

Facts about teenage drug and alcohol abuse: statistics and causes term paper

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



Introduction

Drug and alcohol use among teenagers is a problem concerning not only the core social structures, the families, but societies as a whole. When do teenagers first experience alcohol and what drives them to use drugs? Are figures showing a decline in students using alcohol and drugs leave us on the safe side, or is there another trend replacing an outdated one?

It appears that a large number of 8th, 10th and 12th-graders in the U. S find pleasure in using alcohol or illegal drugs, while there is also a portion of the teenage population that is urged to alcohol and drug use for social reasons. Although statistics showcase a relieving drop in youths consuming alcohol and drug use during the last ten years, there are collateral factors that rise people's awareness; yet, perhaps the most important fact to take into consideration when trying to analyze teen drug and alcohol abuse is the reasons that push youths towards that direction. Maybe, through deeper understanding of the causes, we could manage to deal with such a problem more effectively.

Of course, fortunately, there is a portion of students that choose not to use drugs or alcohol, for more reasons than one. According to the Oracle ThinkQuest Education Foundation, students prefer to stay away from drugs because they want to remain healthy. Moreover, they are aware of the consequences of drug and alcohol use and skip cancer by diving into sports, after school activities and their homework instead (thinkquest). It is that part of the student community that chooses health over sickness and life over cancer. It is interesting to note that those that turn their backs to drugs, believe that those that use alcohol and drugs do so because they cannot say

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“ no” feel bad about themselves and don’t realize they hurt themselves by such behaviors (thinkquest).

Facts about Teen Drug and Alcohol Abuse

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), which is a part of the National Institutes for Health, has funded an on-going study under the name “ Monitoring the Future”. The core goal of the study is to further analyze the behavior and attitudes of the American students, both at secondary school and college, as well as adults. Apart from that, the Monitoring the Future also studies those people’s values and reaches solid data after sending questionnaires and surveys annually to graduates , and 8th, 10th and 12th grade students for many years after their initially participation to the studies/surveys (Monitoring the Future).

Based on their 2010 and 2011 survey, part of the results regarding teen alcohol and drug abuse, are as followed:

- About 36% of teens have used alcohol at some point of their life, by the 8th grade in the United States.
- About 71% of teen have used alcohol at some point of their lives, by the 12th grade in the U. S.
- About 21% of teens up to the 8th grade have used illegal drugs in some form at some point of their life in the U. S.
- About 48% of those attending up to the 12th grade have used illegal drugs in some form at some point of their life in the U. S.

(Data taken from ext. colostate. edu)

As one can clearly understand, the use of alcohol and drugs is widely spread

among students up to the 12th grade and a large portion of the student body has dove into alcohol and drugs, which makes the problem more intense for the families all across the United States, among other countries. Indicatively, given the NIDA 2009 results, in the state of Colorado a profound 81% of students attending secondary school up to the 12th grade have consumed alcohol at a time of their life. It is interesting to note that about 19% of them stated that they had tried alcohol even before the tender age of 13 and more than half of the teen portion of the state have tried illegal drugs by the time they reached the 12th grade. As for the first-timers that used illegal drugs at a later age than 13, the percentage ranges approximately at 7% (Matheson and McGrath).

However, some good news are coming from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), part of the U. S Department of Health and Human Services, that reports a drop in the percentage of youths that use alcohol and smoke cigarettes. In fact, they have reported that there is a significant drop in alcohol and cigarette use among 8th, 10th and 12th-graders, ever since the Monitoring the Future has started their surveys and studies, which was initiated back in 1975 (NIH News).

In order to comprehend the actual drop as discussed before, figures coming out of the NIH speak for themselves:

- In 1997, a 74. 8% of teenagers (12th graders) reported to have used alcohol. In 2011, that number dropped down to 63. 5%.
- In 1994, an astonishing 46. 8% of 8th-graders reported alcohol use, while by 2011 the percentage reached 26. 9%.
- Binge drinking among 8th, 10th and 12th-graders ranged between 6. 4%

and 21. 6% in 2011, which is a significant decrease compared to the 8. 7% and 24. 4% range respectively.

(Data taken from NIH News)

Unfortunately, although the decade's statistics show a drop in the number of teenagers that have reported to have used illegal drugs or consumed alcohol at a time of their life, there is a large portion of the teenage population that still consumes alcohol or uses illegal drugs frequently and put their lives in danger. Also, teenagers appear not to care much about the fact that it is against the law to consume alcohol and use illegal drugs under the age of 21. More analytically, according to teenagers' reports, they most commonly use marijuana, alcohol, pills prescribed to them and caffeine, while the list with the least used drugs include depressants, cocaine, club drugs, hallucinogens and amphetamines and/or other drugs that can boost an individual's performance (Matheson and McGrath). In fact, the use of marijuana and synthetic marijuana or most commonly known as spice or K2, have shown a worrying and steady increase in recent years with a surprising 11. 4% of 12th-graders reporting past year use and 6. 6% reporting daily use (NIH News).

When it comes to pregnant teens, there is about 17% that show up that either tested as positive for drug use or would admit to it during self-reports. Out of that 17%, there was 11% that tested positive through urinalysis, during the third trimester.

Moreover, during a study that was done in Australia, it was found that there were four main categories of substance use for people between the ages of 13 and 15. These were purposeful use, controlled use, competent use, and

use that do not require treatment. This showed some of the main reasons for teen age drug use for that age group. In some cases, a person may use a drug for a specific purpose and later end up becoming addicted to the substance. One such substance is the use of narcotic pain medication. For example, if a teen gets hurt, while playing sports, they may get a prescription for pain medication. At some point they may find that they end up getting addicted to the medication, so they continue to use it, even after they no longer need it.

Reasons that drive teenagers to Alcohol and Drug Use

In order to provide a more in-depth research on youth alcohol and drug use, it is essential to dig even deeper and try to bring to the surface the possible reasons that drive teenagers to alcohol and substance use.

Based on recent studies, as indicated and posted at the Colorado State University Extension website, the human brain reaches matureness and fully develops at around the individual's mid-twenties. The very last area that develops is that of the pre-frontal cortex that is believed to be held responsible for any decisions a person makes. Judgments is also delivered through the pre-frontal cortex, which from some perspective scientifically "justifies" the risky behaviors that are common among teenagers and their peers (Matheson and McGrath).

The same article continues with the findings from researchers that tried to find out why youths are intrigued by alcohol and drug use. Based on their results, it seems that a big part of teenagers are in great need of bringing up their spirits and elevate their mood, trying to reduce any negative feelings

they might be coping with. Another important reason that is believed to urge teens to consume alcohol or use drugs is to be accepted within a community that matters to them, such as their neighborhood or even school community and among their peers and receive “rewards” for doing something “cool” and “by adopting a specific reason for drinking the decision for engaging in alcohol consumption is made” (Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, and Engels 844). In other words, teenagers are inducted in alcohol and drug use in order to feel better or happier or because their friends or close social environment considers drinking alcohol and using drugs as part of being accepted and credited as a valuable member of the community.

Speaking with numbers, a study conducted in Argentina showed that a vast majority of teenagers (80%) drink for enjoyment, 7% drink because they deal with negative feelings, about 5% wanted to be (and feel) socially accepted (by their peers) and 1% decided to consume alcohol because they were bored or wanted to feel more relaxed. A huge percentage (about 94%) among U. K teens drink at parties to have more fun and enjoyment, while about 25% of Canadian teens drink because they wanted to taste alcohol (Kuntsche, Knibbe, Gmel, and Engels 851). Another interesting study that was conducted in Hong Kong by researchers Lo & Globetti in 2000 demonstrated a tendency of youths between 15 and 17 to drink just for fun. Also, teens that were in need of improving their mood “reported heavy alcohol use while those looking to reduce negative feelings showed problematic drinking patterns [while others] sometimes copy what their friends do to feel accepted, and some are curious about the effects of drugs on their mood and behavior” (Matheson and McGrath).

Frances Harding, Director of the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), posted another aspect as per the reasons that push teenagers to substance use that is extremely interesting to note at stopbullying.gov website.

Bullying seems to be more closely related to youth substance use than people might think. Indicatively, “ researchers found that middle and high school students who bully their peers or are bully-victims (bully others and are also bullied) are more likely than students who aren’t involved in bullying to use alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana” (Harding). Since bullying is treacherous, given the fact that it can be undetected, it is vital for parents to have a close relation with their children, talk about any problem and supervise their child in terms of who they relate to (peers). Of course, children whose parents use alcohol and drugs run a greater risk of start using them too. Teachers can also be on the lookout for children with poor grades and lack of interest as they can become victims of bullying or bully others. Aggressive behavior is also indicative of an underlying troubling situation (Harding).

Another link that has been found is that substance abuse is also caused by neglect. That means that many of the cases of substance abuse could be tied into the issue of some form of neglect. There are multiple forms of neglect that can result to youth alcohol and drug use, such as disorganized neglect, emotional neglect, and depressed neglect and it is believed that without better neglect intervention, the problem will only continue to get worse.

Conclusion

Drug and alcohol abuse among teenagers are core societal problems that need to be further analyzed. Statistics show that more than 30% of the country's 8th-graders have used alcohol for the first time and about half of the student body has used drugs by the 12th grade, which shows a concerning fact regarding the country's youths and their future. Maybe statistics demonstrate a drop in those figures compared to a decade ago; however, we can't rest assured when the percentages of those using marijuana, alcohol, prescribed pills and caffeine are slowly and steadily increasing. Another interesting fact that needs to be taken into more serious consideration is the reason why teenagers turn to alcohol consumption and drug use. Their need to find a way to feel better, joy and happiness is definitely something societies should look into deeper.

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