

V.C. Recognising the cocaine vendor

In inner-city areas (and increasingly in small towns as well), cocaine importation and distribution have long been dominated by the Igbo, an ethnic group from the southwest corner of Nigeria, and other Nigerian nationals. While other foreigners and locals are involved in the market, 30% of all those arrested for cocaine and crack in dockets reviewed were male Nigerians. Combining Nigerians and other foreigners (some of whom may have been Nigerian nationals using fraudulently acquired passports), we find that 45% of cocaine charges in the sample were brought against foreign nationals. Some of this may reflect enforcement priorities, but research gathered over the years supports the strong connection between this national group and drug trafficking.

Nigerians tend to be well-dressed and powerfully built, with a fondness for gold jewellery. The Igbo are mostly Catholic, so, despite the apparent contradiction, crucifixes are popular. Their heads are often shaven, and few have an in-depth knowledge of local languages.

As mentioned above, Nigerian dealers have a special association with local prostitutes, and some reside in the same residential hotel rooms with them. Many have arranged marriages of convenience with South African women.

Other cocaine vendors include coloured gangsters, as described in the section on Mandrax.

The most effective way of making arrests for dealing cocaine seems to be buy and bust operations.

