



A huge salary, designer clothes, a Porsche... and an expensive cocaine habit. Young women with a high-flying career in the City are using drugs more and more to cope with the pressures of life at the top. Julian Kossoff and Mark Piggott investigate

Tanya, 25, is a stockbroker in the City, earning £50,000 a year plus a bonus that takes her within a diamond necklace of doubling her salary. This pays for the Rolex, designer clothes and smart flat in an affluent part of London. It also pays for her cocaine. Every weekend, Tanya follows the same ritual. It begins at 5pm on a Friday evening when she leaves the office to knock back a couple of glasses of wine with colleagues, before scoring what she calls 'her eighth' - an eighth of an ounce of cocaine, about 3.5 grams, costing £150.

'I feel such a rush of excitement after I've scored,' she explains, her face lighting up. 'Then I'm ready to let the good times roll. After a couple of lines in the bar, I head round to a friend's place and a few of us spend the evening watching a video, drinking a couple of bottles of wine and doing some more coke. I never do much on Saturdays - I'm pretty wiped out until the evening, which kicks off when I put the stereo on, have a bath and snort a fuck-off sized line of coke.' Then she goes clubbing or partying - always making regular trips to the loo

to 'powder her nose'.

But Tanya doesn't blow all her coke at the weekend - she always makes sure she keeps a little aside for Monday morning. 'I have to be at my desk at 7am, and generally the weekend has taken its toll on me, so I need a little hit to get going,' she says. 'You have to be alert and aggressive in my job and cocaine gives me a charge and clears my head. If the pace is feverish or I'm feeling really rough, I'll do two or three lines during the day for a pick-me-up. 'Sometimes I'll catch somebody looking at me, and for a second I'm terrified it's obvious I'm totally wired. But I reckon I'll never be caught out. I'm very careful about keeping my private life to myself and getting on with my job.'

Tanya is one of a growing breed in the City - young women who do drugs to keep up with the hectic and aggressive pace of their life. Friday night is their usual pick-up time and most don't need to travel any further for their supplies than one of the many bars in the Square Mile.

In a dark corner of one such bar is Eddie. Dressed in chinos and a Ralph Lauren bomber jacket, he doesn't quite fit in with the surrounding sharp suits - but everyone knows who he is. Slung around his waist is a money-belt containing a small bottle of 'speedballs', little pink pills that are a potent mix of heroin and cocaine. Eddie calls them his babies and sells them for £10 a tablet. His busiest time for doing business is 6pm to 8pm on Friday nights, when everyone's out for a good time.

At a little after 6.30pm this Friday evening, an attractive blonde called Jane, who works as a bilingual secretary in a nearby French bank, slips onto the stool beside him. Dressed in a grey pin-stripe suit and black high-heeled shoes, she smiles flirtatiously before casually putting her hand on his knee. Then leaning towards him, she quietly puts in her order. Wordlessly, Eddie slips four pills into her hand. She hands him a couple of £20 notes and the deal's done.

'About one-third of my customers are women now,' Eddie explains. 'Even though they've been doing drugs ever since the rave scene became big, it was still more likely to be a bloke who bought their drugs for them. But now I've noticed that, as women are becoming more

successful and confident, they don't rely on men to sort out their supplies.

‘They do a deal differently to men, though. Blokes usually buy me lots of drinks and try to be my mate. Women, on the other hand, use their wiles. You know - act a bit flirty - but once they've got the drugs, they're off like a shot. Most take them when they want to party, but increasingly they're saying, “Eddie, I've had a really shit week, can you sort me out?” They need to escape.’

One of Eddie's regulars is Jenny, a 28-year-old PA to an oil company executive, who earns £26,000 a year, plus perks. She says she takes drugs for excitement and to escape the monotony of office life. ‘I only take them at the weekends,’ she says, ‘mainly speedballs and coke. I want something that gives me a buzz. My job pays well but it's boring.’ She takes a sip from her glass of wine and continues. ‘After graduating from university, I expected the world of work to be more interesting than it's turned out to be. I want to leave the City as soon as I can. It's my ambition to travel and teach, possibly in Japan. In the meantime, drugs help me get by.’

Julia is another woman who takes drugs to get by- but in a very different way to Jenny. A 26-year-old broker, her cocaine habit is currently costing her £250 a week- and it's rising. ‘I first started taking coke to have a buzzy, fun weekend,’ she says. ‘Everyone I know indulges, so I didn't think twice about it, and for about six months, I was only a weekend girl.’

‘But all that changed one Monday morning. It had been a pretty heavy weekend- drink, drugs and clubbing- and I felt completely wrecked when I woke up. When I dragged myself out of bed I felt so awful I could barely make a cup of coffee. I just couldn't pull myself together to face another week of stress, adrenaline and aggression. I decided the only way I could get through the day was with some coke, so I did one line, and 45 minutes later, I left the flat feeling fantastic, ready to face anything. Now I always do some coke on a Monday and a couple of other days during the week - usually when something important is happening at work- or if I feel unable to cope. It makes me feel

invincible.

‘This industry is bloody tough, though. I really love it, but there are times when I feel so shit-scared something's going to go wrong and I'm going to be responsible for losing hundreds of thousands of pounds, then I wish I did something less stressful for a living, such as a secretary. But I know I don't really want to leave, and most of the time I love being where it's all happening. Coke gives me the courage to be part of all that.’

However, Julia admits there's a downside. ‘It can make me over-the-top aggressive- even for this job- and I never used to be like that. And it's costing me. When I only did coke at the weekend, it set me back about £100. Now it's more than double that but so far, I'm okay- I can handle it.’

Kate, 25, a foreign exchange dealer, says the problem of drugs in the City is escalating. ‘Coke use in the City goes on all the time but no one talks about it,’ she says. ‘You can spot the people who are doing it, though- they look ragged and have this frantic energy. It's blatant. ‘A colleague of mine- another trader- canes it big time. She's a real party girl, socialising every night, then crashing out for a few hours' sleep. The only way she can keep going the next day is with some coke. When she gets up she'll do a line, then drive to work in her Porsche to be at her desk at 7am. Every so often, she disappears to the loo to top up. No one questions it, even though it's obvious what's going on. So many blind eyes are turned, it's amazing anyone is able to read the FTSE.’

Carolyn McDonald runs detox programmes at London's The Core Trust. She says: ‘We're seeing more and more women who've been introduced to cocaine through working in the City. The drug is seen as glamorous there. It's like owning a Porsche- coke's got cachet as it costs more money than the average person can afford.’

‘In the City, where everyone's under intense pressure and working in an extremely stressful environment, it's seen as part and parcel of the job. Female traders also don't want to be seen as weaker in any way, so they're drinking more and taking more drugs to keep up with the men. It's

a very potent mixture. It's only frowned upon when it becomes a serious problem- that is, when it becomes the main focus of your life.' Professor Cary Cooper, an employment psychologist from the University of Manchester's Institute of Science and Technology, isn't surprised at the high level of cocaine use. 'The City puts enormous demands on a person. It's a very stressful and insecure environment because it's so performance-linked. You're dealing with large amounts of money and making decisions that are easily and quickly judged, and if you don't deliver the goods, you're out. It's extremely tough working under those conditions, which is why it has a high burn-out rate at a very young age. 'And it's even tougher for women. They're trying to prove not only that they can cut it in a traditionally male environment, but that they can do even better. And it's not just cannabis or cocaine. Women are also smoking and drinking more.'

But Lisa, 29, who works as a trader on LIFFE, the financial futures exchange, is counting the cost of an expensive drug habit. She snorts 2 grams of coke a week, which costs her around £100. 'I take it in the morning to get me going, during the day to help me deal with the stress, and in the evening when I'm socialising or entertaining clients,' she says.

'I know I'm taking a risk. You think coke gives you the edge but eventually it sends you off the rails. It starts by enhancing your performance but ends up destroying it. I've seen people break down in tears or have really aggressive outbursts. My ex-boss was really successful before he got into coke, then he lost everything when his habit got out of control. Another young guy I know died after a drink and drugs binge to celebrate his new job in New York.

'LIFFE is very macho and aggressive, so the women who work there constantly try to outdo the men. A female trader from one of the big banks was so completely out of it one night she ended up giving one of her colleagues a blow-job under a table in a restaurant. I know I have to stop but once you've started, it's almost impossible. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I know I have to before I fuck-up big time.'

Back to Tanya, who also has big plans to give up... one day. 'I want to stop on 2 January 2000, after one last huge bender,' she says. 'Coke gives me a buzz but it also makes me snappy and paranoid. And, of course, it's addictive. Since I've started taking it, some of my friends have dumped me because they got fed up with me. I know I can't go on like this forever.'

Drug-testing imminent?

A story currently doing the rounds of the City tells the tale of a dealer who, under the influence of drugs, cost his company £40,000 because he bought shares instead of selling them.

Not surprisingly, this type of story has made British financial companies very jumpy, and they got even more nervous following recent research from the States, which revealed that employees who use drugs can be up to one-third less effective than their clear-headed colleagues. In an attempt to tackle the problem, some major corporations are carrying out drugs tests on their employees. British-owned company Garban Equities warned staff they could face disciplinary action if they refused to provide urine samples to be tested for drugs including heroin, cocaine, amphetamines and cannabis. Garban was following the example of American firms based in the City. Drug-testing has been a routine practise in the States for more than a decade and 81% of big companies insist employees comply before they join the company, and on a random basis once employed.

In the UK, City Medical Services Ltd specialises in vetting job candidates for drug use. Around 15% of the tests are positive, usually for cannabis or cocaine, explains Dr Gareth Spier.

'We tend to test brokers and traders because one mistake on their part could cost millions.

'Cocaine gives you a buzz at first, but the long-term effects can be devastating,' he says. 'Users start behaving bizarrely, come into work late, argue with colleagues, are unable to concentrate, and eventually, can't do their job. I've seen cases where people get sacked because they've made a costly mistake when they've been out of it.'

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