



**DRUG USE AND ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION  
AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN GAUTENG**



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### Background

The Youth Research Unit (YRU) of the Bureau of Market Research (BMR) in the College of Economic and Management Sciences at Unisa, was established in 2011 as a Research Flagship Programme, with the aim of generating theoretical and practical research among the South African youth, that will contribute to knowledge and community development.

During 2011 the following aspects were identified as priority research themes among secondary school learners:

- Cellphone living and learning styles
- Substance use and abuse
- School violence, with specific reference to bullying

This resulted in an extensive School Community Research Project, which followed an interactive approach whereby participating learners had the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences regarding the identified topics, which impact on their lives either directly or indirectly. In addition, an attempt was made to empower the learners by providing them with relevant supportive information related to the research themes.

The YRU School Community Research Project was supported by the Gauteng Department of Education, who from an educational perspective, anticipate that the findings and insight generated through the project will contribute to a better understanding among educators and learners of the challenges faced within the education environment.

This research report focuses on the extent and impact of substance use and abuse among high school learners in Gauteng. The research results presented in this report were collected from randomly selected secondary schools in Gauteng, where 4 346 learners completed self-administered paper-based questionnaires during school time, in the presence of teachers and trained Youth Research Unit staff members.

### Research Synopsis

As illustrated in this report, the research findings show that drug and alcohol abuse among young people is a reality with concerning consequences. Not only do young people find themselves in an environment in which drugs and alcohol are readily accessible, but very often these substances are used by their peers, to whom they relate and with whom they interact. Hence, their receptiveness to drug and alcohol use increases.

Despite a general increase in cigarette smoking and the use of hubbly bubbles among young people, the research findings show the most common illicit drug used among learners, mainly for enjoyment and stress relief, is cannabis (dagga). A few learners reported the use of drugs to enhance performance at school, which clearly demonstrates the stress these learners experience and a desperate need for enhanced performance. It is noteworthy that learners often use drugs at home and school, both environments with a significant adult presence.



The majority of learners agreed that alcohol consumption among the youth in South Africa is becoming more socially acceptable and tolerated. Many learners, who consume alcohol, have been drunk or engaged in 'binge drinking' with disturbing consequences which impact on education either directly or indirectly. Reported consequences include; drunkenness, violence, motor car accidents, irresponsible sexual behavior and criminal activities. Learners generally consume alcohol at social events over weekends and mainly do so to be socially acceptable.







Especially with regard to alcohol use, the powerful impact of role models (particularly parents), should not be underestimated. Parents are the most likely to be approached for advice by learners and they themselves often engage in regular and irresponsible alcohol use.

The research findings show high risk awareness levels related to drug and alcohol use among learners, which is encouraging. However, the research identified a fairly low level of awareness of initiatives directed toward preventing drug and alcohol abuse. Learners are mainly aware of organisations such as Alcoholics Anonymous and SANCA as well as media initiatives including television programmes. This raises the question whether current prevention and education initiatives are appropriate for the youth market and reaching the intended audience. Based on the research information, it would seem that the information shared at school or possibly the approach followed is not having the desired impact and therefore needs to be revised.

The importance of educators, in the fight against drug and alcohol use among learners cannot be underestimated. Educators, as reflected in the research results, are among the most likely to be approached by learners for advice and support on drug and alcohol use.

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### Youth Research Project Team

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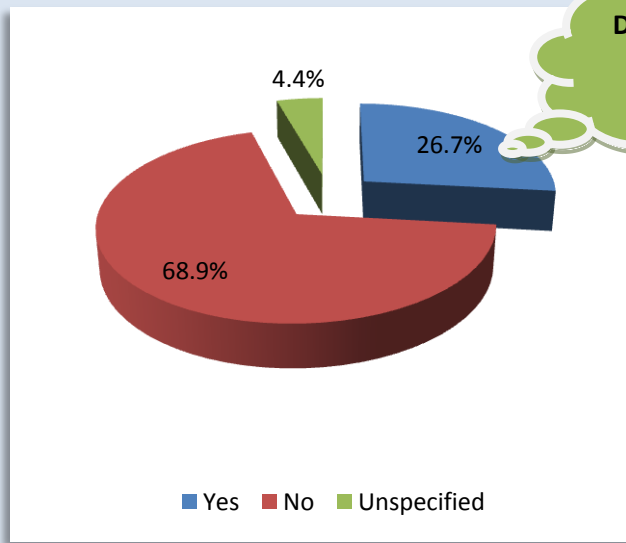
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ACCESSIBILITY AND USAGE OF DRUGS

- Approximately seven in 10 learners (70.7%) confirmed that drugs are easily accessible.
- Almost half the learners (45.3%) were aware of friends who use drugs. The majority of learners were in grade 12 (58.3%).
- Almost three in 10 learners (26.7%) use drugs. Among those who use drugs, dagga (cannabis) is the most popular (95.5%) across all grades.

Ever used drugs

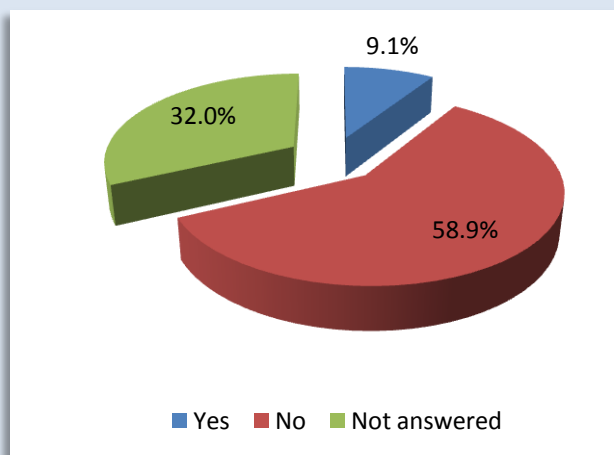


Dagga is mostly used (95.5%)

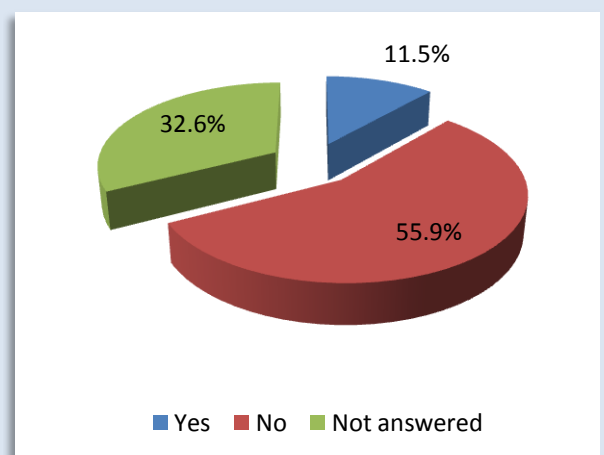


- The research findings show the general popularity of tobacco products such as cigarettes and hubbly bubbly among the youth. Approximately half the learners (54.4%) reported the use of hubbly bubbly.
- Drugs are mostly used at home (27.3%), or on-or-outside school premises (15.7%).
- Drugs are mainly used for recreational purposes (24.1%), feeling 'high' (22.6%) and stress relief (20.6%).
- 9.1% of learners use drugs to boost their performance during sport.
- 11.5% of learners use drugs during exam time. Most are in grade 11 (15.5%).

Use drugs to enhance performance during



Use drugs during exam time





- Learners generally use pocket or lunch money received from parents to buy drugs. Average per month = R237.33.
- Almost four in 10 learners (34.5%) mix drugs and alcohol. This happens mainly among learners in grade 10 (39.8%).



## EFFECTS OF DRUG USE AND ABUSE

- 91% agreed that it is not 'cool' to use drugs.
- Approximately nine in 10 learners (89%) agreed that taking drugs involves risks.



### IDENTIFIED RISKS OF TAKING DRUGS

- **Death**
- **Health risks**
- **Criminal activities**
- **Addiction**
- **Mental problems**

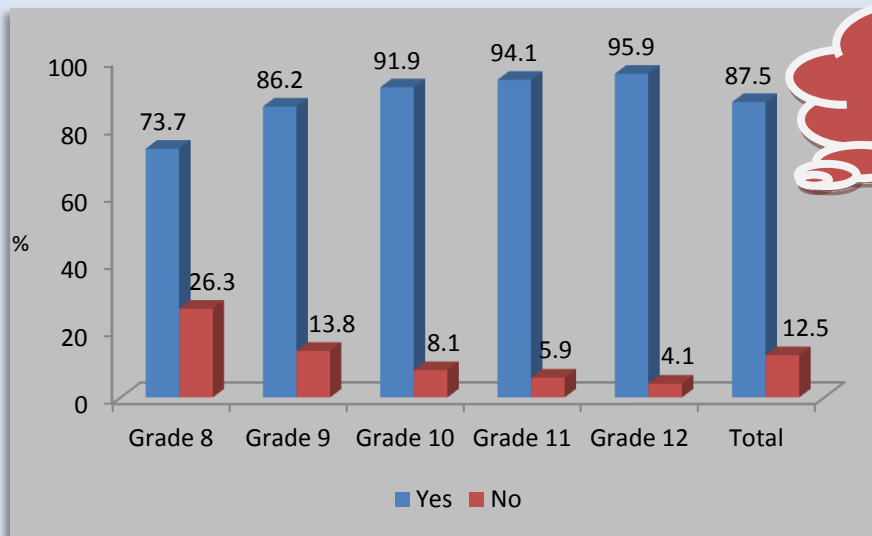
- 7.3% of learners have lost friends since using drugs.
- 6.3% of learners have missed school due to an incident related to drug use. This occurs mainly in grade 12 (8.3%).



## ACCESSIBILITY AND USAGE OF ALCOHOL

- Two thirds of the learners (66%) agreed that alcohol consumption among the youth is becoming more socially acceptable and tolerated.
- 87.5% have friends who consume alcohol and almost eight in ten learners (79.4%) consume alcohol themselves.

**Friends who consume alcohol**



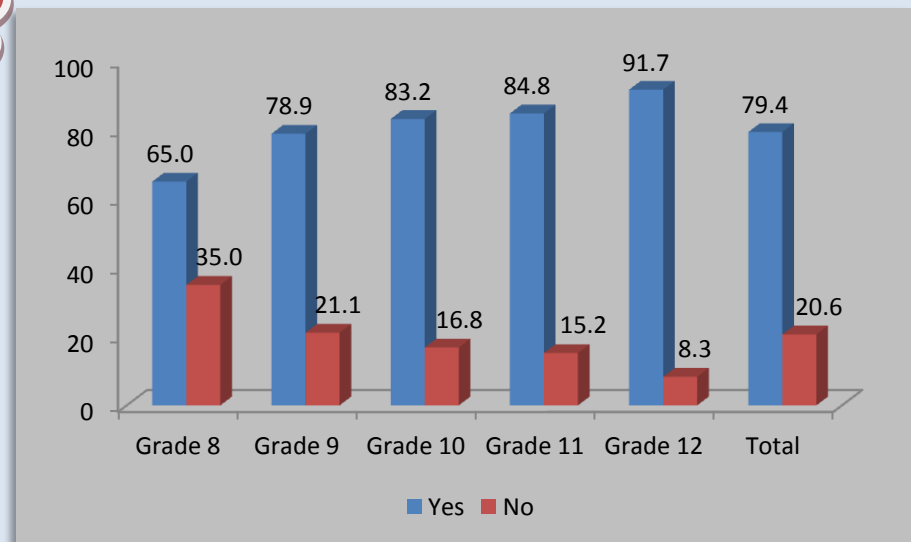
Most learners have friends who consume alcohol.



Almost 8 in ten learners consume alcohol themselves.



**Personally consume alcohol**



- The average age for starting to consume alcohol is around 13-14 years for both genders.
- Approximately seven in 10 learners (66.6%) have been drunk. This occurs mainly in grades 10 and 12.
- Almost half of the learners (44.8%) who consume alcohol themselves have engaged in 'binge drinking' (had five or more drinks in a few hours on one or more occasions, within a month).
- Learners generally consume alcohol on Saturdays at parties and other special occasions.
- Money received from parents (pocket money or lunch money) is used to buy alcohol. Average per month = R327.90.
- Learners indicated that alcohol is mainly used to be socially acceptable or escape problems.

REASONS WHY YOUNG PEOPLE USE ALCOHOL	
To fit into a social situation	57.0%
To escape worries	45.6%
To gain more confidence	33.8%
To escape from a situation	30.7%

- 26.4% of learners reported that their parents regularly consume alcohol.
- 63.7% of learners confirmed that their parents do not know that they consume alcohol. Most are in grades 8 and 9.




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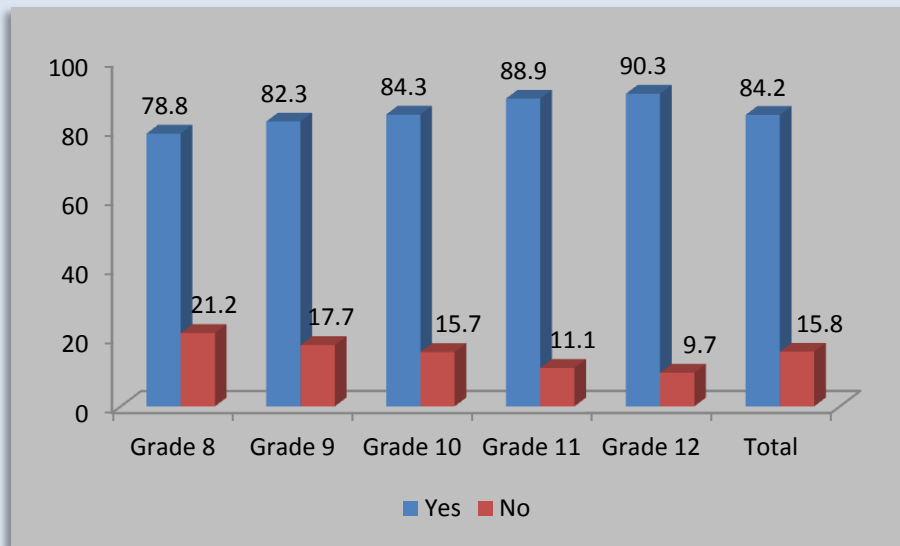
## EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL USE AND ABUSE

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- More than half the learners (56.4%) do not find drinking among young people acceptable.
- The major consequences related to alcohol abuse included drunkenness, violence, motor car accidents, irresponsible sexual behaviour and criminal activities.
- 84.2% of learners are aware of health risks associated with alcohol. Most of these learners are in grades 11 and 12.



### Awareness of health risks

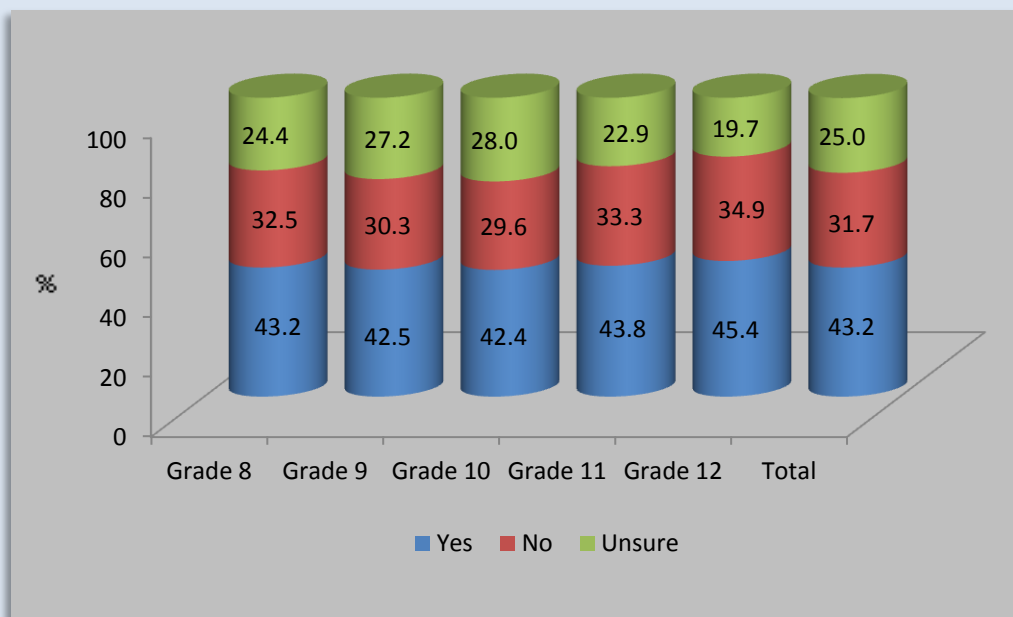


- Approximately three in 10 learners (30.3%) learners have been in trouble because of consuming alcohol.
- 13% of learners missed school because of alcohol. Most of these are in grades 10 and 12.

## PREVENTION AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES

- 41.3% of learners are aware of current initiatives directed toward preventing drug and alcohol abuse among young people, particularly of organisations such as Alcoholics Anonymous and SANCA as well as media initiatives including television programmes.

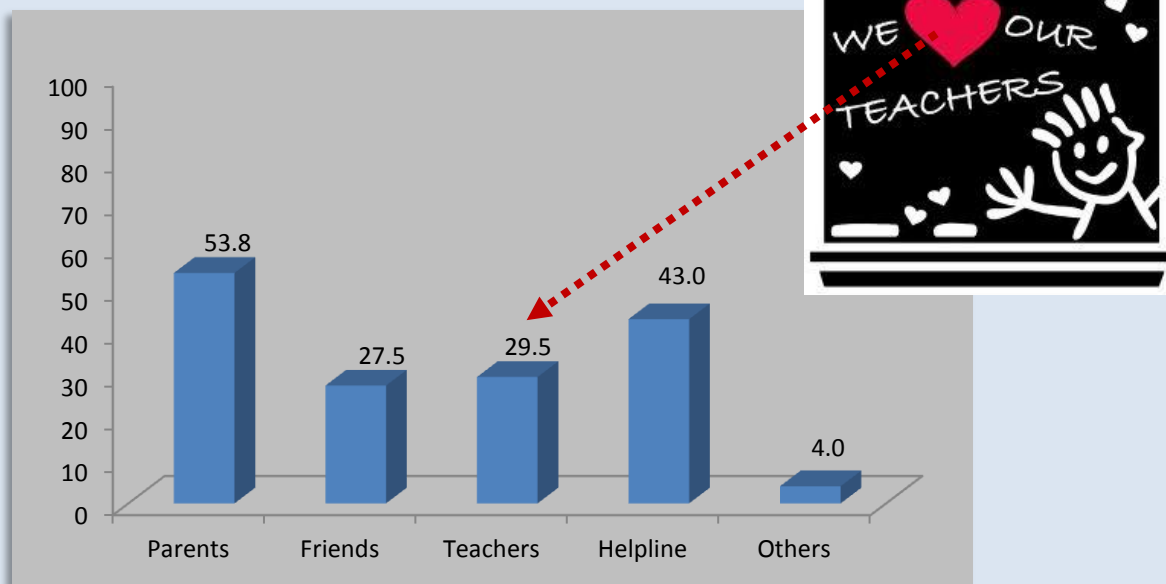
### Awareness of prevention initiatives





- Approximately half the learners (53.8%) will go to their parents for advice on drug use and alcohol consumption. 73.2% reported that their parents had spoken to them about alcohol consumption.

Sources of advice



### Educational impact of findings

- ✚ Education is the principal means of preventing drug and alcohol abuse among the youth. This includes important settings such as the home, which can make an important contribution. Parents need to be informed and involved.
- ✚ Drug and alcohol prevention strategies within schools need to be adaptable. Substance use among the youth is not static, it changes constantly and is greatly influenced by the dynamics of the local community.
- ✚ Innovative approaches to drug and alcohol prevention among the youth need to be put into practice. Real life examples are powerful among the youth.
- ✚ Educators should be trained to identify stress-related symptoms and how to deal with stress among learners within a school environment.
- ✚ Schools need to be resolute and take a stand against drug and alcohol use among learners. Educators must be positive role models for learners.
- ✚ Special training is needed for educators to identify and deal with substance use amongst learners, which impact directly and indirectly on school performance.



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## TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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### TIPS AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

- ✚ Begin to teach and talk about drugs and alcohol early and often. Use clear and direct language along with real life examples.
- ✚ Be specific about which drinks are alcoholic and which substances are illegal drugs. The difference between medicine and illegal drugs can be confusing.
- ✚ Learners need to know that underage drinking and using drugs is illegal.
- ✚ Help learners to find good role models and friends that do not use drugs and alcohol. Be a good role model to members of your community.
- ✚ Help them to find other activities that are fun and provide opportunity to experience success and feel a sense of belonging. A music group, team sport, or other recreational activity is a good choice and gives them something to do and can build positive experiences.
- ✚ When learners experience sadness, boredom or loneliness, deal with these things in positive ways so that drugs or alcohol are not used to self medicate or dull feelings of emotional pain.
- ✚ Use role play, practice and rehearsal to help teens learn to avoid drugs and alcohol. Practice over and over how to say no and how to stay safe.
- ✚ Have a plan in place to deal with situations where drugs or alcohol are available and it is hard to say no. Encourage learners to phone home or leave immediately.
- ✚ Help learners to support a healthy sense of self so that they do not use drugs and alcohol to fit in or be accepted. Encourage safe alcohol-free activities with positive role models.
- ✚ As a teacher, find someone to talk to and to support you. Other teachers can share ideas and help you to feel that you are not alone. (Source: FASD Support Network at [www.skfasnetwork.ca](http://www.skfasnetwork.ca))

### TOP TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- ✚ Play it safe. One incident of drug use could make you do something that you will regret for a lifetime.
- ✚ Do the smart thing. Using drugs puts your health, education, family ties, and social life at risk.
- ✚ Face your problems. Using drugs won't help you escape your problems, it will only create more.
- ✚ Be a real friend. If you know someone with a drug problem, be part of the solution. Urge your friend to get help.
- ✚ Remember, you DON'T NEED drugs or alcohol. If you think 'everybody's doing it', you're wrong. Doing drugs won't make you happy or popular or help you to learn the skills you need as you grow up. In fact, doing drugs can cause you to fail at all of these things.



Young people are easily influenced and often misled about alcohol and drugs.



**CARING TEACHERS MAY HELP KEEP KIDS FROM TRYING ALCOHOL, DRUGS****Robert Preidt**

The connections youth have with their teachers may help prevent kids from experimenting with alcohol and drugs at an early age, a new study suggests.

The researchers found that students in middle school who felt more emotional support from teachers had a lower risk of early alcohol and illicit drug use. The students defined teacher support as feeling close to a teacher or being able to discuss problems with a teacher. “Our results were surprising,” Carolyn McCarty, of Seattle Children’s Research Institute, said in an institute news release. “We have known that middle school teachers are important in the lives of young people, but this is the first data-driven study which shows that teacher support is associated with lower levels of early alcohol use”.

Parental ties also mattered, according to the study. The researchers explained that youth who are close to or who have separation anxiety from their parents may be less susceptible to negative peer influences, including experimentation with risky behaviour such as alcohol use. “Teens in general seek new sensations or experiences and they take more risks when they are with peers,” said McCarty, who is also a research associate professor at the University of Washington in Seattle. “Youth with separation anxiety symptoms may be protected by virtue of their intense connection to their parents, making them less likely to be in settings where substance-use initiation is possible.”

The study also found that middle schools students who began using alcohol and illicit drugs before sixth grade had significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms, which suggests that depression may be a consequence of very early use of alcohol or drugs. It also may indicate that depression is a risk factor for alcohol and drug use before middle school, the researchers said.

The findings from the study of 521 youth in Seattle public schools appear online in the journal *Psychology of Addictive Behaviour*. “Based on the study and our findings, substance-use prevention needs to be addressed on a multidimensional level,” McCarty said. “We need to be aware of and monitor early adolescent stress levels, and parents, teachers and adults need to tune into kids’ mental health. We know that youth who initiate substance abuse before age 14 are at a high risk of long-term substance abuse problems and myriad health complications.”

Although the study found an association between close relationships with teachers and parents and less risk of drug or alcohol use in middle school students, it did not prove that those relationships are the reason why those children were less likely to use drugs or alcohol. (SOURCE: Seattle Children’s Research Institute, news release, March 21, 2012). Copyright ©2011 HealthDay. All Rights Reserved.



## DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS BY SCHOOL GRADE

### Sample distribution by school grade

Grade	Total	Total
	<i>n</i>	%
Grade 8	920	22.0
Grade 9	944	22.5
Grade 10	1101	26.3
Grade 11	795	19.0
Grade 12	427	10.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>4187</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Do you think drugs are easily accessible for school learners (*n* = 4 163)?

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	62.1	37.9	100.0
Grade 9	67.0	33.0	100.0
Grade 10	70.1	29.9	100.0
Grade 11	80.9	19.1	100.0
Grade 12	80.9	19.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>70.7</b>	<b>29.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Do you have friends who use drugs (*n* = 4 158)?

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	26.9	73.1	100.0
Grade 9	41.7	58.3	100.0
Grade 10	50.4	49.6	100.0
Grade 11	56.8	43.2	100.0
Grade 12	58.3	41.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>45.3</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Have you ever used drugs (*n* = 4 242)?

Grade	Yes	No	Unspecified	Total
	%	%	%	%
Grade 8	11.7	83.5	4.7	100.0
Grade 9	24.5	71.6	3.9	100.0
Grade 10	30.9	64.0	5.2	100.0
Grade 11	34.9	62.2	2.9	100.0
Grade 12	37.7	56.9	5.4	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>68.9</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Have you ever used drugs to boost your performance during sport? (*n* = 2 088)

Grade	Yes	No	Not answered	Total
	%	%	%	%
Grade 8	7.2	47.0	45.9	100.0
Grade 9	6.7	61.5	31.8	100.0
Grade 10	12.5	59.0	28.5	100.0
Grade 11	9.3	62.6	28.1	100.0
Grade 12	7.2	59.8	33.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Have you ever used drugs during exam times to improve your potential? (n = 2 088)**

Grade	Yes	No	Not answered	Total
	%	%	%	%
Grade 8	3.2	49.1	47.7	100.0
Grade 9	10.6	56.9	32.5	100.0
Grade 10	14.6	56.1	29.3	100.0
Grade 11	15.5	56.0	28.5	100.0
Grade 12	7.2	60.5	32.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>32.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**In a typical month, what amount do you spend on drugs? (n = 912)**

Grade	<=R15	R16-50	R51-100	R101-250	R251+	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Grade 8	30.3	33.3	15.2	10.1	11.1	100.0
Grade 9	27.4	27.4	15.1	12.4	17.7	100.0
Grade 10	18.8	28.4	15.3	15.3	22.0	100.0
Grade 11	22.5	25.5	11.5	20.5	20.0	100.0
Grade 12	28.1	28.9	18.4	11.4	13.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>23.8</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Do you think taking drugs involve any risks? (n = 4 256)**

Grade	Yes	No	Unspecified	Total
	%	%	%	%
Grade 8	85.9	13.1	1.0	100.0
Grade 9	87.8	10.5	1.8	100.0
Grade 10	87.4	8.7	3.9	100.0
Grade 11	94.1	5.3	0.6	100.0
Grade 12	93.2	4.9	1.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>89.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Have you ever missed school because of an incidence related to drug use? (n = 3 977)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	3.6	96.4	100.0
Grade 9	6.3	93.7	100.0
Grade 10	6.7	93.3	100.0
Grade 11	7.5	92.5	100.0
Grade 12	8.3	91.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>93.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Do you have friends who are using alcohol? (n = 4 118)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	73.7	26.3	100.0
Grade 9	86.2	13.8	100.0
Grade 10	91.9	8.1	100.0
Grade 11	94.1	5.9	100.0
Grade 12	95.9	4.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>87.5</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>100.0</b>





**Have you ever used alcohol yourself? (n = 4 159)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	65.0	35.0	100.0
Grade 9	78.9	21.1	100.0
Grade 10	83.2	16.8	100.0
Grade 11	84.8	15.2	100.0
Grade 12	91.7	8.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>79.4</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Have you ever been drunk? (n = 3 571)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	46.4	53.6	100.0
Grade 9	63.5	36.5	100.0
Grade 10	72.7	27.3	100.0
Grade 11	73.8	26.2	100.0
Grade 12	80.1	19.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>66.7</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Have you ever 'binge drink' alcohol? (n = 3 483)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	26.5	73.5	100.0
Grade 9	41.4	58.6	100.0
Grade 10	52.4	47.6	100.0
Grade 11	48.8	51.2	100.0
Grade 12	56.7	43.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**In a typical month, what amount do you spend on alcohol? (n = 2 601)**

Grade	<=R50	R51-100	R101-200	R201-400	R400+	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Grade 8	38.0	24.9	16.6	11.5	9.0	100.0
Grade 9	22.0	17.5	23.4	15.7	21.4	100.0
Grade 10	17.0	20.6	21.1	18.0	23.4	100.0
Grade 11	19.3	17.4	21.6	18.0	23.6	100.0
Grade 12	15.0	19.9	30.1	18.7	16.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.6</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>22.1</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Do your parents know that you are using alcohol? (n = 3 438)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	30.6	69.4	100.0
Grade 9	28.4	71.6	100.0
Grade 10	34.0	66.0	100.0
Grade 11	41.9	58.1	100.0
Grade 12	57.9	42.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>63.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Have your parents ever spoken to you about drinking alcohol? (n = 3 999)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	72.2	27.8	100.0
Grade 9	72.9	27.1	100.0
Grade 10	71.1	28.9	100.0
Grade 11	73.9	26.1	100.0
Grade 12	79.2	20.8	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>73.1</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Why do young people use alcohol (multiple mentions possible)? (n = 3 296)**

Options	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
To escape worries	50.3	46.6	45.0	40.7	43.8	45.6
To build confidence	26.7	33.2	37.6	36.4	36.6	33.8
To fit in a socially	49.8	54.4	55.8	66.2	64.4	56.9
To escape a situation	28.8	27.8	32.0	32.9	33.8	30.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Do you think using alcohol is becoming socially more acceptable and tolerated? (n = 4 142)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	53.3	46.7	100.0
Grade 9	58.9	41.1	100.0
Grade 10	73.0	27.0	100.0
Grade 11	75.9	24.1	100.0
Grade 12	78.7	21.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>66.6</b>	<b>33.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Are you aware of the health risks associated with alcohol? (n = 4 160)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	78.8	21.2	100.0
Grade 9	82.3	17.7	100.0
Grade 10	84.3	15.7	100.0
Grade 11	88.9	11.1	100.0
Grade 12	90.3	9.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>84.1</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Have you ever missed school due to alcohol? (n = 4 069)**

Grade	Yes	No	Total
	%	%	%
Grade 8	5.4	94.6	100.0
Grade 9	12.1	87.9	100.0
Grade 10	15.7	84.3	100.0
Grade 11	15.3	84.7	100.0
Grade 12	19.1	80.9	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>



**Are you aware of any initiatives directed towards preventing drug and alcohol abuse? (n = 4 041)**

Grade	Yes	No	Unsure	Total
	%	%	%	%
Grade 8	39.6	34.6	25.7	100.0
Grade 9	40.2	31.1	28.7	100.0
Grade 10	40.4	30.3	29.3	100.0
Grade 11	43.7	29.7	26.6	100.0
Grade 12	45.9	32.8	21.2	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>27.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Where would you go for advice on drug and alcohol use? (multiple mentions possible) (n = 3 990)**

Options	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Parents	64.6	56.3	47.4	48.9	50.1	53.8
Friends	25.9	23.5	29.2	32.2	26.9	27.5
Teachers	35.5	31.3	29.8	22.6	24.9	29.5
Helpline	42.2	43.0	44.9	39.7	45.9	43.0
Other	2.9	3.6	4.7	4.0	6.0	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

