

Heavy Alcohol and Other Drug Use

The most disturbing finding of the *California Student Survey* over time has been the continued high level of heavy involvement in alcohol and other drug use among 9th and 11th graders, particularly in the face of a pronounced decline in overall substance use between the end of the 1990s and 2003. Results for 2005 show little improvement, although a few measures in 11th grade did decline slightly.

Indicators of Frequent and Heavy Use

Frequent Alcohol Use. Weekly drinking (once a week or more often in the past six months) remained at 7% in 9th grade, but declined two points to 14% in 11th (compared to 19% in 1999). *As teens get older, the likelihood increases markedly that they will drink heavily.* Weekly drinkers constituted only about one-seventh of drinkers in 9th grade, but one-fourth in 11th. Drinking on three or more of the past 30 days, an indication of weekly drinking, increased 1.5 points in 9th grade to 10% and declined 1.5 points in 11th to 16.5%. Daily drinking was only 2% in 11th grade.

Binge Drinking. Binge drinking — consuming five drinks in a row in the past 30 days — changed little in 7th and 9th grades, at 5% and 12%. It did decline two points in 11th grade to 21%, resulting in a drop of almost five points since 2001. Still, students who binged constitute almost half the current drinking population in 9th grade and two-thirds of it in 11th, as was the case in 2003. This makes binge drinking the predominant pattern of alcohol use in 11th grade. *If an adolescent drinks in the 11th grade, it is likely that he/she will be a binge drinker.* Moreover, about half of binge drinkers in 11th grade (one-third of current drinkers) binged on three or more of the past 30 days, suggesting a weekly pattern (See Table 4.1).

Frequent Marijuana Use. Weekly use of marijuana during the past six months among 9th and 11th graders, at 6% and 10%, was the same as in 2003 (and 2001 for 9th grade). Although these are lower weekly rates than for alcohol, weekly users are about one-quarter of the marijuana-using population, a higher proportion than found for alcohol. Similarly, use of marijuana on three or more of

the past 30 days was unchanged in 9th at 7%, but did decline two points in 11th grade to 11% for a total of four points since 2001. *These respondents account for the great majority of current (past 30 days) users.* Daily marijuana use in the past six months was negligible in grade 9, but reached 4% in 11th, exceeding daily alcohol drinking (only 1%) by three points.

High-Risk Use (HRU). Students who reported a high frequency or level of drug use in the past six months are classified as High-Risk Drug Users (HRU). The percentage rose two points in 9th grade to 11% and remained level in 11th at 17%. The increase in 9th grade also may reflect the addition of prescription painkillers to the survey.

Table 4.1. Frequent and Heavy AOD Use Indicators

| | Grade | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| | 7 th (%) | 9 th (%) | 11 th (%) |
| Weekly marijuana use (6 month) | 2 | 6 | 10 |
| Weekly alcohol use (6 month) | 3 | 7 | 14 |
| Marijuana use 3 of 30 days | 2 | 7 | 11 |
| Alcohol use 3 of 30 days | 4 | 10 | 17 |
| Binge drinking (30 days) | 5 | 12 | 21 |
| Binge drank 3 of 30 days | 2 | 5 | 12 |
| Ever high/loaded, 7+ times | — | 8 | 17 |
| Ever very drunk/sick, 7+ times | — | 3 | 9 |
| Likes to get very high | — | 6 | 11 |
| Likes to get very drunk | 2 | 4 | 7 |
| Drunk/high school, 3+ times | 2 | 6 | 12 |
| High-Risk Drug Use | 4 | 11 | 17 |

Intentions of Use and Intoxication

Table 4.1 also shows that 4% of 9th graders and 7%, of 11th reported that they usually drank to get *very drunk* and that 6% and 11% used drugs to get *very high* (about the same as in 2003). Students use drugs to get high more than alcohol. Although fewer 9th and 11th graders use drugs compared to

alcohol, the prevalence rates for being high/loaded on drugs were slightly higher than for being very drunk/sick on alcohol. For example, 9% of 9th graders and 17% of 11th were high on drugs seven or more times, twice the percentages for alcohol (3% and 9%).

Dependency Indicators

Seven indicators of dependency on the survey were derived from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM)-IV criteria for substance abuse dependence. Two or more of these indicators were reported by 5% of 9th and 13% of 11th graders. About one-sixth to one-fifth of 11th graders reported increasing the amount they used to have the same effect (an indicator of tolerance), using a lot

more than intended, using when alone, and using after telling oneself not to use. About one-tenth spent a lot of time getting, using or being "hung" over from drugs, that their drug use kept them from doing normal activities such as school work or sports, and didn't like the way they felt when not high or drunk, consistent with the percentages reporting that they liked to get very high or drunk when they used.

Problems Related to Use

Experiencing problems associated with AOD use are good indicators of heavy use. Upper graders were asked to identify which of 12 potential pharmacological, personal, school, and social problems they experienced from use of alcohol or marijuana and other drugs. *Two or more problems* were reported by 7% of 9th and 14% of 11th graders

for alcohol; 5% and 8%, respectively, for drugs; and 10% and 18% for either substance. These results are almost the same as in 2003. Although the overall rates are lower for drugs than for alcohol, the results are just as troubling because of the smaller size of the drug-using population.

Cessation Attempts

The DSM dependency criteria include indicators of cessation attempts revealing that users who are heavily involved with alcohol or other drugs have insight as to the source of life problems they are experiencing. The CSS includes four cessation-related indicators. At least two attempts to stop use were reported by 8% of all 11th graders for marijuana and 5% for alcohol, amounting to 19% of marijuana users and only 10% of alcohol users. The lower proportion of users attempting to reduce alcohol use than drug use may in part reflect even higher acceptance of drinking among youth and the difficulties in reducing it.

Ten percent of upper grade students reported needing help with their AOD use or were at least unsure whether they did or not. Consistent with these results, 6% of 9th graders and 12% of 11th indicated they had thought about stopping or reducing use, but even in 11th grade only 6% had spoken with anyone about it and less than 2% had been counseled or attended a program to help reduce/stop use. Thus, the percentage of 11th graders who seeks help is much lower than the percentage who appears to perceive a need to do so. The percentage who enters a program is much smaller still. These findings reveal an unmet need.

Estimating the Intervention Population

Using survey items that map to DSM criteria, we estimated the percentages of students who might be substance dependent or abusers. The results in Table 4.2, very similar to those found in 2003, suggest that about one-in-ten 9th graders and two-in-ten 11th graders may be AOD abusers who would be helped by some intervention to reduce problematic substance use and its related problems. Moreover, among them, 4% in 9th grade and 9% in 11th (almost half) may already be dependent and in need of substance abuse treatment or counseling. This estimate is consistent with the percentages of 11th graders reporting weekly alcohol and marijuana use in the past 6 months; frequent binge drinking and marijuana use in the past 30 days; being drunk/high at

school more than three times; and liking to get very drunk and high. In an average 11th-grade classroom of 35 students, 5-6 students may be in need of some form of intervention and 3 may need treatment or counseling.

Table 4.2. DSM Dependency and Abuse Estimates

| | 9 th Grade | | 11 th Grade | |
|------------|-----------------------|----------|------------------------|----------|
| | 2003 (%) | 2005 (%) | 2003 (%) | 2005 (%) |
| Dependency | 4 | 4 | 8 | 9 |
| Abuse | 6 | 7 | 10 | 10 |
| Total | 10 | 11 | 18 | 19 |

Conclusions

Overall, the results strongly indicate that about one-in-ten high school juniors may be dependent on alcohol or other drugs and involved in problem behaviors leading warranting treatment and counseling. The primary conclusion to be drawn from these findings is the need to expand school-based intervention efforts, such as *Student Assistance Programs*, that provide heavy users the support and referral to services they need to stop or reduce their use and counter the many risk factors in their lives. These interventions need to begin in middle school. Heavy users in grade 9 are already on a trajectory to dependence that involves a wide range of problems associated with failure in school and other problems.

About the CSS

The state-mandated 11th biennial California Student Survey was conducted in the fall-winter of the 2005-06 school year by WestEd under conditions of strict confidentiality and anonymity among 10,638 students in grades 7, 9 and 11 in 113 randomly-selected schools. Participation was voluntary and required parental approval. The survey is sponsored by the Office of the Attorney General, with the California Dept. of Education and Dept. of Alcohol and Drug Programs. Full results are online at www.Safestate.org/CSS.