

ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, OTHER DRUGS, WEAPONS, VIOLENCE, AND PENNSYLVANIA'S YOUTH: A GENERATION AT RISK

THE 1995 SURVEY

1995 marked the fourth biennial survey of Pennsylvania students in grades six, seven, nine, and twelve. This comprehensive survey was sponsored by the Commonwealth Department of Education and the Governor's Drug Policy Council. The questionnaire, *Primary Prevention Awareness, Attitudes and Use Survey* (Diagnostics Plus, State College, Pennsylvania), assures participants of anonymity. Participation by schools and students was voluntary.

The questionnaire included items about willingness to use and self-reported use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs; driver and passenger risks; attitudes about school and future goals; physical fighting; weapons; problem behaviors; and potential intervention resource persons.

The most recent enrollment figures from the Pennsylvania Department of Education were used to select a stratified random sample (by grade by region) of ten percent of the public-school students and five percent of the nonpublic-school students in selected grades. This executive summary highlights the responses of 56,670 students throughout the state: 14,444 sixth graders, 14,594 seventh graders, 15,413 ninth graders, and 12,219 seniors. A comprehensive report of the findings of the 1995 survey is available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Community and Student Services.

SUBSTANCE USE

In discussing use responses, "regular use" reflects a response of "about once a day," "once or twice a week," or "once or twice a month"; this combination is used because it closely reflects National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) 30-day use data. Any reference to "willingness to use" reflects a response of "would like to use it any chance I got," "would like to try or would like to use it," or "not sure whether or not... would try it." The nebulous "not sure" category is included because doing so more closely reflects National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) intent data and also because it provides a better predictor of later actual use.

Willingness to use a substance is typically higher than self-reported use of that substance. For the gateway substances (alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana), intent to use precedes **actual** use by approximately two to four years, depending on the substance. The

difference between willingness to use and self-reported use depends on the availability, legality, and social acceptability of the substance. As the availability of a substance increases, the discrepancy between intent and actual use decreases. For example, by twelfth grade, when most students are old enough to purchase their own cigarettes legally, the difference between intent and use is not great. In the case of alcohol and marijuana, which become more available as students get older, the difference between intent and use decreases proportionally as the students get older; as they reach the upper grades, more of the students who express intent to use these substances are able to obtain them. With the hard drugs, use levels may *never* reach intent levels, because these substances, in addition to being very unavailable to persons of all ages, may also become less socially acceptable as the students mature.

Alcohol

In Pennsylvania, students drank beer more than wine, coolers, or liquor. Almost one-half (49%) of the seniors, 36% of the ninth graders, and an average of 13% of the sixth and seventh grades drank some sort of alcohol at least once a month.

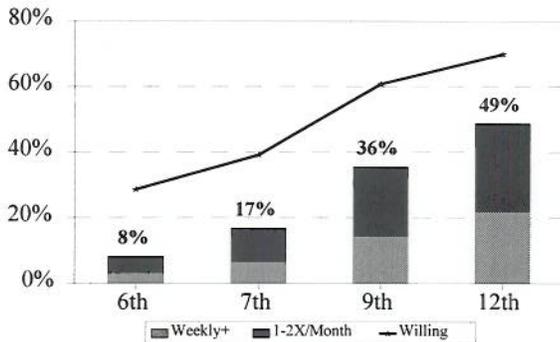


Figure 1. Self-reported willingness to drink and self-reported use of alcohol.

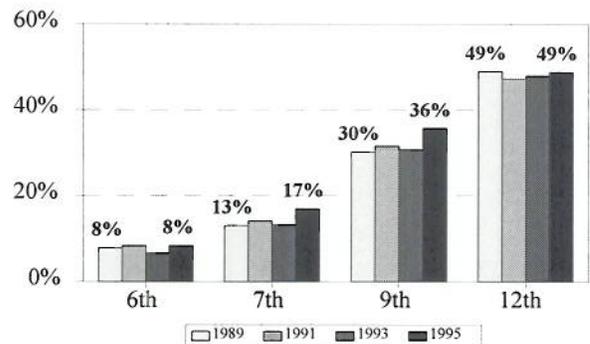


Figure 2. 1989-95 self-reported monthly-or-more use of alcohol.

Historical data indicate an increase in reported use of all types of alcohol in grades six, seven, and nine; minimal changes were seen in grade twelve. The proportional increase (1993 to 1995) in reported use of alcohol is higher in grades six and seven than in grade nine.

Cigarettes

More than one-fourth (26 percent) of the Pennsylvania seniors smoked cigarettes every day. Nineteen percent of the ninth graders, seven percent of the seventh graders, and three percent of the sixth graders smoked daily. An average of an additional ten percent of the students surveyed reported smoking cigarettes once or twice a week or once or twice a month.

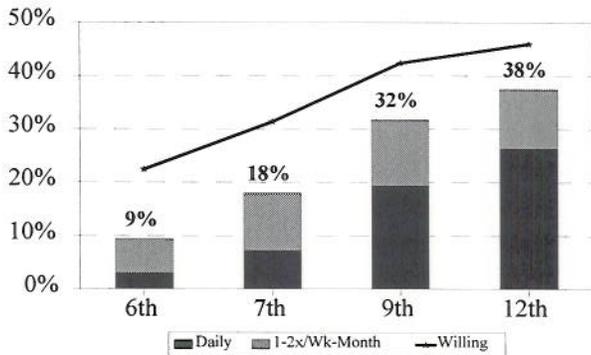


Figure 3. Self-reported willingness to smoke and self-reported use of cigarettes.

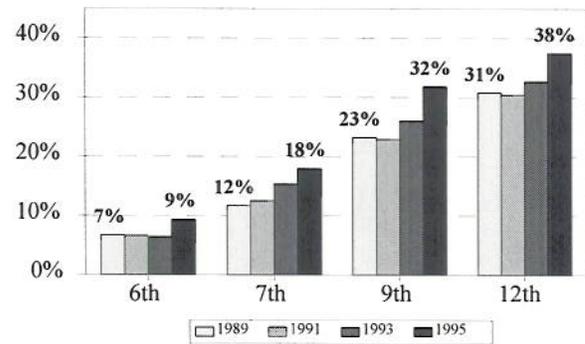


Figure 4. 1989-1995 self-reported monthly-or-more use of cigarettes.

Willingness to smoke and reported use of cigarettes (regular and daily) has increased in all grades since 1991. The proportional increase (1993 to 1995) in daily use is greater than 33 percent in grades seven and nine; greater than 50 percent in grade six.

Marijuana

In 1995, 21 percent of the Pennsylvania seniors reported smoking marijuana monthly or more often; 12 percent smoked marijuana at least once a week. Sixteen percent of the ninth graders smoked marijuana regularly; nine percent of the eighth through tenth graders smoked weekly or more often. Five percent of the seventh graders and two percent of the sixth graders reported smoking marijuana at least once a month.

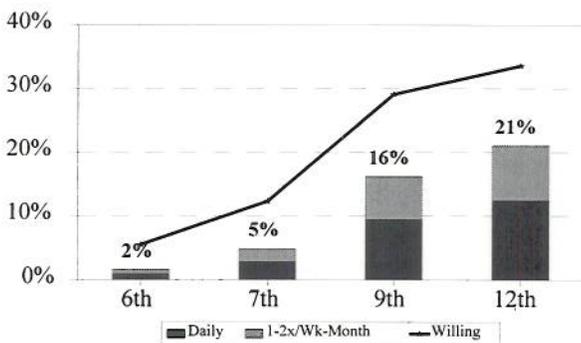


Figure 5. Self-reported willingness to smoke and self-reported use of marijuana.

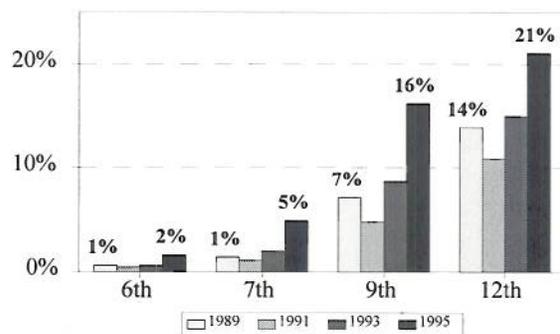


Figure 6. 1989-1995 self-reported monthly-or-more use of marijuana.

Since 1991, willingness to use and self-reported use of marijuana increased in all grades. In grades six and seven, regular use of marijuana more than doubled since 1993; in grade nine, it almost doubled; the increase in use in grade twelve (41 percent increase) is not as great as in other grades surveyed. Proportionately, weekly or more use of marijuana has increased more than monthly or more often use.

Other Drugs

No more than six percent of the students in any grade regularly used any of the listed drugs: stimulants, inhalants, hallucinogens, over-the-counter medications (abuse of), depressants, cocaine, steroids, designer drugs, heroin, crack, and crystal methamphetamine. Stimulants, inhalants, and hallucinogens were the types of “hard” drugs use most widely by Pennsylvania students.

Stimulants An average of six percent of the Pennsylvania ninth and twelfth graders and two percent of the sixth and seventh graders reported using stimulants at least once a month.

Inhalants An average of four percent of the students in grades nine and twelve and two percent in grades six and seven reported regular use of inhalants.

Hallucinogens An average of five percent of the Pennsylvania ninth and twelfth graders and one percent of the sixth and seventh graders reported using acid or other hallucinogens at least once a month. An average of 16 percent of the ninth and twelfth graders, and four percent of the sixth and seventh graders were willing to try or willing to use hallucinogens.

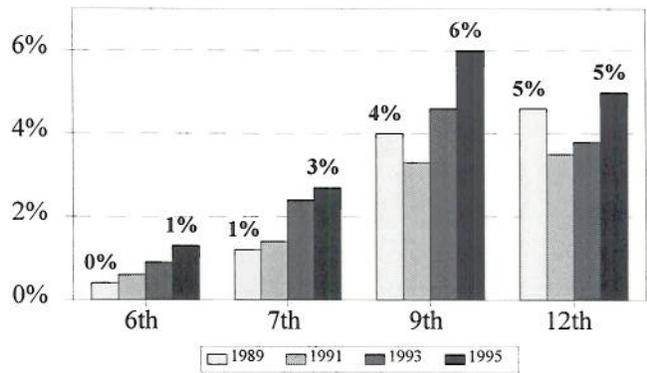


Figure 7. 1989-1995 self-reported monthly-or-more use of stimulants.

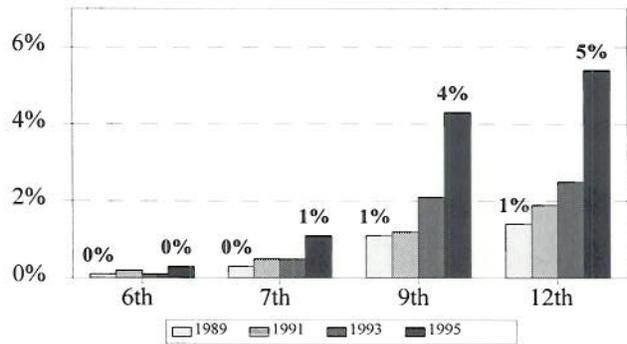


Figure 8. 1989-1995 self-reported monthly-or-more use of hallucinogens.

Reported use of stimulants, inhalants, and hallucinogens generally increased in all grades since the 1991 survey occasion.

Driver Risks

Eleven percent of the Pennsylvania seniors drove at least once a month after drinking alcohol. Of the seniors *who drove and who reported drinking regularly*, 27 percent reported having had driven after drinking monthly or more often.

Eleven percent of the seniors regularly drove after smoking marijuana. Of the seniors *who drove and who reported smoking*

marijuana at least once a month, 62 percent reported driving after smoking marijuana monthly or more often.

The percentage of student drivers taking alcohol- or marijuana-related risks increased since 1991. For the first time in the statewide biennial survey, the percentage of marijuana-impaired drivers reached that of alcohol-impaired drivers in 1995.

Weapons

An average of 22 percent of the students carried a weapon at least once in the twelve months prior to the survey. An average of nine percent of the ninth and twelfth graders and five percent of the sixth and seventh graders reported that they had carried a weapon 20 times or more in the past year. An average of three percent of the students surveyed carried a weapon between ten and nineteen times, and four percent carried between three and nine times.

Ten percent of the students surveyed reported that they had carried a weapon into their school building or on to a school bus at least once in the year before the survey. An average of four percent of the ninth and twelfth graders and two percent of the sixth and seventh graders indicated that they had carried a weapon into school 20 times or more.

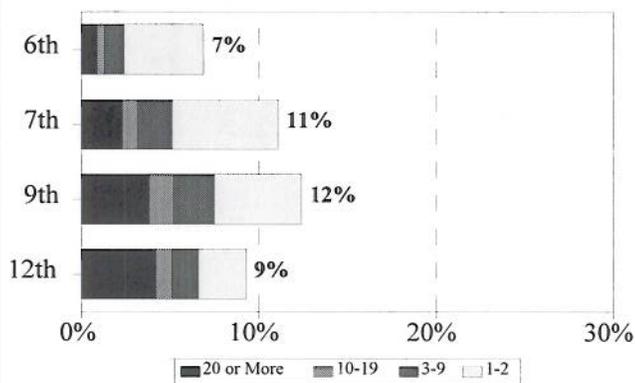


Figure 9. 12-month prevalence of carrying weapon to school/on to bus.

Of the students who gave a reason for carrying a weapon, 44 percent cited protection and 32 percent hunting. Eleven percent carried a weapon because they had been threatened before; eight percent regarded weapons as part of an image (“for show”); eight percent said they had seen someone injured by a person carrying a weapon, and eight percent said they were afraid. Seven percent of the students who carried a weapon indicated that they did so because they had been injured by a weapon; five percent because their friends carried

weapons; and five percent said they carried weapons to intimidate others (“for pushing around other people”).

Students were asked to cite the weapon they carried most often. The response options were didn't carry a weapon; a handgun; other gun, such as a rifle or shotgun; a knife, razor or box cutter; a club, stick, bat, or pipe; a martial-arts weapon; a semi-automatic weapon; and some other weapon. By giving a preferred-weapon response to this item, 22 percent of the students indicated that they had at least once carried at least one weapon.

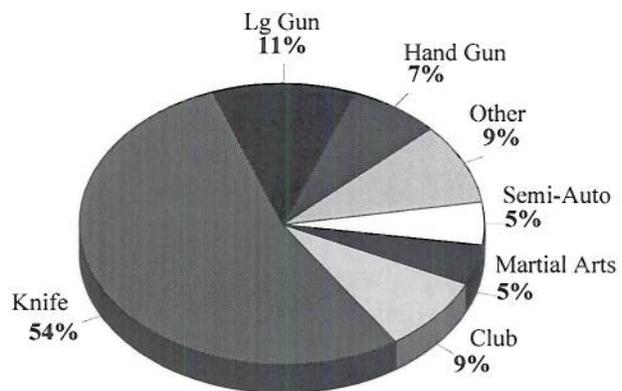


Figure 10. Carriers only. Preferred weapon.

Of those students who DID carry a weapon, the one most often used was a blade. More than one-half (54 percent) of the students who carried a weapon most often carried a knife, razor, or box cutter (Fig 10).

Because hunting is a popular sport in Pennsylvania, it is interesting to look at the weapons preferred by students who indicated that hunting was a reason for carrying a weapon and students who indicated that hunting was NOT a reason for carrying a weapon. Among those students who hunted, the three most-preferred weapons were blades (44 percent), rifles or shotguns (38 percent), and semi-automatics. Among students who did not hunt, the three most-preferred weapons were blades (57 percent), clubs (11 percent), and handguns (nine percent).

Physical Fighting

In the twelve months prior to the survey, 31 percent of the Pennsylvania seniors engaged in at least one physical fight. Forty-five percent of the ninth graders and an average of 55 percent of the sixth and seventh graders fought in the last year.

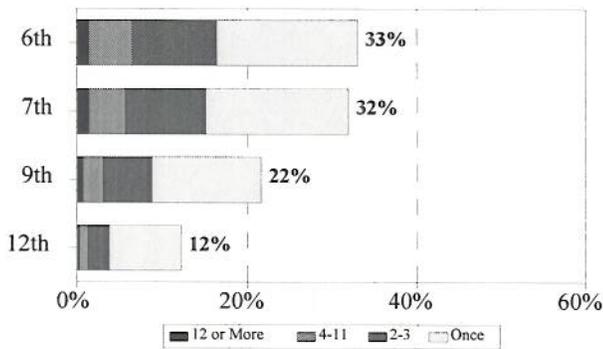


Figure 11. 12-month prevalence of physical fighting at school.

In the year before the survey, 12 percent of the seniors and 22 percent of the ninth graders fought on school property at least once during (or shortly before or after) school hours. One-third (33 percent) the sixth and seventh graders were in fights on school property.

Locations for Use, Sources for Substances

More than three-fourths (78 percent) of the Pennsylvania seniors and 66 percent of the ninth graders indicated that they had used alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana. In the survey, the term "use" is flexible for individual interpretation: for example, a student who drinks only on special occasions may consider him(her)self a drinker, while a student who drinks wine with every special-occasion dinner may not. Forty-six percent of the seventh graders and 32 percent of the sixth graders indicated that they had used alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana. This information is from a combination of three multiple-choice survey items: "In the past year or so, where did you drink alcohol? ...smoke cigarettes? ...smoke marijuana?" Questions about sources were: "From which of these people or places did you get alcohol? ...cigarettes? ... marijuana?"

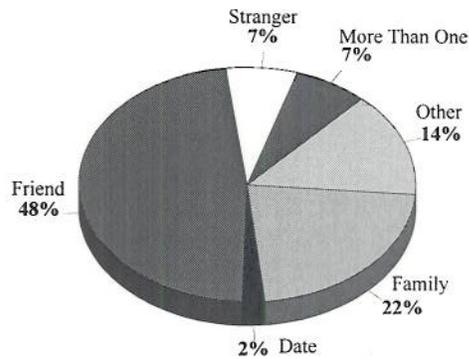


Figure 12. Fighters only. Most-recent adversary.

Fifty-nine percent of the Pennsylvania students indicated that they had been in at least one physical fight in their lives. Of those, 48 percent identified their most recent adversary as a friend; 22 percent as a family member; seven percent as a stranger; and two percent as a boyfriend or girlfriend. Fourteen percent did not identify the specific person with whom they last fought, and seven percent reported that their last physical fight had involved more than one person.

Of the students who indicated that they had drunk alcohol, the most popular places to drink were parties, friends' homes, home, and hangouts.

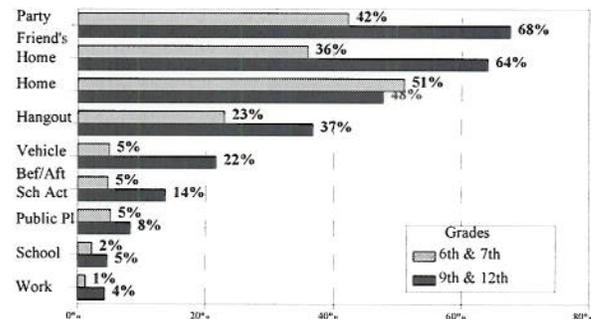


Figure 13. Users only. Sources for alcohol.

Cigarettes were most often smoked at friends' homes, hangouts, home, and parties; marijuana most often smoked at friends' homes, parties, hangouts, and in vehicles.

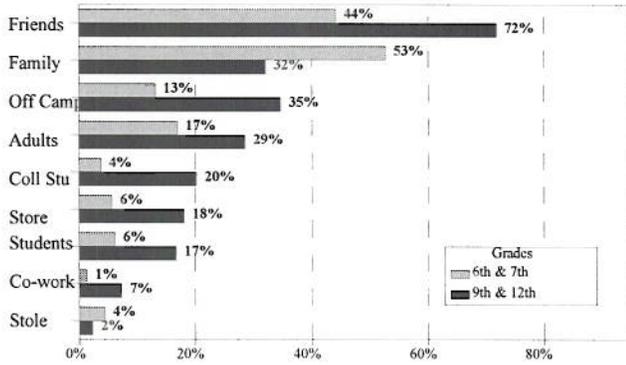


Figure 14. Users only. Sources for alcohol.

Students' most-used sources for alcohol were friends, family, out-of-school students, and adults. The most frequently mentioned sources for cigarettes were friends, stores (purchasing), students, and vending machines. Students most often obtained marijuana from friends, students, out-of-school students, and adults.

Problem Behaviors

More than one-third (35 percent) of the Pennsylvania seniors got drunk at least once a month; 16 percent got drunk at least once a week. Twenty-two percent of the ninth graders, seven percent of the seventh graders, and two percent of the sixth graders said they had gotten drunk monthly or more often.

An average of 16 percent of the ninth and twelfth graders got high at least once a month; ten percent got high at least once a week. Four percent of the seventh graders and one percent of the sixth graders got high regularly.

An average of one-fourth (25 percent) of the Pennsylvania seniors and ninth graders regularly (once a month or more) cheated on tests; 14 percent of the seventh graders and six percent of the sixth graders cheated monthly or more often. Twenty-one percent of the seniors, nine percent of the ninth graders, and an average of three percent of the sixth and

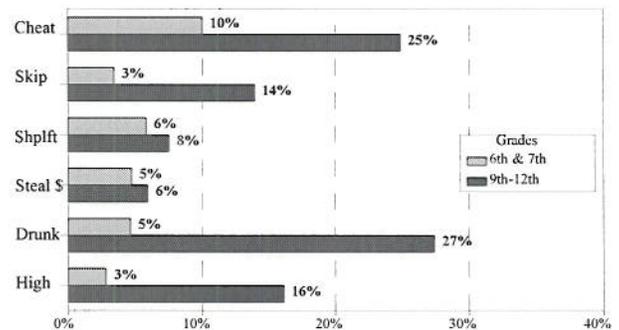


Figure 15. Self-reported monthly-or-more occurrence of problem behaviors.

seventh graders regularly skipped school. An average of seven percent of all students surveyed said they had shoplifted ("stole something from a store") at least once a month; an average of five percent of the students regularly "sneaked money from an adult's wallet."