

IV.B. Recognising the Mandrax user

All types of people use Mandrax, but it is especially associated with the coloured gang culture in South Africa, and is also common in some segments of the Indian community. Increasing use has also been found among black South Africans in parts of Gauteng. It is commonly consumed in prisons by gang members and non-members alike, so prison tattoos (which tend to be crude and limited to black and blue) are a good indicator. Facial tattoos and those employing gang symbolism (the numbers 26, 27, and 28; books; swords; modified dollar signs; etc.) are especially good clues. Mandrax users may accumulate stains on the web of their hands from holding the bottleneck to their mouths (Figure 19). Mandrax also has a very distinctive smell, which all members should become familiar with.



Figure 19

Mandrax lowers inhibitions and may promote reckless conduct, much like alcohol. Immediately after smoking, the drug provides a 30-second 'rush' in which novice users lose control of their bodies and collapse. This is followed by two to six hours of a detached state. While under the influence, Mandrax users are likely to:

- appear uncoordinated, as though drunk;
- exhibit erratic and often aggressive behaviour;
- unlike most other depressant drugs, will have elevated pulse rates;
- have droopy eyelids, bloodshot eyes, and possibly dilated pupils;

- will exhibit 'non-convergence' of eyes (see Recognising the Dagga User, above);
- will experience 'horizontal gaze nystagmus'.

This last indicator, which is also found with the use of other depressants (such as alcohol) as well as inhalants, can be tested in the following way. A pen is held vertically at the suspect's eye-level, approximately 35 cm from the face. Suspects should be told to hold their heads straight, and follow the tip of the pen with their eyes only. The pen should be moved slowly from side to side along an arc of about 30 cm. The pen should then stop at the extreme range of the suspect's vision, and he should be asked to hold his eyes in that position. If sober, the suspect's eyes should both track the pen smoothly to the extreme range of vision and hold there without twitching. Mandrax use will cause the eyes to 'bounce' or jerk instead of tracking smoothly.

Adulterants in Mandrax, such as talc, can cause lung damage, and long-term users may exhibit a chronic, chesty cough.

According to the 3 Metros Study, urban Mandrax users are more likely to be:

- male;
- Indian or coloured;
- under the age of 25;
- arrested for burglary, shoplifting, theft out of a motor vehicle, drug related crimes, or violation of the Firearms Act.

A disproportionate number of Mandrax users were found in the surveys sites in Mitchell's Plain, Bellville, Seapoint, and Phoenix.

