

Adolescents and Substance Abuse

Issue #3

Fall 2003

Adolescent drug use is an important social issue as its development and consequences impact directly on academic achievement, high school dropout rate, early sexual initiation, and troubled interpersonal relationships among other consequences (Hoffman and Johnson, 1998). The effects are far-reaching and make substantial demands on state social services.

As a state which has one of the highest high school dropout rates in the nation (*KIDS COUNT Data Book: 2003*, 2003) it is of interest to examine adolescent substance abuse in Nevada.

It is the intent of this issue brief to focus on significant risk factors leading to adolescent substance abuse, effects of drug use, prevention strategies, and statistics referring to adolescent substance abuse in Nevada.

Significant Risk Factors Leading to Adolescent Substance Abuse

There are many risk factors which lead to adolescent substance abuse. The highest risk, however, is being raised in a father-custody family, that is, a father only and father-stepmother family (Hoffman & Johnson, 1988). Boys may be traumatized to a greater degree than girls from their father leaving home, resulting in adjustment problems such as use of illicit substances (Simons et al., 1999).

Research has also shown that male adolescents are more susceptible to drug use than female adolescents because females are more strongly monitored by their parents than are males. However, when this monitoring is weak, the probability that they will become involved with deviant peers becomes higher, and, likewise their involvement with drugs (Svensson, 2003).

Additional characteristics that can increase the probability of adolescent drug use are:

- (1) lack of closeness adolescents feel toward their family
- (2) poor and inconsistent ways in which parents monitor, train, and discipline their children
- (3) family conflict
- (4) family attitude and behavior involving drug and alcohol use
- (5) associating with peers who use drugs (Bahr, Maughan, Marcos, & Li, 1998).

Research has also identified important risk factors regarding smoking. Regardless of the initial level of cigarette smoking, as long as an adolescent tried cigarettes previously, his or her risk for current alcohol use will increase greatly (Chen et al., 2002).

Risk factors for smoking among adolescents are:

- (1) using alcohol, marijuana, and other illicit drugs
- (2) violence involvement
- (3) having had sex
- (4) having friends who smoke
- (5) learning problems (Scal, Ireland, & Borowsky, 2003).

A recent national survey of American attitudes on substance abuse reveals that high stress, frequent boredom, and too much spending money can also be considered significant risk factors for teens, increasing the likelihood that they will smoke, drink, and use illegal drugs (CASA, 2003).

Effects of Drug Use

Adolescents who use drugs increase the risk of low academic achievement, dropping out of high school, early sexual experience, teenage nonmarital pregnancy, problems with interpersonal relationships, and marital disruption in adulthood (Hoffman & Johnson, 1988).

Illegal acts committed by adolescents under the influence of alcohol and drugs are more often targeted toward persons than toward general theft. Offenses under the influence occurred more often among heavier alcohol and drug users, more serious offenders, more impulsive youth, and youth with more deviant peers (White et al., 2002).

Body modification, like substance abuse, is a risk behavior and may indicate other risk factors such as substance abuse. In a recent study, adolescents with body modification such as body piercing (defined as other than one pair of bilateral earlobe piercing in females), tattoos, scarification, and branding

had 3.1 times greater odds of problem substance abuse than those without body modification. Adolescents with body modification should not, however, according to the researchers, be automatically labeled as substance abusers even though there appears to be a significant relationship between the two behaviors (Brooks et al., 2003).

Prevention

During the past 20 years there has been a concerted effort to develop effective drug-abuse prevention approaches for implementation in schools. Some of the most widely used school-based prevention approaches are ineffective according to a growing body of prevention literature, especially those which rely on providing information concerning the adverse consequences of drug abuse. A broader prevention approach that includes elements of the social-influence approach along with information and skills designed to promote increased personal and social competence has been shown to be more effective. Although the predominant research has been conducted with cigarette smoking, prevention effects have also been demonstrated for alcohol and marijuana use (Botvin, 2000).

Findings indicate that youth at high risk who received a universal drug-abuse prevention program which taught drug refusal skills, antidrug norms, personal self-management skills, and general social skills reported less smoking, drinking, inhalant use, and polydrug use at a one-year follow-up assessment than a high-risk group in the control situation that did not receive the intervention. Indications are that universal prevention programs can be effective for minority, economically disadvantaged, inner-

city youth who are at higher-than-average risk for substance abuse initiation (Griffin et al., 2002).

Parental awareness plays an important role and is a first step in potential for deterring drug use. Unless parents are aware of the problem, they cannot initiate preventative action. In a sample of 985 adolescents and their parents, only 39% of parents were aware their adolescents used tobacco, only 34% were aware of alcohol use, and only 11% were aware of illicit drug use. An important implication is that in most circumstances there should be greater reliance on the adolescent's report than on the parent's report when it comes to assessing drug use (McDermitt, Bertrand & Davis, 2003).

Lastly, studies have shown that higher grade point average and family connectedness may have a positive effect on adolescent smoking (Scal, Ireland & Borowski, 2003) and students who had strong religious ties tended not to use drugs or to not have friends who used drugs (Bahr et al., 1998).

Adolescent Substance Abuse in Nevada

According to the *2001 Crime and Justice in Nevada*, 1,147 youths age 17 and under were arrested for drug and liquor violations by county and municipal agencies.

Drug violations included:

- ❖ 84.3% of juveniles arrested for possession,
- ❖ 15.7% arrested for sales/manufacturing.

Of those juveniles arrested for liquor violations:

- ❖ 95.4% involved liquor laws,
- ❖ 4.6% were for driving under the influence (DUI).

Extracted from the *2001 Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Survey of Middle School and High School Survey Results* are items involving adolescent substance abuse in Nevada (see Table 1).

Some of the findings include :

- ❖ During the past 30 days about one-fourth of the high school students (HHS) had smoked, 13 percent of middle school students (MSS) had had at least one drink of alcohol.
- ❖ During the past 30 days, 47.5 percent of the HHS had had at least one drink of alcohol.
- ❖ Alcohol and cigarette use among Nevada high school students declined since 1999; marijuana use, however, increased slightly.
- ❖ The percentage of students who had been offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property had decreased from 1999 to 2001.



Text by
Freda Klein, EdD
KIDS COUNT Data Book Project Assistant,
CBER

Layout by
Wil Cope
Graduate Assistant, CBER

Table 1
Percentage of Nevada Middle and High School Students Involved in
Substance-Abuse Activities: 1999, 2001

<i>Item</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>MIDDLE SCHOOL Percent 2001</i>	<i>HIGH SCHOOL Percent 1999</i>	<i>HIGH SCHOOL Percent 2001</i>
How long have you lived in Nevada?	Less than 1 year 1 to 6 years 7 or more years	7.2 25.2 57.6	NA	4.8 31.7 63.5
During the past 30 days, on how many days did you smoke cigarettes?	0 days 1 or more days	87.0 13.0	67.4 29.2	74.8 25.2
During the past 30 days, on how many days did you have at least one drink of alcohol?	0 days 1 or more days	NA	47.0 52.5	52.5 47.5
How do you usually get the alcoholic beverages you drink?	I don't drink alcohol From home, parents know From home, parents don't know From friends Ask adults to buy Buy them myself	65.7 16.1 6.5 9.7 1.3 0.8	NA	36.6 13.3 6.7 34.7 5.1 3.8
During the past 12 months, has anyone offered, sold, or given you an illegal drug on school property?	Yes No	18.8 81.2	30.9 69.1	35.7 64.3
Among your closest friends, how many use tobacco (any kind) almost every day?	None A few Some Most All	67.2 19.5 7.2 4.6 1.5	NA	35.6 29.1 18.3 14.3 2.7
Among your closest friends, how many use alcohol at least once a month?	None A few Some Most All	63.9 21.3 7.1 5.1 2.6	NA	22.0 28.5 16.4 22.6 10.5
During the past 30 days, how many times did you use marijuana?	0 days 1 or more days	90.2 9.9	74.1 25.9	73.4 26.6

Note: NA = Not Applicable

Source: Nevada Department of Education, *Nevada Youth Risk Behavior Report*, 1999, 2001.

If you need more specific information about the children and youth in your local area, contact Nevada KIDS COUNT, Keith Schwer, PhD, Director CBER or Rennae Daneshvary, PhD, Interim Nevada KIDS COUNT Coordinator, Assistant Director CBER

Phone: (702) 895-3191

Fax: (702) 895-3606

E-mail: kids@unlv.nevada.edu

The Center for Business and Economic Research

4505 Maryland Parkway, Box 456002

Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-6002

