

Do You Know Any 12-Year-Old Junkies?

By CHARLES B. RANGEL

This year a survey by the Addicts Rehabilitation Center found there were 40,000 addicts in Harlem. That's about one out of every six people.

Walk along nearly any street uptown and you'll see Harlem's great addict army—slumped over in doorways, stumbling along in a trance, nodding in front of bars and soul food joints, standing in the cold without enough clothes on. Chances are you'll also see other all too familiar Harlem scenes: the dope pusher who sets up shop on a street corner and deals like he had a license; the junkie couple who have established residence in an abandoned building and are playing man and wife; the teen-ager who is wearing \$100 alligator shoes and a \$300 silk suit.

The streets of Harlem used to serve the same purpose as the cafés in Europe. The sidewalks would swing with men smiling and rapping with each other and everywhere you'd go there would be crowds, noise and laughter.

But it's not quite so anymore. Fear now pervades Harlem. The derelict horde menaces our streets and parks, lurks outside our homes and stores, and preys on neighbors and friends. Whole neighborhoods have declined; others have been completely abandoned to junkie squatters.

Heroin has destroyed the functioning of our school system. Eight-year-olds experiment with heroin bought in the grade school yard and in Benjamin Franklin High School, where drugs are as available as chewing gum, young girls shoot up in the locker room and 13-year-olds buy dope from 15-year-old peddlers.

According to a survey of Harlem conducted by the Small Business Chamber of Commerce, 51.2 per cent of those interviewed said they were criminally assaulted in 1970. Sixty-nine per cent named a narcotics addict as the offender. The study also reveals that thefts to support the narcotic habit in Harlem amount to a staggering \$1.8 billion and "90 per cent of all businesses in central Harlem have been robbed, held up or pilfered."

But most devastating of all is the effect heroin has had on our young—the hope of the black nation. It used to be that a mother would pray that her son would finish high school. Now, she dare not admit to herself her worst fears: that her son's corpse will be found on some rooftop, a needle sticking from his arm. I personally know of a mother who has four sons, all of them addicts, and such a situation is not unique.

The sad fact is that junk is so readily available in Harlem that any kid

with some curiosity and some small change is bound to try it. One of the most demoralizing experiences I ever had in Harlem was being panhandled by a 12-year-old junkie.

Meanwhile, back at the Establishment, the state has slashed funds for narcotic programs by 65 per cent and reduced the number of addicts who can be treated in residential centers from 6,435 to 2,167. The pharmaceutical companies won't invest large funds to develop a nonaddictive heroin substitute since there's no profit in it for them. Despite much heralded pledges of intragovernmental cooperation to halt the international drug traffic, not a single heroin laboratory has been busted in France in two years, opium is still being grown on a vast scale in Turkey, and the amount of heroin smuggled into the United States

from Southeast Asia is up sharply.

The people of Harlem may or may not know of these developments, but they do see the cops of Harlem; cops who are quite willing to defend the Republic against permissiveness and long hair, but look the other way when a heroin sale is being transacted. Cops

who proudly wear the American flag, but accept payoffs or make a heroin bust and then resell what they've confiscated. And cops in patrol cars, with the windows rolled up and the doors locked, who don't even bother to glance at the pushers taking care of business on the sidewalks.

That's the way it is in Harlem. The situation never changes except that more and more of the young are shouting, "Genocide!"

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