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## Prevalence of Youth Drug Use, Mental Health and Co-Occurring Disorder

Mental health and substance use disorders impact millions of youth in the U.S., and consequently, families, schools, neighborhoods and juvenile justice systems each year. Before designing prevention programs, outlining community action plans or developing treatment strategies, an understanding of the percentage of youth affected and the types of problems they face is necessary.

### Drugs and Alcohol

- Illicit Drugs – were used by 40% of high school seniors last year (2013: measured in last 30 days, last year or lifetime) –and by 28% of all youth in 8th, 10th and 12th grade combined (1)
  - 9% to 11% of all youth used an illicit drug in the last 30 days (1, 2).
- Alcohol use by youth has been declining steadily for years and is currently at historically low levels (1). However, alcohol remains the most commonly used substance by American youth (1, 2, 3). Binge drinking, while also at lower levels than in previous years, represents significant risks to youth and the community. In the last 30 days:
  - Between 24 and 35% of all youth reported they used alcohol (1, 3) – and up to 1 in 5 of all youth reported engaging in binge drinking (at least 5 drinks in a row) (3).
  - 6% of all high school students reported having 10 or more drinks in a row (3).
- Marijuana use by youth has been increasing steadily for years (1, 3). The increase in use corresponds to a decreasing perception of risk associated with marijuana use by youth which is close to the lowest levels ever recorded (1).
  - Over one quarter of all youth reported using marijuana in the past year (1).
  - In the last 30 days, anywhere from 7 to 23% of all youth reported using marijuana (1, 2, 3).
  - Over 45% of all students reported trying marijuana at least once by their senior year of high school (1).
  - Over 6% of all high school seniors reported daily use of marijuana (1).
- Prescription drug misuse by youth has become a growing concern in the U.S. Misuse of any prescription drug by high school seniors for the past year is at 15%, with the following breakdown of prescription drug misuse:
  - 7.4% Adderall
  - 5.3% Vicodin
  - 5.0% Cough medicine
  - 4.6% Tranquilizers (primarily benzodiazepines); 3.6% OxyContin (1).

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## Survey Information

Three large, federally funded surveys currently collect information about youth substance use and mental health: 1) National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH: sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), 2) Monitoring the Future (MTF: sponsored by National Institute on Drug Abuse), and 3) Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS: sponsored by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Each survey collects and interprets data in slightly different ways, resulting in ranges of reported prevalence percentages. Despite these differences, each survey shows similar findings on which subgroups of adolescents have relatively higher or lower estimates of substance use(8).

## Special Group Focus: Juvenile Justice

Youth involved with Juvenile Justice are at much higher risk for school failure, unemployment, adult arrests and drug/alcohol use (4, 6). Nearly 70% of juveniles in detention have at least one DSM IV mental health diagnosis.

- Over 40% of juveniles in detention have a substance use disorder
- In the overlap - over 60% of youth in detention have a current co-occurring disorder (4, 6)

## Mental Health

Half of all mental illnesses start by the age of 14 - prompting the National Institute of Mental Health to proclaim mental illness 'a chronic disease of the young' (10).

While many studies rank specific disorders for youth in different orders of prevalence, the types of disorders experienced by youth remain quite consistent:

- 9% of youth in the U.S. were diagnosed with at least one Major Depressive Episode *in the past year* (2).
- 13% of youth reported having a suicide plan in the past year - with 8% of youth reporting that they had attempted suicide in the past year (3).
- 22% of youth in the U.S. experience a mental disorder significant enough to be a severe impairment at some point in their lifetime (10).
- 67% of youth engaged in programs funded through the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment reported experiencing victimization in their lifetime (11).

## Co-Occurring Disorders

Co-Occurring Disorders - exist when a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder are identified independently of each other and are not symptoms resulting from a single disorder.

- Of all youth experiencing a Major Depressive Episode (MDE) last year, 34% also used drugs or alcohol (compared to just 16% of their peers with no MDE).
- Over 70% of youth entering treatments for substance use disorders were identified as having a co-occurring mental health diagnosis (11, 12).

43% of youth receiving mental health services were identified as having a co-occurring substance use disorder (13). These rates of co-occurrence should prompt a standard approach to screening for **both** substance use and mental illness regardless of the service system in which the youth first engages.

Substance Use disorders are neither rare nor inconsequential for American youth. Co-Occurring disorders can cause more harm than when these disorders occur in isolation and can complicate treatment necessitating screening and assessment for co-occurring disorders whether a youth is presenting for mental or substance abuse treatment.

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## ABOUT THE NATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK FOR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The National Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health (TA Network) operates the National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Child, Youth, and Family Mental Health (NTTAC), funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Child, Adolescent and Family Branch. The TA Network partners with states, tribes, territories, and communities to develop the most effective and sustainable systems of care possible with and for the benefit of children and youth with behavioral health needs and their families. The TA Network provides technical assistance and support across the country to state and local agencies, including youth and family leadership organizations.

## ABOUT CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

This resource was produced by Case Western Reserve University in its role as a contributor to the Clinical Distance Learning Track of the National [Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health](#).