

VARIETY

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Investigative Reports: The Junkie Next Door: Women and Heroin

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(Documentary; A&E, Tuesday, Oct. 26, 10 p.m. PT/9 p.m. ET) Taped in Baltimore, Md., and Newcastle County, Del., by BNNTV.com in association with A&E. Executive producers, Steven Rosenbaum, Bill Kurtis, Ed Hersh; senior producer, Jeffrey Tuchman; supervising producer, Laura Fleury; producer, Katherine Linton; associate producer, Deborah Kurtz; director of production, Lori Fechter; editor, Christopher White; creative director, Dave Goldberg; video, Mira Chang, Shasa Rogers, Linton. Host/Narrator: Bill Kurtis

It was only a matter of time before heroin, the new boutique narcotic of choice, began surfacing not only in the suburbs but in TV documentaries about heroin abuse in the suburbs. And here we are. This raw, potent "Investigative Reports" hour shows girls and women hooked on smack without the accompanying closeups of dank shooting galleries and creepy, sweaty withdrawal. Here, the junkies are more or less typical female members of white society: students, mothers, career women. Well, kinda. The "career" of the career woman depicted here is actually that of professional stripper. But Theresa Fox is 24 and middle class, with a home in suburbia, two adorable kids and a supportive husband. She also happens to need her daily dime-bag heroin fix to get her through work as men paw at her and treat her like "a whore," in her words. When she doesn't get it, she starts getting cranky and lashing out at the family. Just why Theresa's husband takes this kind of crap from her isn't clear, but the term "co-dependent" comes to mind. What is most fascinating about "The Junkie Next Door: Women and Heroin" is the uncommon access granted to A&E and producer BNN. Junkies are not typically a

forthcoming lot, but surprisingly, the production was able to elicit permission to ride along and record --- in up-close-and-personal fashion --- the damage done by heroin, as well as its procuring. What emerges is a rare glance into the mind of drug abusers, who are portrayed as human beings caught in the throes of a damaging habit that brings them pleasure, rather than as slaves to a poison that has no up-side whatsoever. There are noble people as well as sad ones to be found here. The noble include the mother of Erin Allen, who bravely tells her daughter's tragic story in hopes that it will prevent others from spiraling downhill in a similar fashion. There is also Joan Chatterton, a drug counselor who has dedicated her life to saving young women from the familiar cycle of ruin. But mostly, "The Junkie Next Door" is about women like 17-year-old Nicole, who has a \$ 30-a-day heroin habit and admits, "It's hard to explain I don't want to get high, but I do." Later, a young mother will reveal, "I don't want people to look at my son and say, 'His mother's a junkie.' I want him to have his own identity." Then, chillingly, she places the crack pipe to her lips and takes a fresh hit. The hour doesn't necessarily offer much in the way of solutions so much as hold a mirror up to the new reality of heroin: There were 141,000 new users in 1998; its use has doubled among high school seniors over the past decade; and its level of purity now exceeds 50% (it was once less than 10%). And heroin is likely to penetrate still further into our hallowed middle-class neighborhoods before the pattern heads into reverse. That probably isn't what anyone wants to hear. But to the credit of this spare but wise "Investigative Reports" installment, it is surely the reality. Tech credits are right on.