

REPORTS BY BOTANICA PERSONNEL OF MERCURY SALE AND USE FOR SPIRITUAL PRACTICES, BRONX, NEW YORK CITY, 1995

After: Zayas & Ozuah *AJPH* 1/96:112-113

Mercury Sale and Use Data	Botanicas Reporting (n = 41) No. (%)	
Botanica mercury sales		
Sell mercury	38	(92.7)
Do not sell	3	(7.3)
Volume of daily mercury sales^a		
1-4 capsules	20	(48.7)
5-10 capsules	12	(29.2)
11 or more capsules	3	(7.3)
Mercury dispensing forms		
Capsules	33	(80.5)
Larger qualities	2	(4.8)
Both forms	3	(7.3)
Source of recommendation for mercury use^b		
Family member	16	(39.0)
Spiritualist	16	(39.0)
Friends	15	(36.5)
Card Reader	14	(34.1)
Self	9	(21.9)
Santero	4	(9.7)
Books	1	(2.4)
Condition for which mercury was recommended^b		
Luck in love, money, work, health	32	(78.0)
Protection against evil	23	(56.0)
Protection from envy	1	(2.4)
Method of mercury use^b		
Carried in sealed pouch	20	(48.8)
Sprinkled in home	12	(29.3)
Carried in pocket	13	(31.7)
Sprinkled in car	1	(2.4)
Consumed in small quantities	1	(2.4)

Based on this data, Wendroff calculated that the median number of mercury capsules/vials (mean weight 9 grams) sold in 1995 by Bronx botanicas was 47,000 or 930 pounds. Riley calculated the range of such sales at from 506 pounds to 3,080 pounds per year. This is the equivalent of from 25,500 to 155,000 (9 gram) capsules/vials per year.

^aOnly 35 botanicas provided information on daily or weekly sales.

^bOften, more than one source, condition, or method was reported; therefore, percentages exceed 100%.

ESTIMATE OF TOTAL YEARLY MERCURY SALES, NUMBER OF DWELLINGS POLLUTED, AND NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS EXPOSED TO MERCURY (Based on above data.)

"Volume of daily mercury sales"

# Botanicas selling mercury	Range in Table # caps/day	Midpoint of daily sales (conservative)	Calculated # capsules sold per day
20	1 - 4	2	20 x 2 = 40
12	5 - 10	7	12 x 7 = 84
3	11 - ?	11	3 x 11 = 33
Totals: 35			157

Thus, 157 capsules sold per day, multiplied by 300 days per retail year, equals some 47,000 capsules sold per year. Of these, 29.3%, or 13,800 dwellings per year will be sprinkled with mercury. If there are but 2 inhabitants per dwelling, there will be 27,600 individuals exposed to toxic mercury levels per year in this area.