

Drug Use Trends among American Youth

The latest Monitoring the Future Survey conducted by the National Institute of Drug Abuse in the United States reveals promising results. Drug use among youth in several categories is in decline. The survey, conducted annually by the University of Michigan's Institute of Social Research collected more than 43,000 questionnaires from students in grades 8, 10, and 12. Approximately 394 schools participated in the study from across the United States. The self-administered questionnaire examines past year, past month, and lifetime drug use as well as perceived risk and disapproval, and perceived availability. The 2002 survey produced more positive results than findings from recent years. This year's survey depicts significant declines in cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, and a decrease in use of several illicit drugs.

- *Smoking* rates reached their peak in 1996 and 1997, however, since the mid to late nineties cigarette consumption among adolescents in grades 8, 10, and 12 have begun to decline. Past month usage decreased significantly in 2002; the 30-day prevalence of smoking declined by 49%, 42% and 27% in grade 8, 10, and 12, respectively. Perceived risk of smoking has continued to increase, as has perceived disapproval with both findings contributing to the overall decline in smoking.

- *Alcohol* use continues to be the most common substance used. In

2002 the proportion of students who reported drinking an alcoholic beverage in the 30-day period prior to the survey was 20%, 35%, and 49%, in grades 8, 10, and 12, respectively. More than half of 12th grade students (62%) and 21% of 8th grade students report having been drunk at least once in their life. However, the 2002 rates are considerably lower than the previous few years and seem to indicate a downward trend. Perceived availability of alcohol remains very high among students in all three grade levels.



- One of the most significant findings in this year's study is the overall decline in *ecstasy* use within all three grades. Since the late 1990s, ecstasy rates have been climbing steadily. Perceived risk of ecstasy use seems to have preceded the notable declines. In 2002, annual prevalence fell by 20% in all three grades, and use of ecstasy is down for all three prevalence periods measured (lifetime, annual, and 30-day). Disapproval of ecstasy use increased

in 2002, reflecting a change in peer norms.

- The 2002 study results indicate a decline in any illicit drug use for all grades in all three prevalence periods measured. *Marijuana* is one such example where use is down for all grades. In 2002, the use of *LSD* declined sharply, continuing the downward trend that began in 1996. Perceived risk and disapproval do not seem to explain the changes in marijuana and LSD consumption. *Amphetamine* use also decreased in 2002 for students in grades 8 and 10.

- Several classes of drugs showed no significant changes in 2002. These include *heroin*, *narcotics* other than heroin, and *cocaine*, as well as anabolic *steroids*. *Tranquilizers* and *barbiturates* seem to be the only two drugs that demonstrated an increase in 2002; and the increases are among grade 12 students only.

Although results from the 2002 survey reflect trends in a positive direction, professionals need to continue, strengthen and improve current prevention efforts in light of these findings.

Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., & Bachman, J.G. (2003). *Monitoring the Future national results on adolescent drug use: Overview of key findings, 2002*. Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse. Available through NIDA's Web site: www.drugabuse.gov