

State of Drug Abuse Among School Youth in Jamaica National Schools Survey 2006

Summary

The 2006 National Survey for Jamaica is part of a coordinated regional effort supported by the Organization of American States' Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (OAS/CICAD). The survey provides regional comparison of the drug problem as it affects young people, ranging from ages 11-19, in Grades 8, 10 and 11. Baseline surveys exist in Jamaica for comparison of this age cohort. Jamaica's National School Survey also included a Teacher's Survey. The Survey was conducted by the National Council on Drug Abuse (NCDA).

4536 students randomly selected from 70 schools across Jamaica completed the survey. 48.8% were males and 51.2% were females. The schools were located in Kingston, St. Andrew (urban), St. Catherine (urban), and other urban and rural areas. 192 teachers, attached to the selected classes, were surveyed. As with most studies of this problem, under-reporting is a larger problem than over-reporting.

Alcohol (70.4%) was the most frequently "ever used" drug followed by Cigarettes (27.4%), Solvents and inhalants (28.2%), Marijuana (ganja) 24.1%, Beady (14.0%), Season spliff (6.0%) and Cocaine (3.1%). An illegal drug was "ever used" by 43.9% of students. In the 30-day category, 16.5% of students surveyed had used an illegal drug. The 30-day use was considerably less than lifetime use. In the 30-day category alcohol (36.7%) was most consumed. 30-day use of cigarettes(5.0%) and marijuana(8.0%) reflects marginal increases over 1997. The majority of students started to use drugs at an early age with 32.9% reporting alcohol use before 10 years. The age range for most substance use in Jamaica in the cohort studied lies between 11 and 12 years.

New patterns of consumption have emerged. Beady (nicotine and tar) is now commonly used. Inhalants continue to be abused by females (34.19%) over males (21.79%). Overall, while male students continue to use drugs more than females, the data show a narrowing of the gap between both genders.

Perceptions of reasons for drug use are shifting. Peer pressure has emerged as the major reason. Students pointed to stress release and the need to relax as reasons for drug use. Teachers found curiosity and experimentation to be important. Perceptions varied between teachers and students. Illegal substances are available to students. Marijuana (38.4%) was classified as easily available and, within the last 30 days, 11.7% of the sample was offered the substance. The data show a mixed perception of harm that could result from the use of various substances, highlighting the need to develop targeted interventions. 72.2% of the sample had never been curious about trying an illicit drug while 77.3% would not try an illicit drug, even if the opportunity was presented.

Drug use and abuse has wide national, regional and international implications and its escalation among adolescents is a major concern. Consumption of many of these of the psychoactive substances has marred the health status of many adolescents and negatively affected their academic progress. The National Survey is an important tool in the evaluation of the existing situation, assessment of ongoing interventions and supporting plans and policies for future direction.

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