

# 1989

## Crack myths and realities in the UK

Crack cocaine first made its appearance in the UK around [date]. The stories coming out of the States were of whole communities being devastated by this new form of cocaine. And like smokable heroin in the UK, the effects of crack cocaine on those areas experiencing high levels of poverty and deprivation in a time of economic recession and massive cuts back in public expenditure, were indeed extremely damaging.

But in among the realities of the damage caused, were the tabloid excesses as expressed in headlines

like 'one hit and you are hooked' – and sensational statements from politicians like then-Home Secretary Douglas Hurd who told the *Daily Mail* that crack was the worst plague to hit Britain since the Black Death – at a time when there were still relatively few users of the drug here.

The government went into overdrive and were planning to form special crack teams to parachute into local areas to deal with a problem that for the most part did not exist yet. These plans were soon modified and eventually morphed into the Home Office Drug Prevention

Initiative, which set up local drug prevention teams.

As we know, crack eventually did find a significant level on the drug scene and did cause many problems for users and the wider community. But they were not really on the scale predicted by former DEA agent, **Robert Stutman**, who came to speak to the Association of Chief Police Officers drug conference in 1989. Below is an edited version of what he had to say.



“ In the past three and a half years crack has gone from a drug which was virtually unheard of in the largest city in the United States to a major drug of abuse in 49 out of the 50 states.

Crack is an equal opportunity drug. It affects blacks, whites, Hispanics. It affects rich, poor and in-between and it has left the ghetto in United States and it has gone on to suburban America. It is truly a drug that has taken over our society and changed the face of our society.

Crack, unlike heroin, is a drug that affects females as much as males. Of all the crack addicts we have seen, about 50 per cent are female. Now what does that mean? In the United States most inner city families are run by women. These are the same women who today are becoming crack addicts.

Therefore, the last vestiges of family in the inner city, certainly in New York and most other major cities in the United States, are beginning to disappear. That's one of the major reasons why we are now seeing crack addicts in New York, 10, 11, and 12 years of age. The number of reported child abuse cases in New York City has gone from 2200 in 1986 to 8000 in 1988. Almost all of them are the children of cocaine/crack using parents.

And one figure, which I think is absolutely frightening, is that last year in New York City, of all of the children who died because of battering – where parents literally beat their kids to death – 73 per cent were the children of cocaine/crack using parents. It is a drug that produces violence.

A study that will be released by the Cocaine Hotline in the United States proves beyond reasonable doubt that the drug itself causes violence. You don't necessarily need a person with a predisposition to violence. In a survey of 17,000 crack users in the United States, the Cocaine Hotline is going to point out that 47 per cent had been involved, under the influence of crack, in a physical fight, 35 per cent in assaults with weapons, 12 per cent in child abuse, and 1 per cent had actually been involved in murders. That is a drug unlike any other drug that we have ever seen which produces those kind of numbers.

Now, what is crack? It is nothing more or less than smoking cocaine. So why does it produce this feeling that cocaine doesn't necessarily produce? One very simple reason is that smoking is the most efficient method of getting the drug to the brain. That's the only difference between cocaine hydrochloride and crack.

So why did the cocaine epidemic hit us all of a sudden? For a very simple reason: we believed our own garbage. We told ourselves it was relatively harmless, we told ourselves it certainly was not addicting and everybody believed it, so they tried it.

We now know that crack is the single most addicting drug available in the United States of America today and certainly the most addicting drug available in Europe. Heroin is not even in the same ballpark.

### Crack's appeal

A study that will be released in the next two to three weeks will probably say that of all of those people who tried crack three or more times, 75 per cent will become physically addicted at the end of the third time. It is pointed out now that in most treatment centres in New York City the average crack addict is addicted within five weeks of first use.

Right now in the United States crack is considered a virtually incurable addiction. No treatment centres show any long term remission of any statistically significant number of crack addicts. Yet it is a drug that of those people who try it three times, 75 per cent become addicted. You don't have to be a mathematician to figure out you've got a hell of a problem when you've got a drug like that.

Now let me take it one step further. If I wanted to design a drug that I'm going to market to kids, I couldn't improve on crack. Let me tell you why.

It is a very expensive drug but sold in very, very small amounts so it is relatively inexpensive. Before the advent of crack if a kid in New York wanted to buy cocaine he had to lay out about \$80 for a gram. Those were the smallest amounts it was sold in.

Today you could purchase crack for as little as \$3 to \$4 a phial. Is that cheaper than the \$80? Really not, for the very simple reason that that \$3-\$4 worth lasts only 8 to 10 minutes. It is three to four times more expensive than hydrochloride, but at least the kid doesn't have to lay out a lot of money at one time. Any kid in the United States can come up with \$5 or \$10.

The second reason that crack has become so popular in our country is that the method of ingestion is so non-intrusive. No needles stuck in your arm, you don't even have to stick a white powder up your nose. Who does that, nobody, it's not a normal thing to do. We smoke it. It doesn't bother anybody to smoke something.

And then there's the third reason:

crack is the ultimate 'feel good now'. If I inject heroin it takes about two and a half minutes to feel the full effect. If I sniff cocaine, it takes about three minutes. If I smoke crack in five to ten seconds I am stoned. The problem, of course, is that it only last about 12 minutes and then you come down.

For those three reasons crack has become extremely popular in our country. The obvious problem that it has caused, certainly in New York, is violence. Crack does two things: it gives you a feeling of omnipotence – I am the strongest S.O.B. in the world, nobody can touch me; at the same time it gives you a sense of paranoia – why are you picking on me? When you mix those two things together you can imagine the problems you start to get with the user.

Now we'll take that one step further. Generally there was an unwritten rule, certainly in New York, that you don't knowingly shoot at cops. That rule has changed. In the last nine months I have had four of my agents shot. Three were shot in the head, two lived.

The third turned out to be what I think has become the most heinous crime against a law enforcement officer ever in the United States, or close to it, and that was the assassination of Evert Hatcher who was working undercover.

The traffickers found out he was a federal agent and made a knowing decision to meet with him. They cleaned off his surveillance, met him an hour later, shot him twice in the side of the head. The most cold-blooded assassination I have ever seen of a law enforcement officer.

That is the philosophy that we now see in New York and it is due specifically, in my way of thinking, to the advent of crack and cocaine. It has changed the face of the city. Now every DEA agent, all 3000, are issued sub-machine guns. That is what has happened in our country basically because of crack and cocaine over the past three years.

How do you make crack? Any person in this room can make crack. All you take is some cocaine, some hot water, a bunsen burner and a baby bottle, and in an hour and a quarter you have crack. The geniuses in New York City didn't have to figure it out very long: if I buy a kilo of cocaine for \$18,000, and an hour and 15 minutes later I can sell it for \$70,000, that's what I am going to do. Crack started out as a cottage industry in our country with no big pedlars.

Unfortunately it didn't take very long for the traffickers to realise we're not going to leave this to individuals, and they began to organise. Right now

crack is controlled by a fairly large number of organisations, basically of two ethnic backgrounds, Dominicans and Jamaicans. As you leave New York City the Jamaicans have taken over control of much of the rest of the United States, Jamaicans who are tied back directly to New York City.

### Jamaican traffickers

I don't have to tell any of you that you have a large number of Jamaicans in this country. Many have relatives and friends in New York and none of them are very stupid if they are dope pedlars to start with. These guys don't have to be geniuses to realise 'I don't have to import crack from the United States. I can make my crack right here in Great Britain and I can increase my profit by something like 300 per cent, and I don't have to worry about getting new customers all the time. Three out of four of the guys I sell crack to three times are coming back to me, they're locked in, they're a guaranteed customer.'

That's how it started in our country. Now we are basically saturated with crack, the problem is continuing to grow, the violence level has been continuing

to grow and the response of law enforcement, although we are trying to do something, we haven't made one bit of difference.

Last year the New York City Police Department and the DEA in New York made 90,000 drug arrests [and] the Drug Enforcement Administration in New York City seized 9,000 kilos of cocaine. Did all those seizures and arrests make one bit of difference? Absolutely not. There is not a single corner in New York where you can't purchase crack or cocaine.

Our mistake in New York was that we didn't see the problem early enough and we didn't get a jump on it. Three years ago Boston's mayor came to my office worried about crack. We talked about it, trained their police officers, he increased the size of his drug unit and set up task forces [so] information came from the street to the top immediately. They did away with parochialism. They started drug education in school systems and community education across the city, and today Boston has a very minor crack problem.

The only thing I would ask you is the following: learn from our mistakes. Don't be like the people in Kansas and Texas

and California who said, 'It can't happen here'. I will make a prediction and as you all know, you've got to be crazy to make them. I will personally guarantee you that two years from now you will have a serious crack problem.

We are so saturated with cocaine in the United States, there aren't enough noses left to use the cocaine that's coming in. It's got to go somewhere and where it's coming is right here.

Don't fall for that old business of 'It's only black guys'. We set up a car seizure programme in New York City in which we seized the vehicles of people coming in to high density areas. We seized 1000 cars; 80 per cent were white kids from the nice suburbs coming in to buy crack.

If you don't attack this potential problem putting aside differences and looking at a community national response that is law enforcement, education and treatment, I will guarantee you the following: three years from today you will invite me back, because you will be looking back on the good old days of 1989, and that won't be pleasant. ”

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## Government backs off anti-crack drive

This summer's crescendo of concern over crack with the government spotlighting it as the "spectre hanging over Europe" culminated in a decision not to single out the drug in a major anti-crack drive.

The thrust of the Home Secretary's statement issued on 3 August was that the crack threat "requires even stronger efforts on our part to prevent the misuse of drugs", rather than crack-specific initiatives. Ruled out "for the time being" was a national anti-crack campaign of the kind which appeared to be called for by the Home Affairs Committee in their interim report rushed out on 27 July after their visit to America the previous month.

Instead, Hurd reported, "we believe at this stage the further action to reduce demand for crack should be local and specific". The decision to restrict anti-crack publicity drives to particularly affected areas was taken in advance of the meeting of the Ministerial Group on the Misuse of Drugs on 26 July, which appears simply to have rubber-stamped the line hammered out in what's reported to have been an interdepartmental policy struggle.

In June the split between ministers who wanted an all-out anti-crack campaign and those who thought this would just be free advertising for the dealers surfaced in the *Times* (12 June 1989). Informed opinion has it that the line up was the Home Office and Foreign Office for the campaign versus the Departments of Education and Health, which favoured locally determined approaches integrating cocaine and crack with other drug-related initiatives

The outcome of this tussle will bring relief to most in the drugs field, whose criticism of the single-issue anti-heroin campaigns of past years appears to have been taken to heart by the government. At a local level the voices of drug workers and health education specialists are likely to carry considerable weight, helping to prevent inappropriate campaigns being foisted on them from on high.

Nevertheless this summer of crack panic has amounted to a potentially dangerous plug for crack as the quick way for dealers to make their first million and the best hit drug-weary misusers will ever experience.

Ironically, while ministers now reject

national anti-crack publicity because of the risk of stimulating interest, it is dramatic ministerial statements that have driven the media publicity.

Probably the most ticklish policy issue has arisen from the association of cocaine and crack use with black people in Britain. Opinion differs over whether this is real or imaginary, and, if real, whether it merely reflects the fact that crack has been found in less affluent areas, and these are where many black people live.

The other but not mutually exclusive explanation is that cocaine distribution is handled largely by traffickers with Jamaican connections. In March Interpol identified a new cocaine trafficking route from Jamaica to Europe, the first seizures from which were made in the UK

Areas with high black populations such as Toxteth, Handsworth and parts of South East London, have all been associated with crack. Although cautioning for possession of cannabis (another drug used by young blacks as well as white people) has become accepted police practice, the Home Secretary regards it as "important that the police should take a firm line

against possession of crack as well as trafficking". This should, he told Action on Addiction's crack conference in July, be done with "due regard" to community sensitivities, but the crack threat would "no doubt" ensure police had local support.

He was speaking after the widely reported incidents of 23 May when 120 police mounted a drugs raid on the Travellers' Rest pub in the Heath Town district of Wolverhampton. Fifteen minutes later youths converged on the building and more than two hours of street violence followed with young blacks and whites pitted against 250 police in riot gear.

Local anger and liberal misgivings over the raid were overshadowed by reaction to the "ominous" discovery of 14 wraps of crack reportedly worth £140 – this "truly diabolical" substance as the *Times* put it in a leader supportive of the police (25 May 1989).

Invited to congratulate the police on their actions, Margaret Thatcher said they were "entirely right" as "crack

peddlers must know they have no haven" (Hansard, 25 May 1989).

Police themselves queried whether it was all worth it, but "You have got to hit the street dealers. The best thing we can do is attack the demand... The public will now see an increase in drugs raids," said the head of the Met's drug squad referring to crack. With this drug, he had to admit, "The dealers tend to be in black areas".

West Midlands police at first suggested the Heath Town 'riot' was organised by drug dealers and for Home Secretary Hurd it was confirmation that "drug trafficking leads to violence" (*Daily Mail*, 2 June 1989).

For other observers it was confirmation that years of "poor policing" and deteriorating relations between police and local blacks in a socially deprived area had borne fruit. Crack, it's suggested, both here and in America, is used as an alternative to less comfortable explanations of social disorder (*Searchlight*, 1989, issue 169).

Among the eight points listed in

Douglas Hurd's 3 August statement, only the news that special anti-cocaine Customs teams have been set up related exclusively to cocaine. Also listed was the international conference being organised next April in London on reducing the demand for drugs, at which cocaine and crack were to be major topics.

First put by Hurd to the Council of Europe's Pompidou Group in May, backing for this conference was one of Margaret Thatcher's major achievements at July's 'G7' summit of the seven richest industrialised democracies. However, misgivings in some European nations about the focusing on crack and the fact that Britain itself is lowering its profile on the drug will probably mean that the conference takes on a broader demand-reduction remit.

With Spain as a natural European entry point for cocaine, the crack issue has become entangled with Britain's fight to keep its frontier controls after 1992, adding a further twist to the international initiatives.

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## The Stutman connection

"It made a deep impression on me," Home Secretary Douglas Hurd told *Daily Mail* readers on 2 June, and an "even deeper impression on the senior policemen who were there". An eye witness said it "scared the hell" out of the audience.

Direct from the crack-infested streets of New York, drugs investigator Robert Stutman's address to chief police officers in April put several sticks of dynamite under Britain's rumbling worries that cocaine and crack could turn downtown Toxteth, Handsworth and Deptford into US-style drug ghettos.

In turn, these refuelled concerns were broadcast on the European stage when in May Douglas Hurd addressed Pompidou Group ministers. Again we learn from the *Mail* that "he acknowledges that a fair part of the inspiration for that speech had come to him a few weeks earlier" from Drug Enforcement Administration special agent Stutman.

One of Stutman's most significant statements was that three-quarters of crack triers get hooked after three hits. On this much else hinges – a drug this addictive causes users to commit violent crimes and promises massive profits to the dealers, disrupting whole communities. His reference was "a study

that will be released in the next two to three weeks" which would "probably" report this finding.

It was more than two to three weeks later, with no supporting study yet seen crossing the librarians' desks at ISDD, when the Home Secretary told *Mail* readers that "75 per cent of takers are hooked on [crack] after three goes".

A week earlier, Stutman's statement appeared as a headline in the *Sun* (25 May): "Three Hits Can Get You Hooked" was their version of these "terrifying statistics". Before that, the as yet unseen study cited by Stutman had become a "survey" which "showed" these disturbing facts (*Times*, 19 May 1989). Later the 'survey' was attributed to an impeccable source – the Home Office itself (*Grimsby Evening Telegraph*, 2 August 1989).

In all this there was not one shred of hard evidence, an inconvenient fact that, to their credit, seems to have become apparent to senior police officers who "attempted to trace the studies and figures quoted by Stutman and found that they don't exist" (*Independent*, 27 July 1989).

On the same day the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee released their emergency interim report



on crack with these same discredited 'facts' highlighted in bold.

Perhaps the police's discovery that the emperor had no clothes is the reason why later ministerial statements have not repeated Hurd's original replay of Stutman's claim as well as helping to persuade the hawkish Home Office to toe the softer DoH and DES line.

The 'three hits and you're hooked' example is just one among many – several other startling statements from Stutman's speech were given equal credence by ministers, some police, the media, and by the Home Affairs Committee.

Police at the heart of Britain's anti-drug effort have made public their concern that such uncritical regurgitation of Stutman's 'facts' was providing potentially counterproductive messages to the British public.