationed themselves on Stan-

ford's White Plaza to conduct their interviews.

The findings, Peroutka noted, differed sharply from a survey conducted in May 1986 by Stanford's Cowell Student Health Center. In that sampling, tallied from 877 responses to a written questionnaire, only 8 percent of the students said they had tried the drug.

Ecstasy is one of the so-called designer drugs because chemists can make it by changing the molecular structure of other mind-altering compounds. It is known scientifically as MDMA and is related both to hallucinogens and stimulants. It is one of the amphetamines that are known on the street as speed.

The compound was banned by the federal Food and Drug Administration in 1985 on the grounds that it could be addictive and caused brain damage in laboratory rats. The ban drew fire from some psy-

chiatrists, and Dr. Lester Grinspoon, a Harvard University specialist in psychoactive compounds, sued to permit the drug to be used by physicians in psychotherapy. A federal appeals court in Boston upheld Grinspoon, but the FDA has continued the ban under its emergency powers, pending a Supreme Court ruling.

In his letter to the medical journal, Peroutka noted that MDMA has been reported to induce euphoria and a sense of enhanced self-awareness without psychotropic effects or visual distortions.

Grinspoon, who has tried the drug himself, said recently that it may prove to be "the first pharmacologic agent that actually gives a patient the capacity for insight, it enhances positive feelings of love and trust and seems to facilitate the retrieval of early memories."

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Survey: Many tried 'ecstasy' drug

The Associated Press

BOSTON — More than one-third of Stanford University students admitted in a survey that they have experimented with "ecstasy," an illegal drug that causes brain damage in animals.

In a letter in today's edition of the New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Stephen J. Peroutka said his survey, conducted in May, documented "extensive recreational use" of the so-called designer drug.

The synthetic drug was banned by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration two years ago. Although ecstasy is toxic to lab animals, there is no clear ev-

idence that it causes harm in people. However, experts are unsure of its long-term effects.

In an interview, Peroutka said use of the drug also appears to be widespread at other California schools.

"Last year, it became the thing to do on the West Coast at parties," he said. "We simply don't know what the drug does to human brains, whether there are transient or permanent effects."

Peroutka, a neurologist at Stanford Medical School, surveyed 369 undergraduates. He found that 143, or 39 percent, said they had tried ecstasy. On average, they had used it about four times.

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