

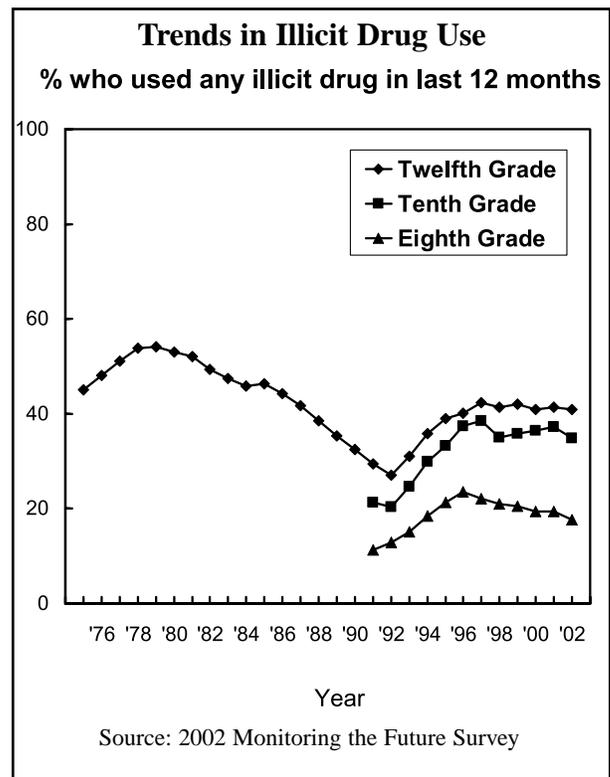
## Youth Substance Abuse & Violence

### *Interconnections — Protective Factors — Prevention*

Teen substance abuse and interpersonal violence participation has either declined or stabilized during the past several years. This is good news for parents, teens, policymakers, educators and youth development professionals because it's clear evidence that the majority of teens in the U.S. are making smart decisions about their lives.

However, the total population of teens who have chosen to abuse drugs and alcohol and participate in interpersonal violence remains unacceptably high and requires continued attention to reduce the prevalence of these behaviors.

Research has demonstrated that predictive and protective factors exist. As a result, this data provides insight into what drives and prevents participation in risk behaviors, and can therefore be used to identify new programs, refine existing programs, and encourage America's youth to continue making healthy decisions.\*

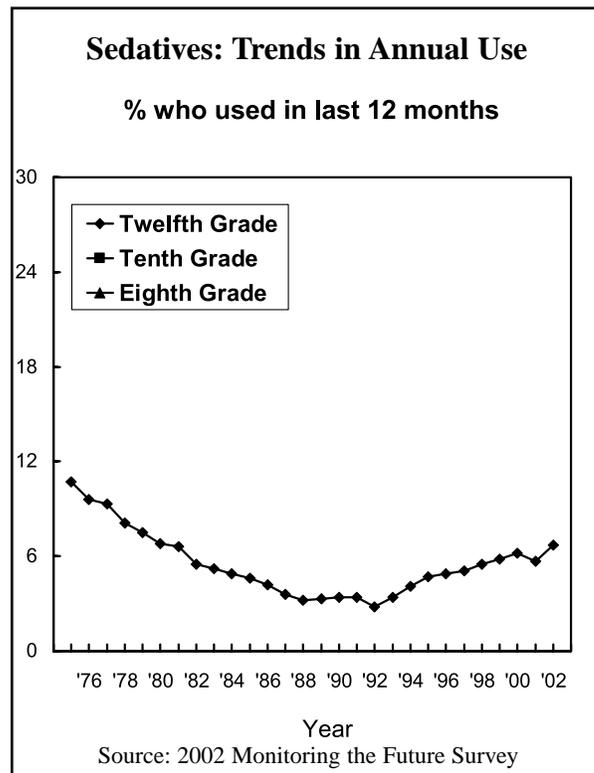
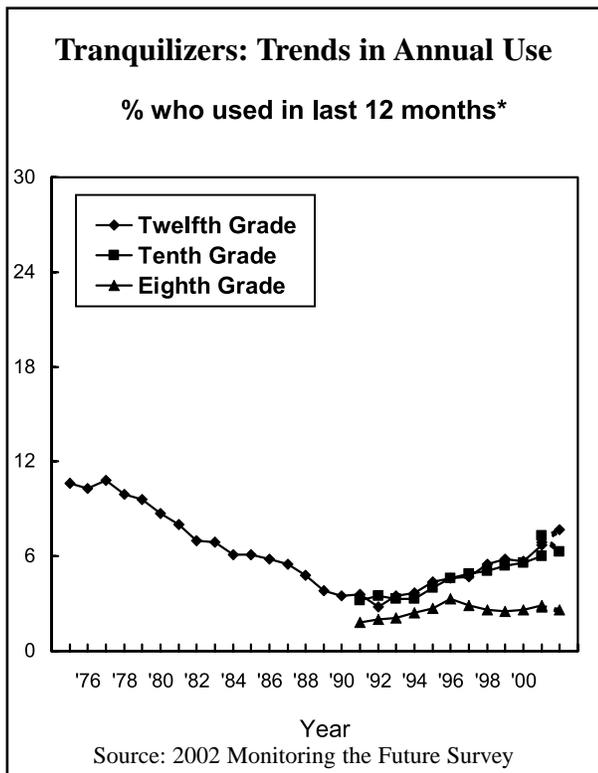


### **Trends**

Overall, trends with regard to teen substance abuse and violence are heading in a positive direction. The 2002 Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF), sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse to study 43,700 students around the country, reported that after dramatic increases in the early to mid-90's illicit drug and alcohol use among 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders either remained stable or decreased for the sixth year in a row. Quite a few illicit drugs showed broad declines, most notably ecstasy, for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

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*\*This issue of IYD Youth Facts hopes to give readers an overview of certain youth risk behaviors. IYD uses statistics from different sources which may seem to indicate inconsistent trends or levels of participation. This may be due to a variety of factors including differing methods of data collection, age ranges, time periods, measurements of perception versus actual participation, reporting by rates or actual numbers and definitions of participation.*



Drugs that showed an increase in usage were tranquilizers and sedatives. This increase was limited to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade population. Usage rates for tranquilizers, in particular, rose from a 2.8% prevalence rate in 1992 to 6.7% in 2002.<sup>2</sup> While these drugs require prescriptions, respondents to the 2002 MTF study were asked to respond only to non-prescription-based usage.

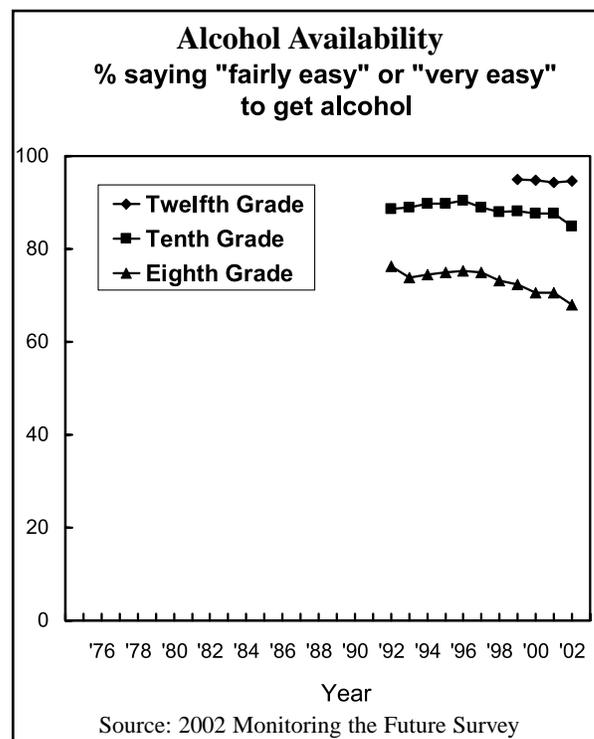
Teen violence is also declining with youth homicide, robbery, weapons carrying, weapons use in violent crimes and rape arrests rates trending down since 1993.

Between 1992 and 2001, juvenile arrests on weapons charges dropped 35%. The juvenile arrest rate for murder fell 62%, dropping to its lowest level in more than two decades, and the juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes dropped by 21%.<sup>3</sup> However, aggravated assault is 70% higher than in 1983.<sup>4</sup>

### Prevalence of Youth Substance Abuse & Violence

While these trends are encouraging, it is important to keep in mind that the total number of teens who are engaged in substance abuse and violent behavior remains unacceptably high. There are millions of teenagers around the country who abuse drugs and alcohol and victimize others through violent activities.

Homicide is the second leading overall cause of death among 15 to 24-year-olds. In this age group, it is the leading cause of death for African-Americans, the



second leading cause of death for Hispanic Americans, and the third leading cause of death for Native Americans. In 2000, 4,938 youths ages 15 to 24 were murdered — an average of 14 per day. The vast majority – 80% – of the victims were murdered with guns.<sup>5</sup> Kids under 18 were responsible for approximately 9% of murders in the U.S. in 2000, and 15% of violent crime arrests in 2001.<sup>6,7</sup>

In 2000, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) survey of high school students published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicated that more than 400,000 kids between the ages of 10 and 19 were injured as a result of violence. A little more than 35% of teens surveyed had been involved in a physical fight in the past 12 months. Four percent of those students were injured enough to require treatment by a doctor or nurse.<sup>8</sup>

One year later, the 2001 YRBSS in a report to the CDC revealed that 17% of teens surveyed carried a weapon during the 30 days preceding the survey.<sup>9</sup>

Homicide and fighting are not the only elements that make up teen violence. Current statistics on bullying cannot be ignored. More than 1 in 6 students in grades 6 to 10 say they are bullied — and more than 1 in 12 say they are bullied once a week or more.<sup>10</sup> This is an important trend to monitor since current research indicates that those who engage in or are victims of bullying are more likely to participate in violent behavior in the future.

Substance abuse prevalence remains unacceptable. Fifty-three percent of teenagers will use drugs by the time they graduate from high school. Approximately 32% will have done so as early as 8<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>11</sup>

Nearly four out of five or 78% of teens have used alcohol before they enter college – 47% will have done so by 8<sup>th</sup> grade.<sup>12</sup> Thirty days prior to the 2002 MTF survey, the proportions of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders who admitted drinking an alcoholic beverage were 20%, 35% and 49% respectively.<sup>13</sup>

The 2001 YRBSS correlates with the 2002 MTF study. A year earlier, it reported that 47% of the teens it surveyed had at least one drink of alcohol during the 30 days preceding the survey while 30% had participated in binge drinking on at least one occasion during the same time frame.<sup>14</sup> Binge drinking is defined as having five or more drinks in a few hours time, and is particularly destructive to the health and well being of adolescents.

Availability of alcohol seems to be an important factor. In 2002, twelfth graders reported that it is very easy to get alcohol as evidenced by a 95% perceived availability rate.<sup>15</sup>

## ***Characteristics***

Boys have been found to have somewhat higher rates of illicit drug use and heavy drinking than females. The same can be said for participation in violent behavior. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has found that boys are more likely than girls to engage in both aggressive and non-aggressive anti-social behavior.<sup>16</sup> Overt aggression in the form of violence is more common in boys while social aggression by girls harms others through emotional damage to peer relationships. Both boys and girls who are not college-bound are considerably more likely to be at risk for using illicit drugs and for drinking heavily while in high school than those who are college-bound.<sup>17</sup>

Identifying characteristics associated with youth violence is a very complicated task. Special attention needs to be given to the quiet, troubled child who has the potential to become extremely violent.<sup>(18)</sup>

The NIMH is in the process of researching “child violence” profiles. It has found that a single fac-

tor or a single defining situation does not cause child and adolescent antisocial behavior. Instead, it is caused by multiple factors such as weak bonding, ineffective parenting, exposure to violence in the home, and exposure to violence among peers.

In spite of this data regarding gender differences, there are a wide range of prevention programs in place throughout the nation that are not gender-specific. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University has conducted some interesting research that makes a case for the development of gender-specific programs, and recently called for a nationwide overhaul of prevention and treatment programs.<sup>19</sup> This call to action was prompted by a three-year study of the impact that tobacco, alcohol and drugs have on young girls.

The study found that girls are using substances at earlier ages, nearly as early as boys. Girls and young women use these substances for different reasons and suffer greater consequences than boys. Girls are more likely to be depressed, have eating disorders or be sexually or physically abused, and are more likely to attempt suicide. Substance use can turn into abuse and addiction more quickly for girls and young women even when using the same amount or less of a substance.

The study concluded that uni-sex programs are not effective, and should be customized to meet gender-specific needs.

### ***Interconnections With Other Risk Behaviors***

There is a growing body of research that identifies the interconnections that exist between the five major risk behaviors – alcohol, drugs, sex, tobacco, violence. This is especially true with regard to substance abuse and violence. In many cases, substance abuse is a gateway to violent behavior of all types.

## **Interconnection Research Findings**

- **The two strongest predictors of subsequent violence for the 12-14 age group are lack of social ties and involvement with antisocial peers.<sup>20</sup>**
- **Children who are quick to anger, perceive themselves to be stressed, are resentful of parental absence, or are from families with significant conflicts have high drug use rates.<sup>21</sup>**
- **Adolescents who begin using alcohol are likely to subsequently engage in cigarette smoking and sex within two years.<sup>22</sup>**
- **Alcohol and drugs often act as a catalyst in teen sexual encounters. Almost 17% of teens who have had an intimate encounter admit having done something sexual while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.<sup>23</sup>**
- **Alcohol and drug use has a significant impact on the number of sexual partners an adolescent will have over his/her lifetime.<sup>24</sup>**
- **Youth who carried a handgun in the past year had lower academic performance, were more likely to have used illicit drugs, and were more likely to have engaged in binge and heavy alcohol use than youths who had not carried a handgun in the past year.<sup>25</sup>**

Research indicates there are a variety of factors that predict involvement in serious violence. Friendships with other teens involved in gangs, criminal activity and other anti-social behavior are the most important predictor of participation in violent behavior.<sup>26</sup> This research has also uncovered important patterns that emerge over time as a direct result of a teen's participation in substance abuse or violence early in their lives.

For example, people who begin drinking before the age of 17 were found to be three to four times more likely to have been in a fight after drinking alcohol at some time in their life compared to adults who began drinking after age 21. An early age of drinking onset was associated with alcohol-related violence not only among persons under age 21, but among adults as well.<sup>27</sup>

Many adolescents continue to abuse alcohol and other substances and engage in violent behavior as they exit their teenage years. Alcohol, in particular, is blamed for two-thirds of college student suicides and 95% of violent crime on campus.<sup>28</sup> In addition, students who frequently binge drink were 21 times more likely than non-binge drinkers to engage in a wide range of unsafe and violent risk behaviors.<sup>29</sup>

Other family-related risk factors include: poor monitoring or supervision; exposure to violence in the home, parental abuse of drugs or alcohol, poor emotional attachment to parents or caregivers, low family socioeconomic stature, anti-social parents, low commitment to school, and academic failure.<sup>30</sup>

Bullying is beginning to emerge as a predictor of engagement in violent behavior.

In April 2003, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) unveiled a survey of 15,686 students throughout the country in grades 6 to 10 in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*. The research, which appears to be the first of its kind, was designed to determine if bullying is related to other forms of violence-related behavior. It found that kids who bully other kids appear to be at risk for engaging in more serious violent behaviors such as frequent fighting and carrying a weapon. In addition, victims of bullies are more likely to engage in violence than kids who have not experienced bullying.

The NIH survey reported that 52% of boys who reported they had bullied others at least once a week in school had carried a weapon in the past month. Forty-three percent had carried the weapon to school. A little over 38% were involved in frequent fighting and 45.7% reported they were injured in a fight.

NIH researchers reported that bullying that occurred away from school grounds seemed to be more severe than at school where adult supervision provided a protective factor against violence. A little more than 70% of the boys who had bullied others at least once a week away from school had carried a weapon. Fifty-eight percent reported carrying a weapon to school. Nearly 45% said they frequently fought while 56.1% had been injured in a fight.<sup>31</sup>

The NIH research correlates with research collected by the National Youth Violence Resource Center (NYVRC) sponsored by the CDC and its federal partners – the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor and Health and Human Services.

The NYVRC reports that witnessing violence as a teen has far-reaching impact. Children who witness domestic violence may develop problems such as violence toward peers, and are more likely than kids who have not been exposed to domestic violence to attempt suicide, abuse drugs and alcohol, and commit sexual assault crimes.<sup>32</sup>

## Protective Factors & Prevention

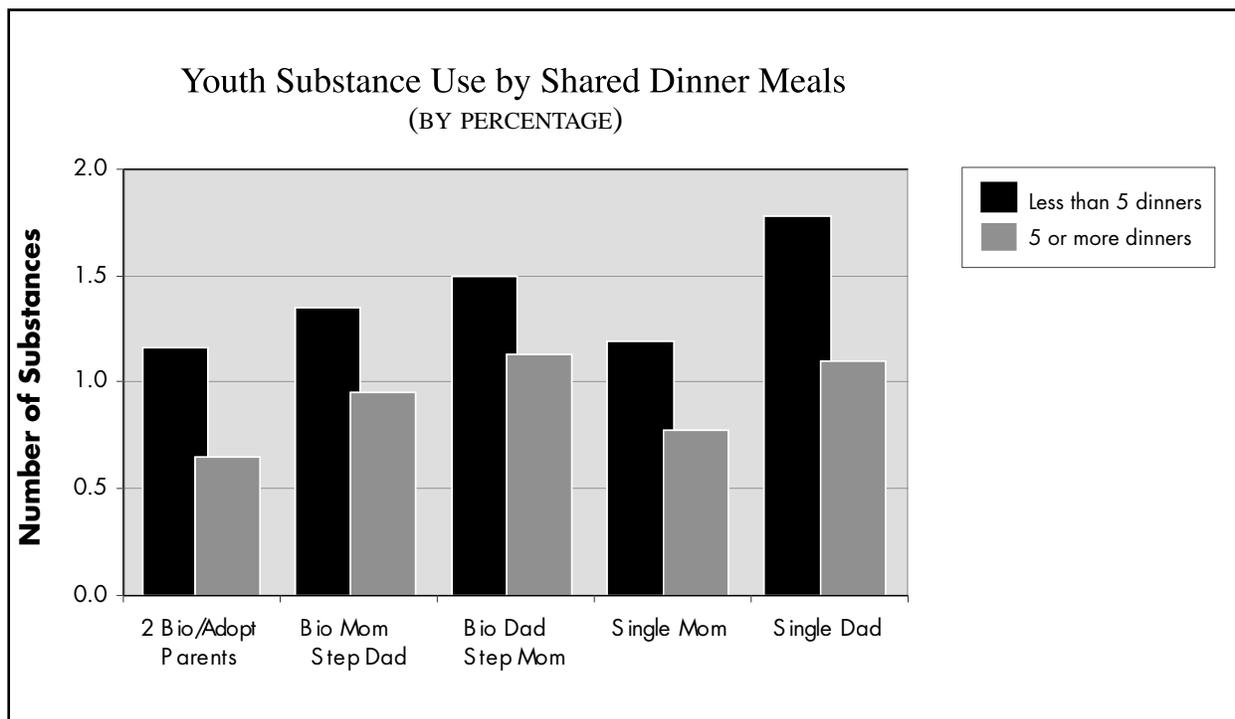
Studies show the vast majority of teens who avoid unhealthy activities such as substance abuse and violence share a set of common circumstances.

- **Hands-On Parenting** – “Hands-on” parents – parents who establish a household culture where they consistently set down rules and expectations for their teens’ behavior and monitor what their teen does – have adolescents at substantially lower risk of drinking, using illegal drugs, and engaging in violence.

Households with “hands-on” parents (27% of teen households) have teens at half the risk of all teens. Teens from households with “hands-off” parents (18% of teen households) are at four times the risk of teens from households with “hands-on” parents.<sup>33, 34</sup>

- **Parent & Child “Connectedness”** – The research is clear: given firm direction, high expectations and consistent messages from a parent and supported by adult mentors, adolescents thrive. Surveying more than 90,000 teenagers, the federally-sponsored National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health (Add Health) found that children who feel loved and cared for are more likely to make healthy choices.<sup>35</sup>

For example, youth who say their parents would “strongly disapprove if they tried marijuana once or twice” used any illicit drug at a rate of 7.1% compared with 31.2% for youth who thought their parents did not strongly disapprove.<sup>36</sup>



Connecting through something as simple as shared dinner time also serves as a protective factor against substance use and promotes the healthy development of youth. Research shows that a multi-faceted process takes place at dinner in nurturing households – communication, sharing of feelings, giving and sharing of advice, accountability, help, support, and information.<sup>37</sup>

- **Connections with Schools** – The Add Health research team examined many aspects of the school environment. A feeling of connectedness to school was consistently associated with health and

healthy behaviors, and served to protect teens from substance abuse and violence. Teens with strong connections to their schools, positive relationships with teachers and peers, a commitment to scholastic achievement, and who participate in school activities make consistently better choices and have better health.<sup>38</sup> In fact, commitment to school shows up as a strong protective factor in a wide range of research as indicated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>39</sup>

- **Religion** — Religion is more of a protective factor for girls than for boys, but religion does protect teens from all types of risk behaviors including substance abuse and violence.<sup>40</sup>

### ***The Role of the Institute for Youth Development***

The Institute for Youth Development (IYD) is a non-partisan, non-profit organization founded in 1996 to help teens make healthy choices.

To meet this goal, IYD conducts research and develops programs to educate teens, parents, educators and youth development professionals about the importance of avoiding alcohol, drugs, sex, tobacco and violence. Research shows these behaviors are inextricably linked, and should be comprehensively avoided during adolescence. They can best be avoided by having close relationships with parents, family, schools, and other caring adults.

### ***The Role of the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI)***

NFI's mission is to improve the well being of children by increasing the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible, and committed fathers. NFI accomplishes this mission through:

- Educating and inspiring all Americans, especially fathers, through public awareness campaigns, research, and other resources.
- Equipping and developing leaders of national, state, and community fatherhood initiatives through curricula, training, and technical assistance.
- Engaging every sector of society through strategic alliances and partnerships.

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