Not all are in ecstasy: Witnesses exalt, denounced drug

Most of the two-day hearing, before the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) hearing, federal judge Francisco L. Varga at the District Courthouse Downtown, was steeped in the criminal and technical. Specific molecular structures of MDMA—3,4-methylenedioxyxymethylamphetamine—were discussed as to their alleged hallucinogenic qualities. So was methodology used in determining the extent of brain damage suffered by laboratory animals.

However, when asked to describe alleged benefits of Ecstasy, witnesses, as well as those present in the small galley, abandoned technical jargon for more uplifting language:

"Do you know the word agape, the word usually associated with Christianity?" Thomas B. Roberts, professor of educational psychology at the University of Illinois, asked a reporter. "It usually means a love that is beyond words, beyond objects, between God and man. It is also a means of a feeling of brotherhood among all men."

Roberts was not a witness. He was one of 29 subjects who participated in a "pilot" study of the effect of MDMA on human behavior. He is one of four private citizens who have hired a Washington law firm to challenge the DEA's decision.

As of July 1, MDMA was a "Schedule I" drug. Schedule I, in government parlance, means a drug that has a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical use.

Under the ruling, those who possess MDMA can be charged with a misdemeanor. Those who sell and manufacture the drug are guilty of a felony and face a potential sentence of 15 years in prison and a $125,000 fine.

The first arrests under the emergency ruling were made last week in Dallas. Three men were apprehended after selling about 750 tablets—a wholesale price of $125.50 each. The drug to be used in the study, the DEA agent, said Philip J. Tarlow, special agent in charge of the DEA field office in Atlanta.

See Ecstasy, pg. 38, col. 3

Ecstasy continued from pg. 1B

The Ecstasy problem in Texas will be highlighted in an upcoming issue of Life magazine. Some DEA officials have said the drug, sometimes called a "designer" drug, is popular with college students and professionals. Mr. Jordan says it is a "dangerous" drug.

"It is a very dangerous drug," he says. "It can be dangerous if taken with other drugs."

The impurities, the poisons in this thing. It's unimpeachable what people will put in their systems.

"Ecstasy is another problem," he says. "It is a dangerous drug."

The term "designer drug" has come to mean synthetic chemical compounds produced in clandestine laboratories.

Underground chemists create a designer drug by subtly varying the chemical structure of an existing illicit drug, or a controlled substance. Until the drug is banned by the DEA, it is a "legal" variation of the drug.

However, Charlotte Johnson, DEA attorney, says: "These drugs are being touted as legal by those selling them. Legal as in not being controlled substances under state or federal law."

"But if you use in unapproved drugs in interstate commerce, it's a violation of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act.

The government was hard-pressed in reacting to these substances, so last October, the DEA streamlined procedures that allowed the DEA to rush to schedule the drug.

To that end, the DEA has reversed its temporary scheduling of MDMA, as opposed to Schedule I. Under the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984, the DEA has the second such use of that procedure.

In another government step, a bill was introduced last week in the U.S. Senate, the Designer Drug Enforcement Act of 1985. It would make it unlawful to possess or distribute a "designer" drug intended for human consumption.

Last month, citing the University of Chicago Medical Center, the DEA warned that a drug called MDMA, similar to MDMA, causes brain damage in laboratory animals. The DEA said it wanted to place MDMA on Schedule I.

A segment of the psychotherapy community has challenged the scheduling. The four men who hired a Washington law firm to challenge the DEA include two professors with Harvard University Medical School in Cambridge, Mass., Dr. Greer, a psychiatrist in Santa Fe, N.M., and Mr. Roberts.

"Everybody knows that a traumatic experience can influence a person's life negatively," Mr. Roberts says. "But can a positive experience influence a person's life positively? That doesn't occur to most people.

"There will be sessions in couples or groups experienced "more cognitively" and "enhanced communication." Twenty-seven reported positive changes in attitudes and feelings.

The study, although written up by Mr. Greer, has not been published in a journal. Mr. Greer says one of his motives is to alert the research community to the possibilities of more research.

What was the first week like, were the motives of the 29 subjects?

"Nine wanted a more cognitive understanding of themselves," he said. "Five subjects received 50-milligram doses to facilitate creative writing. Six subjects wanted enhanced communication with someone (often their spouse)," according to his report. Eight subjects wanted a "peak-experience of a visionary or mystical state."

Four subjects "mentioned fun and enjoyment" as a goal. "Is fun and enjoyment a legitimate use for a pharmaceutical agent?" Dr. Greer was asked by Steve Stone, special counsel, former chief counsel for the DEA.

"It's not a standard use," Dr. Greer replied.

Dr. Greer, as his study points out, said subjects were screened for health reasons before involving themselves in the study. They were healthy people, he said.

"In other words," Mr. Stone said, "they're OK, but they want to be better?" "They're OK in some ways," Dr. Greer said. "They want to be better in some ways."
