

so many people now," she says. At CREA's residence outside the capital, a sign of the recent surge in addicts is that most of the men wear short pants—which newcomers are required to wear to show they are child-like because of their addiction.

Unless Latin governments do more to educate the public and combat domestic sale, they will probably see a lot more newcomers. History is not on their side. During the 1970s, Pakistan was a major heroin shipper but had only a few thousand users.

Authorities were stunned to find later in the decade that the number had grown to 1.2 million practically overnight. Closer to home, Puerto Rico is another grim example. Moreover, as Latin America tries to adopt capitalism—and the increased education and technology it requires—it can hardly afford a drug-abuse epidemic. "It would be a mortal setback to our development," says Yolanda Márquez, head of Venezuela's Ribas treatment center.

A Panamanian social worker saw that

future last month as she chased a crack-addict mother onto a city bus. Laughing and passing her crack baby to other addicts, the mother became angry when the social worker ordered her to take the infant to a clinic. "Don't worry," scoffed the mother. "She's going to be just like me." It could have been a scene from the south Bronx in New York City—a reminder that in the realm of drug abuse, Latin America could become just like the United States in ways it never dreamed of. ■

Death in the Shooting Galleries

Talk about a deeply rooted drug culture. In Puerto Rico, the shooting galleries post house rules. ANYONE WHO USES THE SERVICE HAS TO PAY ONE DOLLAR AND STAY NO MORE THAN 10 MINUTES, says a handwritten sign in Spanish on the wooden wall of a tin-roofed gallery in the San Juan slum called La Colectora. The customers rent their needles, shoot up, chat a while, and they're on their way. Another half dozen shooting galleries no farther than a block away are also doing a brisk late-afternoon business. At one of the bigger establishments, the 27-year-old manager, herself an addict, also sells heroin and cocaine in \$5 and \$10 bags. Bargain hunters can buy five \$10 bags of heroin for \$40. Do police seizures ever prevent her from buying her merchandise? "Maybe for one morning. But it'll be around by the afternoon."

Murder rate: Metropolitan San Juan, with 1 million people, has an estimated 200 galleries and crack houses. Drug buyers can also get dope at dozens of outdoor stop-and-shop *puntas* that have sprung up in and around housing projects. Abuse has left its mark everywhere. AIDS, spread largely by intravenous drug users, is the No. 1 killer of Puerto Rican men. The island's murder rate has risen to more than twice that of the mainland United States; wars between drug gangs account-

ed for at least two thirds of the killings. In the capital, 1992 was a record year for murder, with 820 victims; January set a monthly record. Heavily armed thugs looking to finance drug buys are a hazard for everyone. Mayor Héctor Acevedo negotiated a truce between police and one housing-project gang whose armaments included hand grenades and a shoulder-fired missile. Newly elected Gov. Pedro Rosselló has started deploying the National Guard to beef up security during drug raids.

An island smaller than

Connecticut, Puerto Rico does not grow coca or opium poppies. But for decades its residents have been going back and forth to big cities on the mainland like New York and Newark, NJ. Some Puerto Ricans brought heroin habits back to the island. After years of steady growth in hard-drug use among the poor, Puerto Rico had the misfortune in the mid-'80s to get discovered by South American smugglers. Now it has become a favored transshipment point. Ideally located on the inter-continental trade route, Puerto Rico is also within U.S.

Customs jurisdiction; that means that once a drug shipment makes it into San Juan, "it might as well be in St. Louis," as William Mitchell, who runs the Drug Enforcement Administration's 67-agent San Juan office, puts it.

The AIDS age: Skyrocketing drug use was the last thing Puerto Rico needed in the age of AIDS. The virus spread like wildfire because of the prevalence of intravenous injection. Puerto Rico has the highest incidence of AIDS transmission via needle in the United States; injection is reported to be a factor in at least 63 percent of HIV-positive cases. Health workers can't get through to the main carriers. "Addicts—it goes in one ear and out the other," says Dr. Jaime Rivera Dueñas, medical director of the San Juan AIDS Institute.

Elsewhere in Latin America, drug consumption grew out of the export market. In Puerto Rico, smuggling was grafted onto a well-entrenched culture of addiction. The ease and speed with which that happened point to the folly of ignoring hard-drug use. Governor Rosselló, trying to stamp out the blaze while also tending to underlying conditions, warns Latin American countries that avoidance and denial don't work. "You really can't accept your country or your region to be a transshipment region and assume that it's not going to have any impact internally," Rosselló says. Judging from the grim news out of Venezuela, Panama and elsewhere, it already has.

PETER KATEL in San Juan



Drug abuse has left its mark:
Shooting up in San Juan