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**SUBSTANCE USE AMONG STUDENTS IN  
TEXAS SECONDARY SCHOOLS - 1988**

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**Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse  
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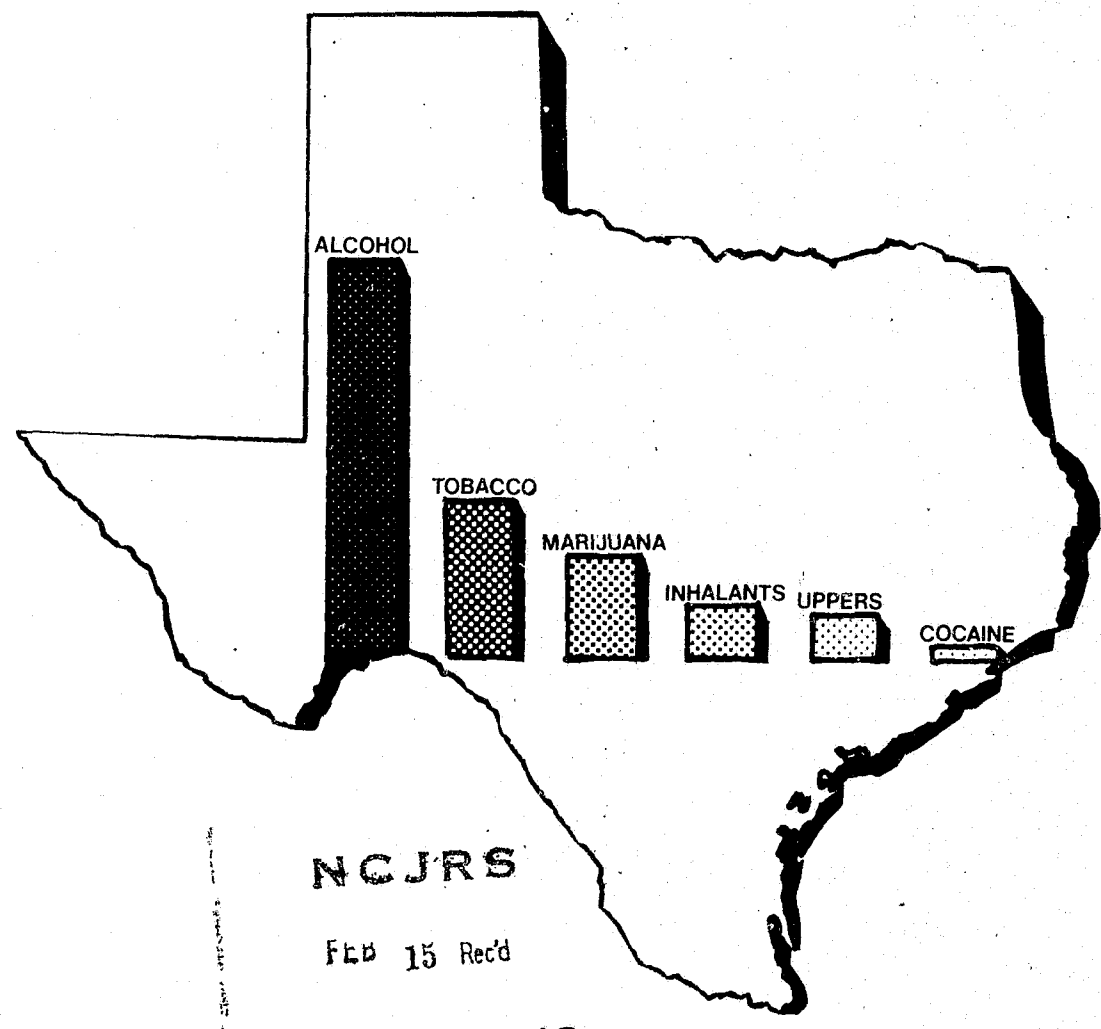
Texas Commission on Alcohol  
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# SUBSTANCE USE AMONG STUDENTS IN TEXAS SECONDARY SCHOOLS - 1988

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

## **Preface**

We are pleased to report in this volume the results of the first statewide survey of substance use among students in Texas secondary schools. The survey was funded by the U. S. Department of Education under the Drug-Free Schools and Communities grant program and was a collaborative effort between the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse and the Public Policy Resource Laboratory (PPRL) of Texas A&M University. We would like to thank the schools and the students who voluntarily participated in this project and the Texas Education Agency for their assistance and support.

In addressing the issue of substance abuse among youth, we should not fail to recognize the majority of students for their values and lifestyles which have no place for drug or alcohol abuse. We should take heart from the knowledge that over 60% of Texas students have never used any illegal substance. We must give these students the recognition they deserve and the support they need to maintain a drug-free lifestyle.

However, many students use drugs and alcohol regularly and heavily. The heavy use of alcohol by older students and the early use of a wide range of toxic inhalant substances by younger students is of special concern. These students need various types of assistance. We are confident that the findings provided in this report will provide important data to help in structuring and targeting prevention, intervention and treatment strategies. We must focus more attention and effort on dealing with substance abuse among our youth. If we can help them before they become adults, we will be making a crucial step in beginning to reduce the extent of substance abuse problems that affect all the citizens of our State.

Bob Dickson, Executive Director  
Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse

# SUBSTANCE USE AMONG STUDENTS IN TEXAS SECONDARY SCHOOLS - 1988

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This report contains the main findings of the 1988 survey of substance abuse in Texas secondary schools. It is the first statewide effort to collect systematic information on substance use patterns of Texas secondary students. However, it is not the first occasion that information on the substance abuse patterns of the youth of Texas has been collected. In 1980, the Texas Department of Community Affairs, Drug Abuse Prevention Division, sponsored a household survey of substance abuse in Texas and results were reported for Texas youth age 12 to 17.<sup>1</sup> Although there are methodological differences between the two studies, the data indicate that substance abuse is currently a larger problem among Texas youth than was the case eight years ago.

This current study was conducted as a joint effort between the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (TCADA) and the Public Policy Resources Laboratory at Texas A&M University (PPRL). PPRL had primary responsibility for designing the sample and collecting the data. TCADA was primarily responsible for design of the questionnaire and data analysis. The study was funded under the U.S. Department of Education Drug Free Schools and Communities Block Grant.

Some 7,500 students selected through a multi-stage probability sample completed an eight-page questionnaire on alcohol and drug use patterns. The questionnaire explored usage patterns of 14 drugs and included questions pertaining to correlates of substance abuse, problems relating to substance abuse, and sources of information about and help for substance abuse-related problems.

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<sup>1</sup>E. Ann Jones and John D. Massey, *1980 Texas Survey on Drug Abuse*. (Austin: Texas Department of Community Affairs, 1980).

The 1988 School Survey is part of a larger effort to gather information about the substance abuse patterns and problems of the Texas population as a whole as well as some special populations. A telephone survey of the adult population has been collected as well as a survey of offender populations in the state. This report is the first in a series intended to describe the substance abuse-related problems which daily challenge the well-being of the citizens of Texas.

**Trends in Substance Abuse Among Youth: 1980 to 1988**

Due to methodological differences, caution must be exercised when comparing reported prevalence of secondary school students in 1988 and youth aged 12 to 17 in 1980. However, it is apparent that prevalence of current use tends to be much higher in 1988 than was reported in 1980 (Figure 1 and Table 1). The current use of alcohol increased by about 40% over 1980. Current use of tobacco decreased by about 14%. Current use of marijuana increased by a relatively modest 19%. Reports of current use of inhalants increased by over 2,000%. Current use of "uppers" increased by about 93%. Large relative increases in current use of psychedelics and cocaine were also observed. When this change in reporting patterns is taken as a whole, these results suggest that more youth are using more kinds of substances than was the case in 1980.

FIGURE 1

**PREVALENCE OF CURRENT SUBSTANCE USE:  
TEXAS YOUTH IN 1980 AND 1988**

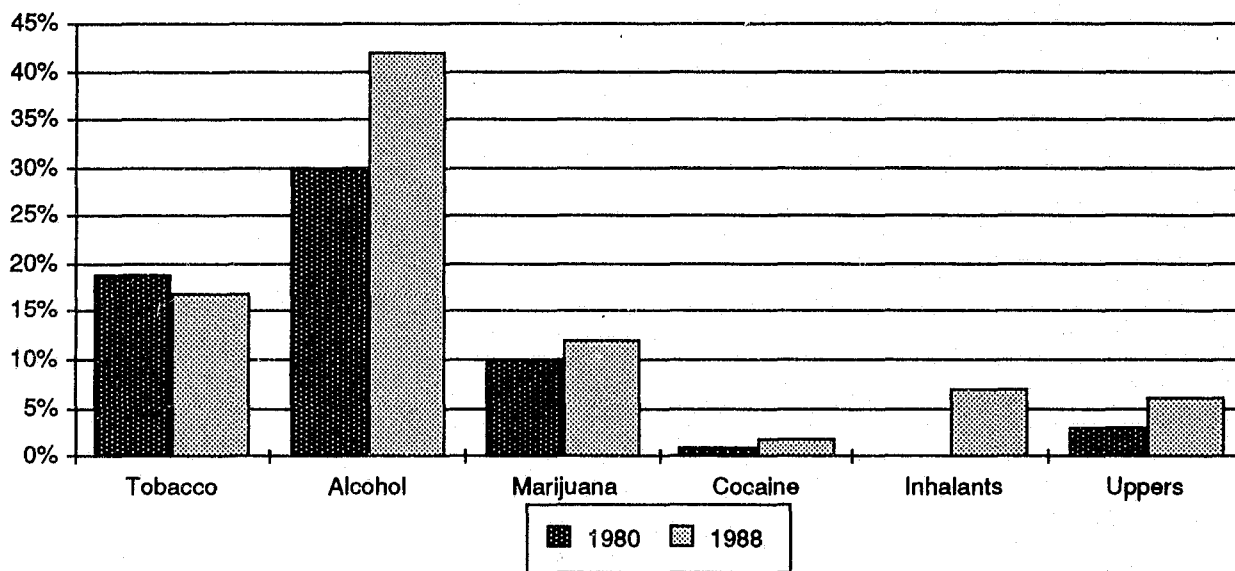


TABLE 1

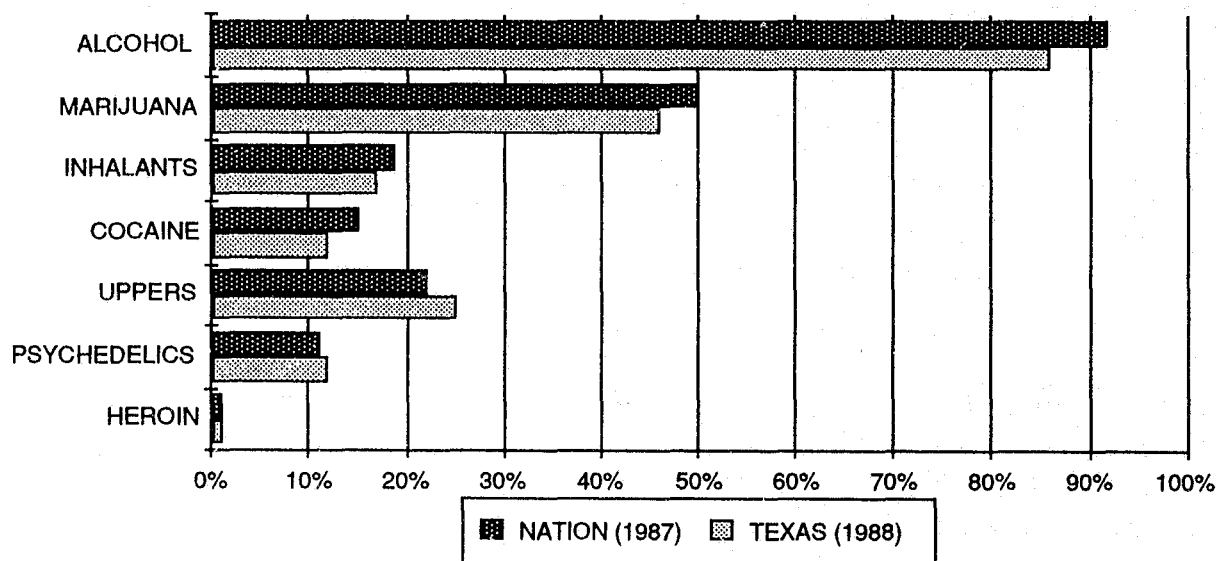
COMPARISON OF REPORTED PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE BY TEXAS YOUTH IN 1980 AND 1988

	Tobacco		Alcohol		Marijuana		Cocaine		Inhalants		"Uppers"	
	1980	1988	1980	1988	1980	1988	1980	1988	1980	1988	1980	1988
<b>Total</b>												
<i>Ever used</i>	29.9%	39.3%	52.5%	75.5%	18.8%	31.5%	2.4%	6.7%	2.4%	22.8%	6.2%	17.1%
<i>Current use</i>	19.2%	16.6%	30.7%	42.8%	9.7%	11.5%	0.7%	2.3%	*	6.6%	3.0%	5.8%
<b>Female</b>												
<i>Ever used</i>	22.0%	39.2%	46.0%	73.5%	14.0%	28.4%	3.0%	5.5%	2.0%	22.2%	8.0%	18.0%
<i>Current use</i>	13.0%	16.4%	27.0%	39.3%	8.0%	9.9%	1.0%	1.9%	*	6.6%	4.0%	6.4%
<b>Male</b>												
<i>Ever used</i>	38.0%	39.0%	59.0%	77.6%	23.0%	34.2%	2.0%	7.3%	3.0%	23.5%	4.0%	15.6%
<i>Current use</i>	26.0%	16.5%	35.0%	46.5%	12.0%	12.8%	1.0%	2.6%	*	6.7%	1.0%	5.0%
<b>Black</b>												
<i>Ever used</i>	13.0%	19.6%	43.0%	63.7%	8.0%	25.6%	1.0%	4.0%	*	13.1%	2.0%	6.1%
<i>Current use</i>	6.0%	4.7%	21.0%	29.5%	3.0%	9.2%	*	1.1%	*	3.4%	2.0%	1.8%
<b>Hispanic</b>												
<i>Ever used</i>	20.0%	40.0%	34.0%	74.4%	18.0%	38.3%	*	8.7%	3.0%	24.1%	4.0%	16.2%
<i>Current use</i>	13.0%	15.5%	25.0%	40.7%	11.0%	14.3%	*	3.9%	*	7.2%	1.0%	5.5%
<b>White</b>												
<i>Ever used</i>	37.0%	44.4%	60.0%	79.9%	21.0%	31.3%	4.0%	6.9%	3.0%	23.8%	7.0%	21.4%
<i>Current use</i>	24.0%	20.3%	35.0%	47.5%	11.0%	11.8%	1.0%	1.9%	*	6.9%	4.0%	7.5%

\* Less than 0.5%

This increase in substance abuse is further documented when 1980 and 1988 data are compared to national data gathered according to similar protocols. In 1980, the use of alcohol, marijuana, and inhalants was significantly lower for Texas youth than was reported by a comparable sample of national youth in 1979. In 1988, however, there are no significant differences in use by Texas seniors compared to the 1987 national senior survey<sup>2</sup> (Figures 2 and 3). Texas high school seniors report slightly higher prevalence of use on some substances and national seniors report slightly higher prevalence of use on others. However, the general impression is that patterns of substance use for Texas seniors are currently very similar to those of national seniors in 1987.

FIGURE 2 **LIFETIME PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE AMONG SENIORS**

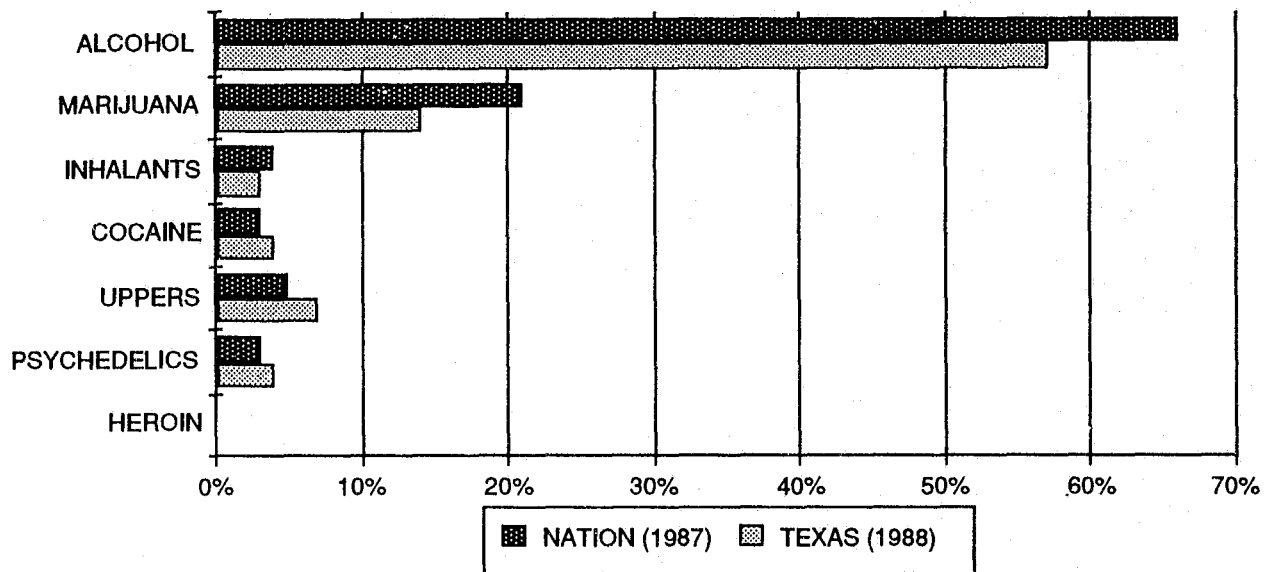


<sup>2</sup>Lloyd D. Johnston, Patrick M. O'Malley, and Jerald G. Bachman, *Drug Use Among American High School Students, College Students, and Other Young Adults, National Trends through 1985*. (Rockville, Maryland: National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1986).



FIGURE 3

**THIRTY-DAY PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE  
AMONG SENIORS**



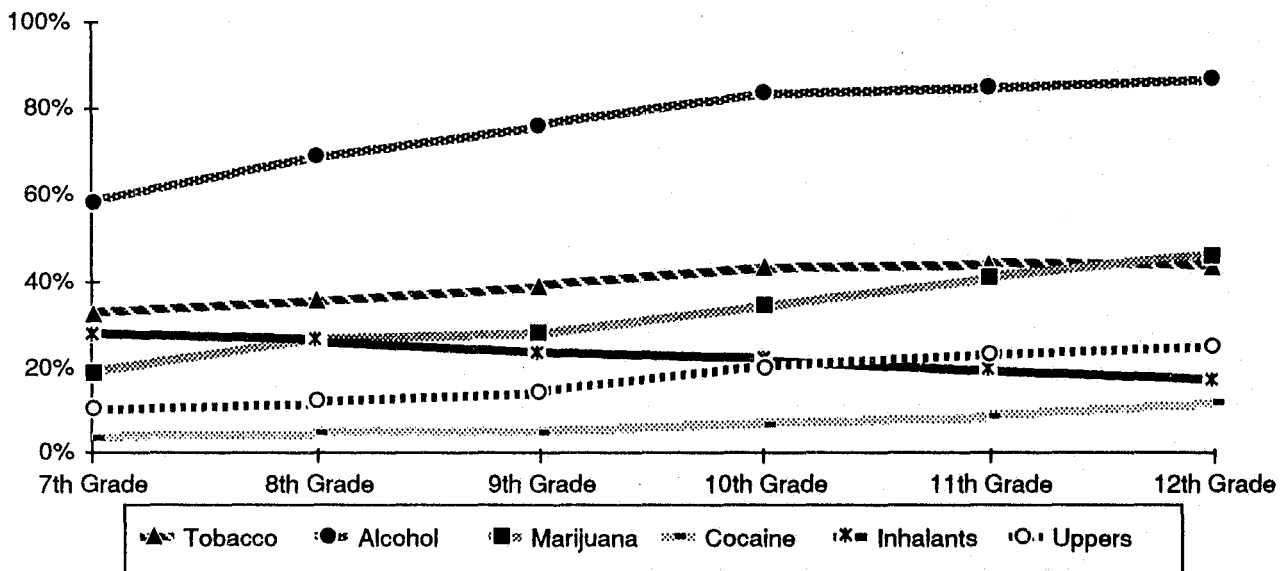
Overview of Substance Use by Secondary School Students in Texas: 1988

There are three major areas of concern with respect to substance abuse patterns of Texas secondary students:

1. Toxic Inhalants - Usage of inhalant substances appears to have increased substantially among youth. The heaviest usage was reported by the youngest children in all racial and ethnic groups.
2. Alcohol - There is widespread use of alcohol by students who drink very frequently and in large quantities. To a greater extent than for other substances, a substantial proportion of students continue beyond experimental use to a pattern of chronic heavy consumption in the later grades.
3. Use of illicit drugs - These substances are available and are used by a large number of students. Over half of all students will have used such drugs and consequently will have engaged in illegal behavior by the time they graduate from high school. Furthermore, it appears that students who use illicit drugs are likely to use them frequently.

The six substances most reported as being used by students in 1988 were alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, inhalants, uppers, and cocaine (Figure 4). Alcohol was the most widely used substance reported by Texas secondary students, and for many students it was the only substance they had ever used. About 76% of secondary students report one or more experiences with alcoholic beverages, with 43% reporting use in the month prior to the survey. About 16% used tobacco in the month prior to the survey and 12% used marijuana. Inhalant use ranked fourth in terms of current prevalence, with about 7% of respondents using inhalants in the month prior to the survey. Current use was reported by 6% of students for "uppers" and 2% for cocaine. Overall, some 17% of secondary student respondents used some illicit substance during the 30 days prior to the survey.

FIGURE 4  
LIFETIME PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE BY GRADE: TEXAS SECONDARY STUDENTS IN 1988



As would be expected, differences in patterns of use of various substances were observed by grade, race/ethnicity, sex, and urbanicity. With respect to race and ethnic patterns, White students are more likely than other groups to use alcohol, tobacco and uppers, while Hispanics tend to report higher prevalence of marijuana and cocaine. Blacks tend to report lower prevalence on all substances as compared to Whites and Hispanics. However, the percentage of minority students who have used substances has increased more sharply between 1980 and 1988 than has the percentage of White students (Figures 5 and 6).

FIGURE 5

**LIFETIME PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE BY RACE AND ETHNICITY: TEXAS YOUTH AGES 12 TO 17 IN 1980**

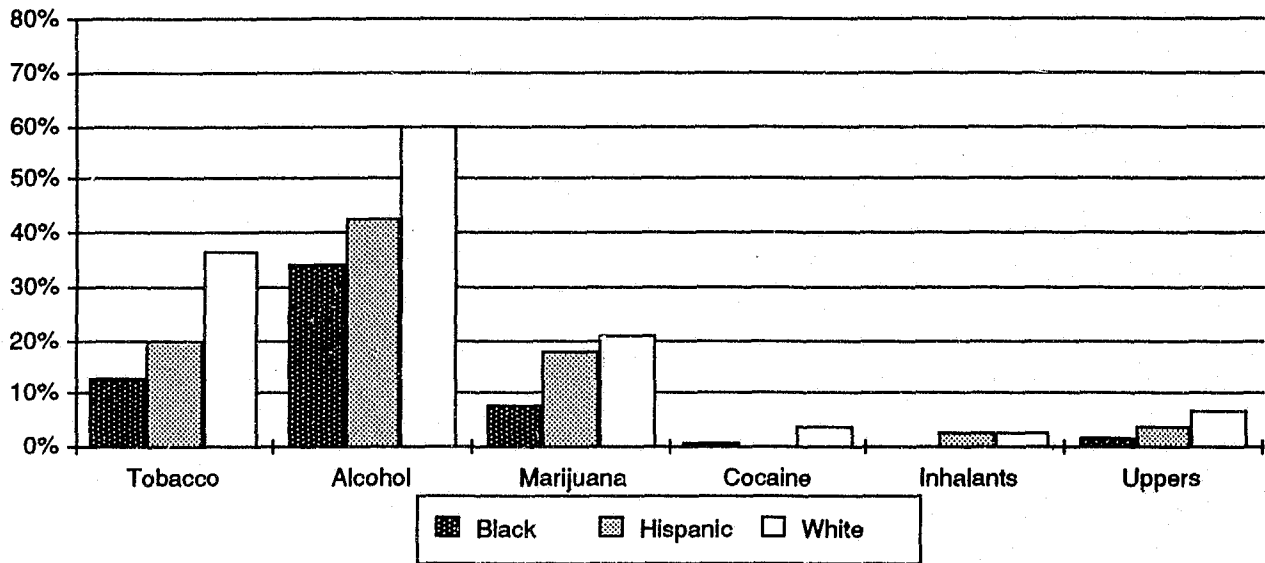
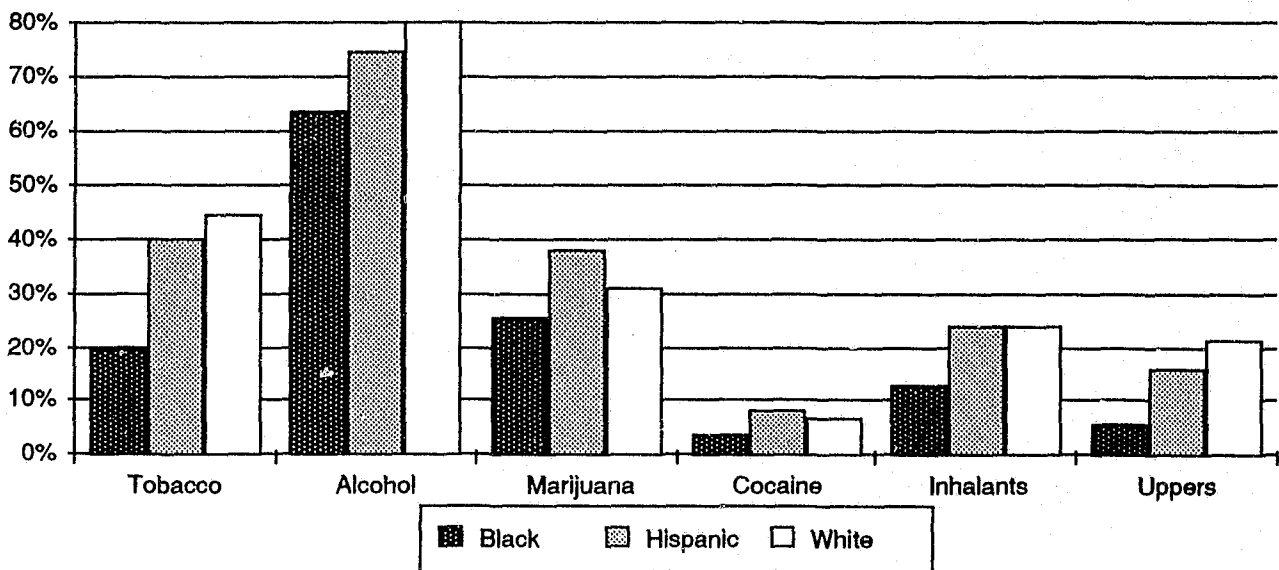


FIGURE 6

**LIFETIME PREVALENCE OF SUBSTANCE USE BY RACE AND ETHNICITY: TEXAS SECONDARY STUDENTS IN 1988**

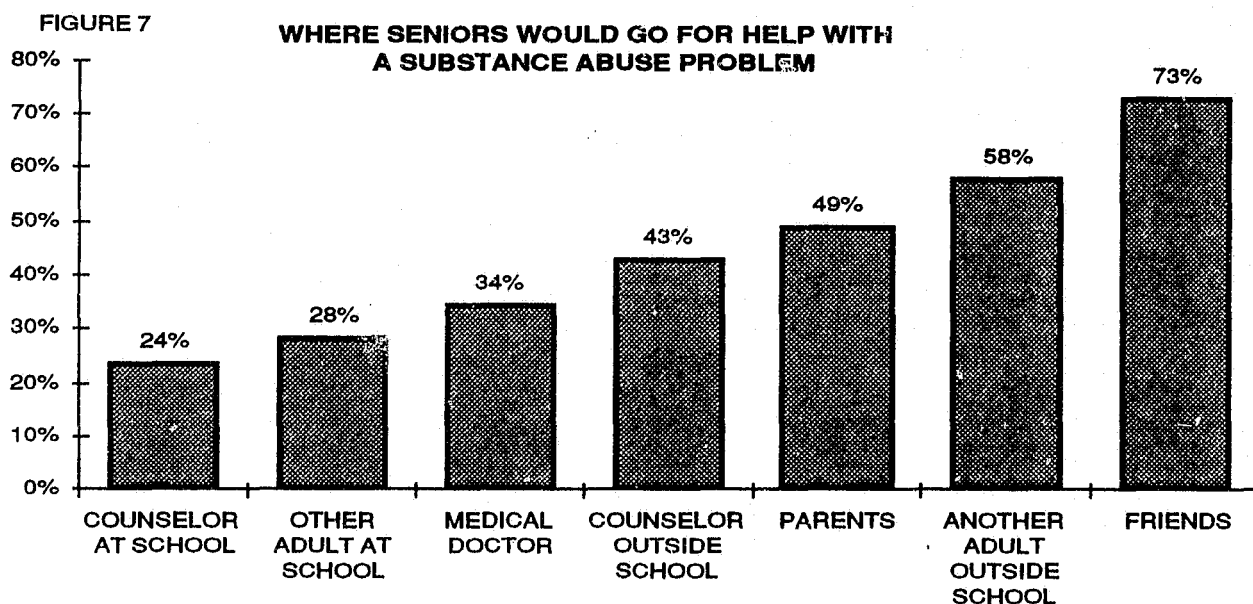


Males generally report higher prevalence of use of almost all substances than do females, although females report higher prevalence of use of “uppers” and “downers” in the lower grades. Also males and females were about equally likely to use tobacco in lower grades.

When reports from the largest metropolitan areas of the state (Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston and San Antonio) are compared to reports from the rest of the state, it appears that students in the most populous areas are somewhat more likely to use illicit drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and psychedelics. However, in the lower grades, students in the rest of the state appear to be slightly more likely to use abusable "legal" substances such as tobacco, alcohol, and inhalants.

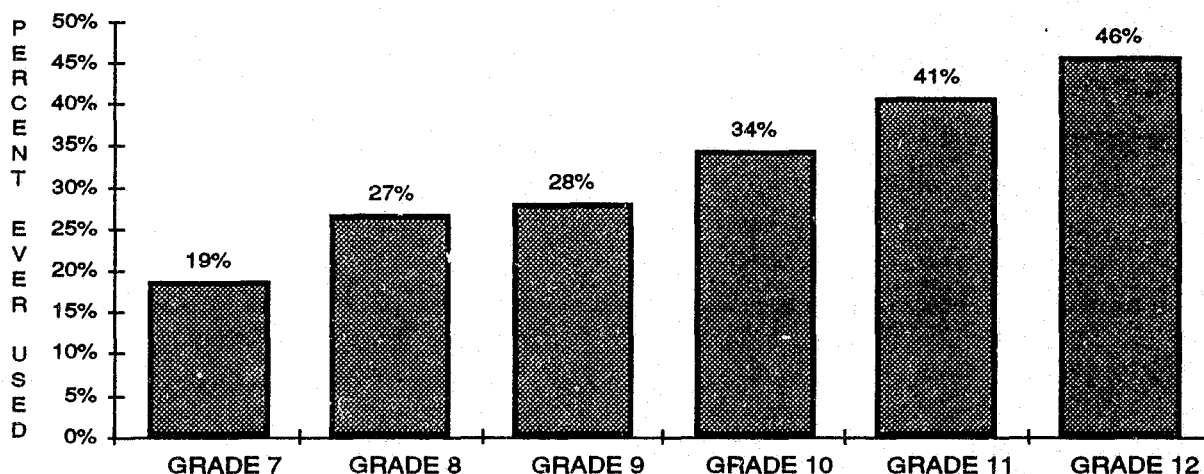
Family structure and academic performance appear to be associated with differences in drug use patterns. Students residing with both parents tended to have significantly lower prevalence of substance abuse than did those living in any other situation. In addition, students who normally achieved A or B grades reported lower prevalence of substance abuse than those who normally received C, D, or F grades. Thus, as would be expected, it appears that not using drugs may be positively associated with two-parent family structure and better academic performance.

When students were asked who they would go to for help with drug or alcohol problems, they reported they would be much more likely to go to friends (67%) than to any other source. The next most likely source students would go to was an adult outside of school such as a relative, clergyman, or family friend, followed by parents. Other potential sources of help in decreasing order of preference by students were a counselor outside of school, a medical doctor, a counselor or program at school, and any other adult in the school. This pattern of student preference was most apparent among seniors, 73% of whom reported that they would go to friends for help (Figure 7). From the perspective of prevention and intervention, it is interesting to note that students who would not seek help from adults appear more likely to have used substances than those students who would seek help from an adult.

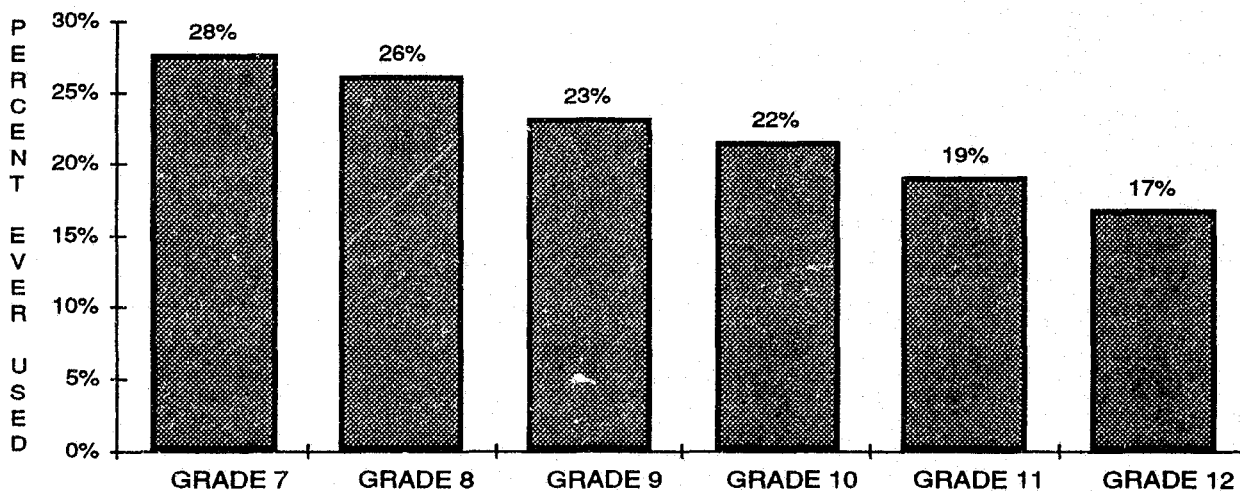


One of the strongest predictors of drug use is grade level. In general, lifetime and current prevalence of substance use tends to increase with grade. Lifetime prevalence of marijuana use is a good example of reporting patterns observed for most substances (Figure 8), since it is relatively low in earlier grades and increases with grade level. It is reasonable to expect that older children are more likely to have had the opportunity to experiment with substances and are more likely to have experienced various kinds of pressure to use such substances. Moreover, older children are more likely to have money to spend for substances and are developmentally more prone to risk-taking behavior than are younger children. Thus, it is not surprising to observe a positive association between reported prevalence of substance abuse and grade level.

**FIGURE 8 LIFETIME PREVALENCE OF MARIJUANA USE BY GRADE TEXAS SECONDARY STUDENTS 1988**



**FIGURE 9 LIFETIME PREVALENCE OF INHALANT USE BY GRADE TEXAS SECONDARY STUDENTS 1988**



It is, however, somewhat surprising to observe that, in contrast to other substances, lifetime experience with inhalants appears to have an inverse relationship to grade level (Figure 9). About 28% of seventh grade students report one or more experiences with inhalants while only 17% of high school seniors do, although high school seniors have, on average, had about an additional five years of opportunity to use such substances.

### Inhalant Abuse Among Texas Secondary School Students

The lower lifetime inhalant experience reported by students in upper grades suggests several possibilities: a) older students have forgotten about early experiences with inhalants or are ashamed to report them, b) there has been a sharp increase in inhalant use by young students over the past several years, or c) inhalant users are more likely to drop out of school and therefore are not present to participate in a survey in later grades. The true explanation for this pattern may be a combination of these factors, and it points to a need for greater concern about inhalants as a major substance of abuse, particularly among younger students.

This need is particularly highlighted when the frequency and type of inhalants abused by younger students is considered. The average seventh grade inhalant abuser has inhaled almost 18 times. Inhalants frequently used by younger students include substances such as liquid paper, spray paints, solvents, glues and gasoline. The typical younger inhalant abuser uses a variety of these substances.

While the conventional wisdom has been that inhalants tend to be abused primarily by young Hispanics, surprising similarity was observed with respect to inhalant use by race/ethnicity. Whites and Hispanics report use of inhalants at similar elevated rates in all grades, while Blacks tend to report at somewhat lower rates.

These results suggest that inhalants may be a larger and more general problem than previously assumed for Texas youth, especially for younger secondary students.

### Alcohol Abuse Among Texas Secondary School Students

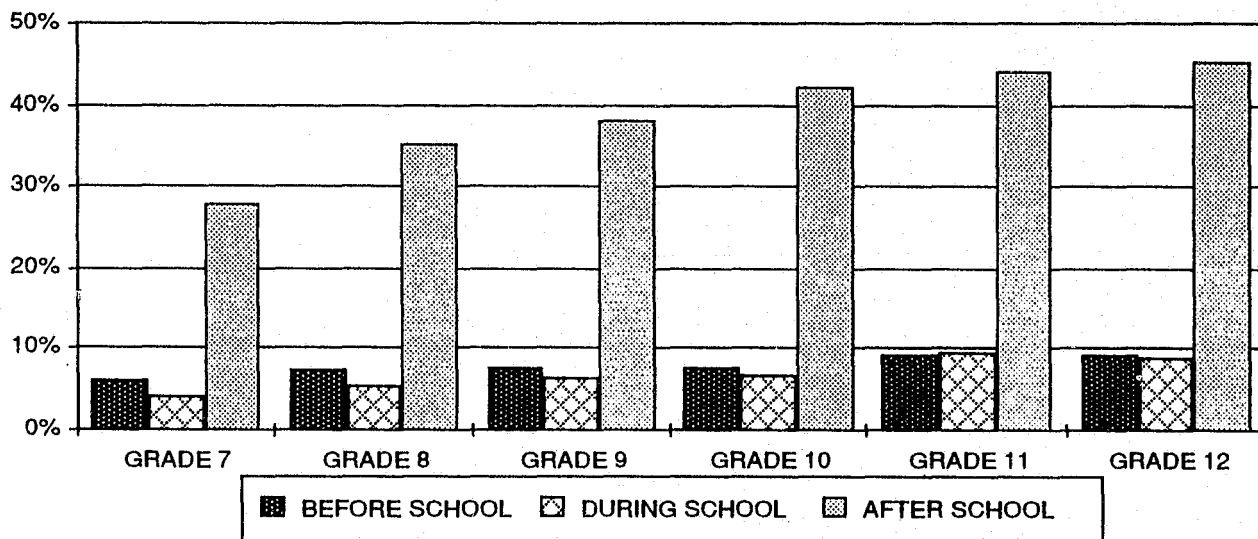
Alcohol is the most prevalent substance used by Texas secondary students. There are two general patterns of prevalence, with about 60% of the respondents using beer or wine coolers, and 45% using wine and liquor. While this observation is not in itself surprising, the amount of alcohol

consumed is a matter of concern. Of high school seniors, about 32% drink alcohol on three to 19 occasions each month. An additional 5% use alcohol on 20 or more occasions in a typical month. From reports of high school seniors, it is estimated that the average senior drinker consumes 41 alcoholic drinks per month. About 3/4 of the total amount consumed is beer, which is the most commonly used alcoholic beverage. Some 31% of high school seniors typically drink five or more beers per occasion and 29% of high school seniors consume five or more beers once per week or more often.

While students in earlier grades report less consumption of alcohol than do those in later grades, large quantities are consumed by some students at all grade levels. For example, respondents in the seventh grade who identified themselves as alcohol users drank an average of about 19 drinks per month. About 4% of seventh graders reported consuming five or more beers once a week or more often. Thus, drinking large quantities of alcohol is not restricted to students in higher grades, but rather, this practice appears to be relatively common at all levels of the Texas secondary school system. There are two patterns of progressive consumption: a “higher progression” pattern with an increasing frequency of drinking of beer and liquor in the higher grades and a “lower progression” pattern with more moderate increases by grade for wine coolers and wine.

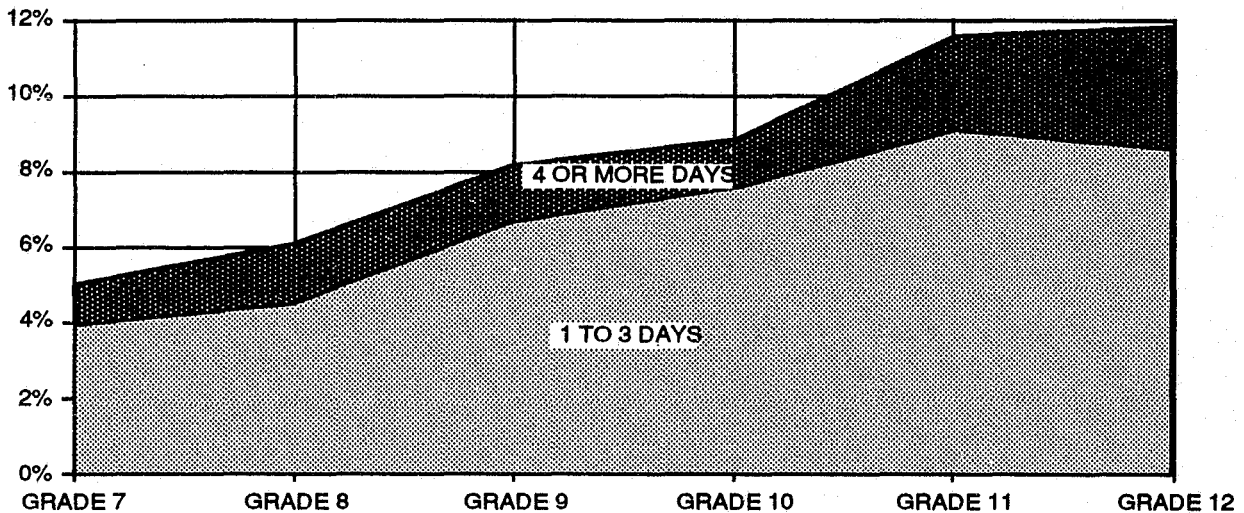
Some secondary students report drinking before or during school days (Figure 10). This proportion is larger in the upper grades. About 9% of high school seniors used alcoholic beverages in the morning before school in the past 30 days, and the same proportion reported using alcohol during school in the past month.

**FIGURE 10 USE OF ALCOHOL BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER SCHOOL IN THE PAST 30 DAYS**



About 12% of high school seniors attended school while drunk at least once during the school year (Figure 11). About 2% of high school seniors reported having been in trouble with their teachers over an alcohol-related incident in the past year (Table 2). Students in lower grades reported such behaviors at somewhat lower rates.

**FIGURE 11 STUDENTS ATTENDING ONE OR MORE CLASSES WHILE INTOXICATED ON ALCOHOL IN PAST SCHOOL YEAR**



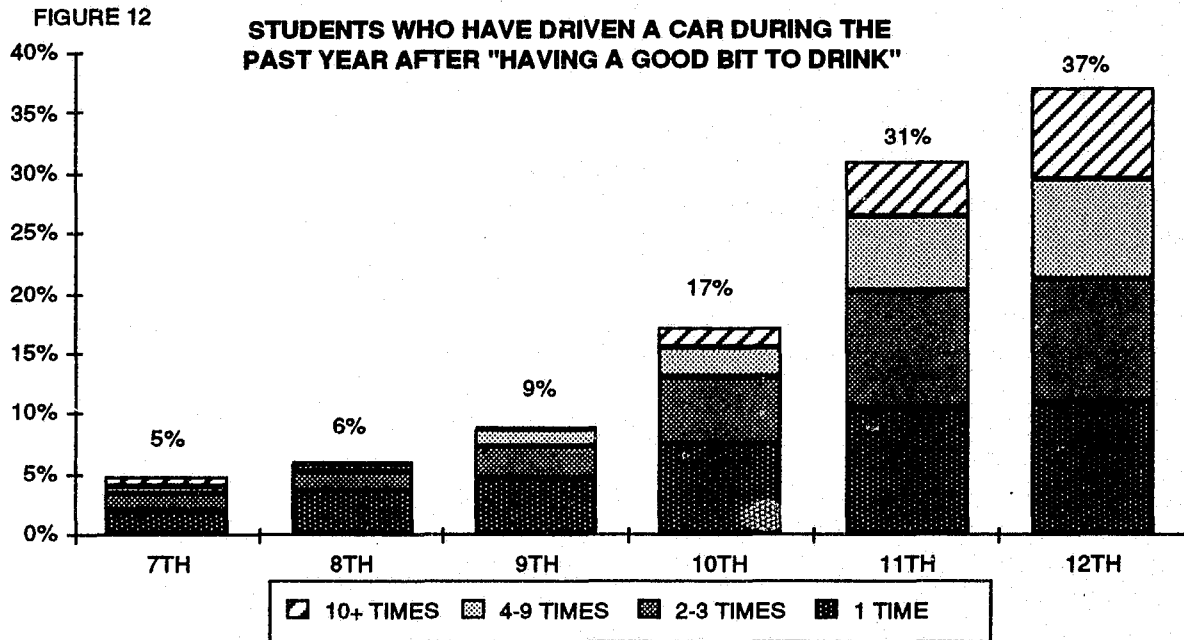
**TABLE 2**

**SINCE SCHOOL BEGAN IN SEPTEMBER, ON HOW MANY DAYS HAVE YOU GOTTEN IN TROUBLE WITH YOUR TEACHERS BECAUSE OF YOUR DRINKING?**

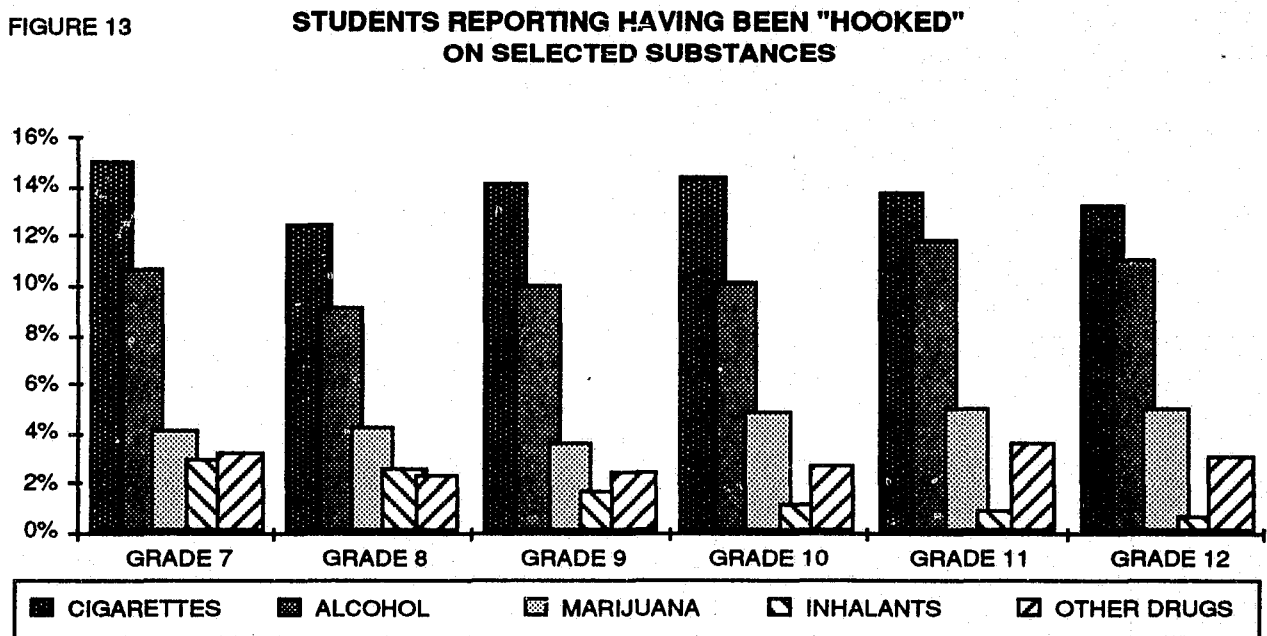
	NONE	1 DAY	2-3 DAYS	4+ DAYS
ALL	98.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.2%
GRADE 7	98.5%	0.8%	0.2%	0.5%
GRADE 8	98.9%	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%
GRADE 9	99.1%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%
GRADE 10	98.7%	0.7%	0.5%	0.1%
GRADE 11	98.9%	0.7%	0.2%	0.1%
GRADE 12	98.1%	1.6%	0.2%	0.1%

Alcohol-related problems are not restricted to the educational sphere. For example, about 10% of high school seniors reported getting into trouble with the police one or more times in the past year because of drinking. A dangerously large 37% of high school seniors drove a car "after having a good bit to drink" one or more times in the past year. About 8% reported doing so ten or more times (Figure 12).



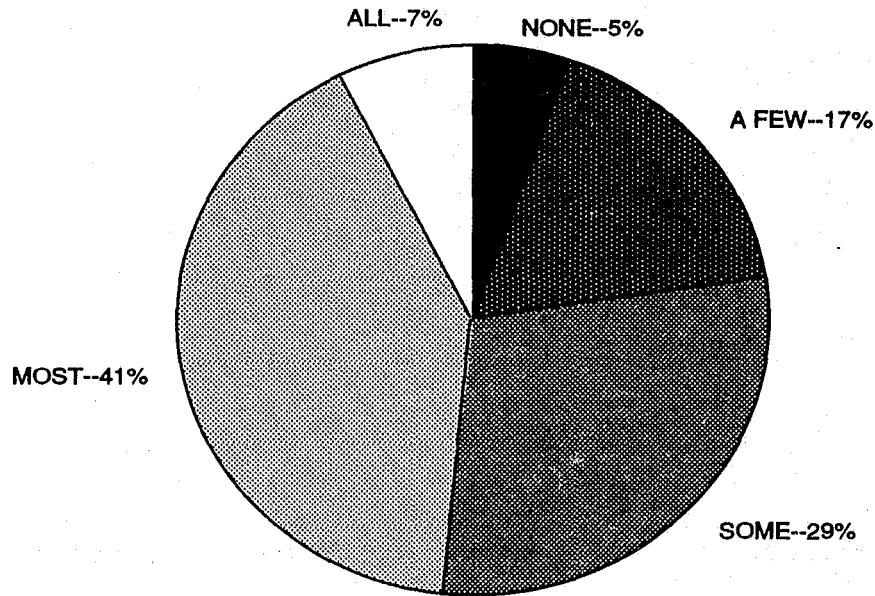


There were also numerous indications that alcohol dependence may be a problem for an unacceptably large number of Texas secondary students. Around 10% of students in all grades reported that they thought they had been "hooked" on alcohol at some point in their lives (Figure 13).



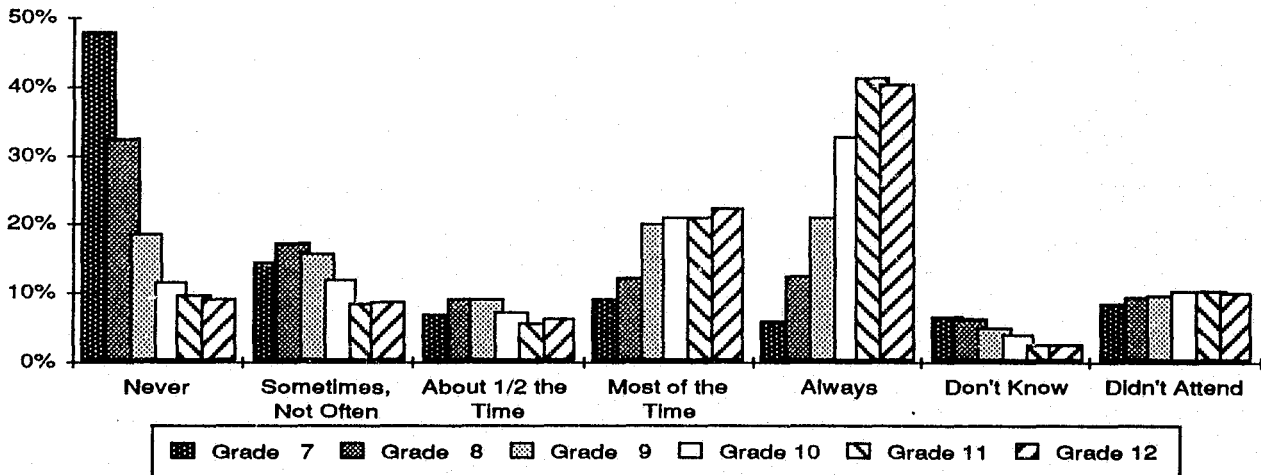
Of the seniors, 45% reported that most or all of their close friends get drunk (Figure 14). Some 7% of seventh graders and 5% of high school seniors sought help for alcohol or drug-related problems in the past year.

**FIGURE 14 HOW MANY OF YOUR CLOSE FRIENDS GET DRUNK ON ALCOHOL? TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS IN 1988**



One reason that alcohol-related problems appear to be widespread in the secondary school population may be that alcoholic beverages are relatively easy for Texas secondary students to obtain. For example, some 63% of high school seniors reported that alcohol was served at most

**FIGURE 15 USE OF ALCOHOL AT PARTIES BY GRADE**



or all of the parties they attended during the school year (Figure 15). Some 89% of seniors said that alcohol would be very easy or fairly easy to obtain if they wanted it.

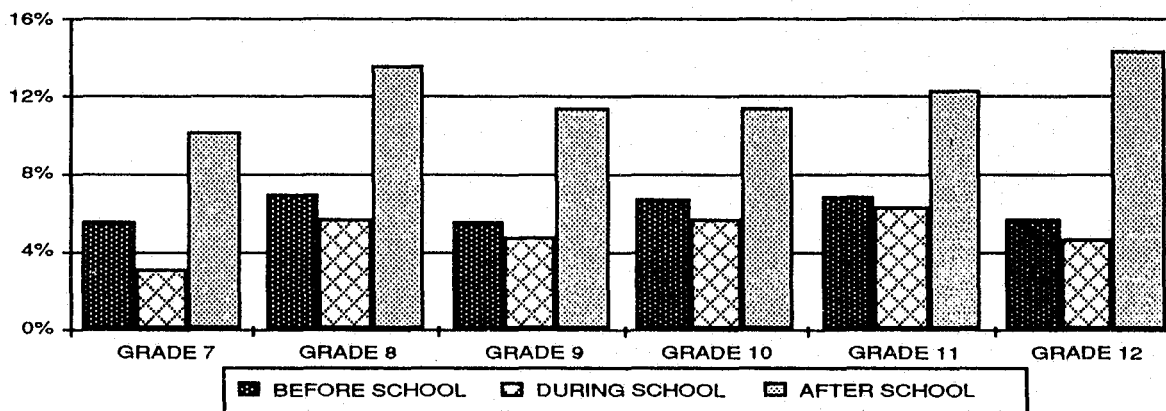
### Abuse of Illicit Drugs by Texas Secondary School Students

Illicit drugs are defined as controlled substances and include marijuana, cocaine (in powdered form and crack), "uppers," "downers," psychedelics, and heroin. Overall, some 39% of respondents used one or more of these substances at some time in their life. A substantial proportion of students, 24%, used some illicit substance other than marijuana. As would be expected, high school seniors had the highest lifetime and current prevalence of illicit drug use, with 54% reporting use of one or more illicit drugs in their lifetime, and 20% reporting use of one or more illicit substances in the 30 days preceding the survey.

Fewer secondary school students used illicit drugs than alcohol; however, those using illicit drugs reported more frequent use of such substances. For example, high school seniors who drink reported using alcohol an average of 7.6 times in the month prior to the survey. In contrast, seniors who use illicit drugs reported using those drugs an average of 10.2 times in the past month. Of high school seniors, about 9% used illicit drugs one to two times in the month prior to the survey; 8% used such drugs three to 19 times and 3% reported "daily" use (e.g., use on 20 or more days of the past 30 days).

FIGURE 16

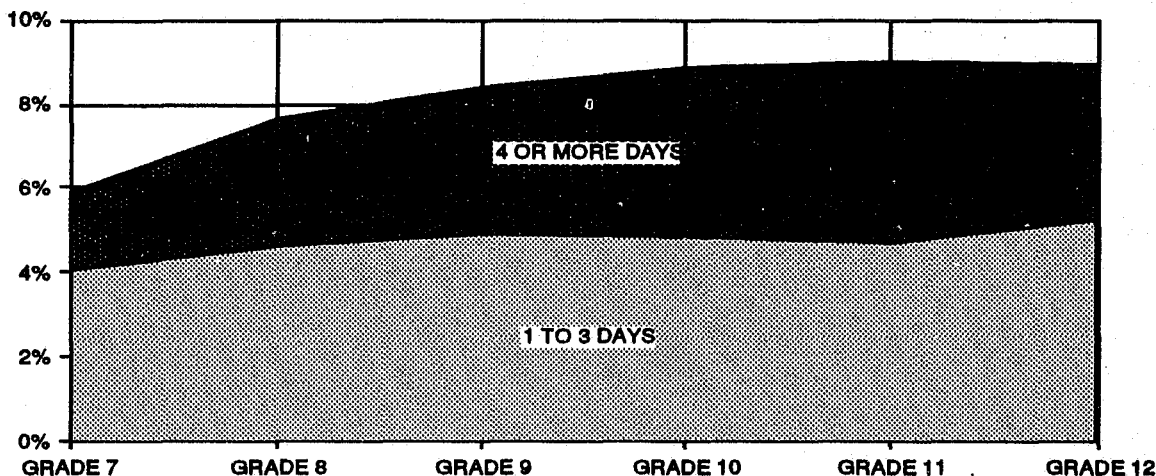
**USE OF MARIJUANA OR OTHER DRUGS BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER SCHOOL IN THE PAST THIRTY DAYS**



While it is not possible to estimate the amount of illicit drugs consumed, it is clear that these substances are associated with problems for many users. With respect to their education, between

FIGURE 17

**STUDENTS ATTENDING ONE OR MORE CLASSES WHILE HIGH ON MARIJUANA IN PAST SCHOOL YEAR**



6% and 7% of students used illicit substances before school in the past 30 days (Figure 16). Only slightly fewer used illicit substances during school. Between 6% and 9% attended class while high on marijuana or some other drug in the past year (Figure 17).

Between 1% to 2% of the respondents were in trouble with teachers because of drug use at least once in the past year (Table 3).

TABLE 3

**SINCE SCHOOL BEGAN IN SEPTEMBER, ON HOW MANY DAYS HAVE YOU GOTTEN IN TROUBLE WITH YOUR TEACHERS BECAUSE OF YOUR DRUG USE?**

	NONE *****	1 DAY *****	2-3 DAYS *****	4+ DAYS *****
ALL	98.8%	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%
GRADE 7	98.2%	0.7%	0.5%	0.6%
GRADE 8	98.5%	0.9%	0.4%	0.3%
GRADE 9	99.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%
GRADE 10	98.9%	0.4%	0.5%	0.2%
GRADE 11	99.3%	0.5%	0.1%	0.1%
GRADE 12	98.7%	0.9%	0.2%	0.3%

Since fewer students use illicit drugs than use alcohol, it is not surprising that fewer report trouble with the law based on illicit drug use. As compared to the 10% reported for alcohol, less than 2% of high school seniors report trouble with the police because of drug use in the past year. Of high school seniors, about 14% report having driven while they felt high from drugs. About 4% report doing so 10 or more times in the past year.

Secondary students also had problems associated with being dependent on illicit drugs. About 5% of students report having been "hooked" on marijuana. Around 3% have been "hooked" on other drugs. These rates are somewhat lower than those reported for alcohol (11%) and are consistent with generally lower prevalence of use of illicit substances.

Illicit substances appear to be more difficult to obtain than alcohol for secondary students, but 17% of seniors reported that illicit drugs were used at most or all of the parties they attended in the past school year. Of the illicit substances, as would be expected, marijuana is the easiest to obtain, with 76% of seniors reporting that marijuana is fairly easy or very easy to obtain. Students tended to report that other illicit substances were much more difficult to obtain than marijuana.

Student responses to the survey indicate that a substantial number of Texas secondary students are abusing illicit substances, many on a daily basis. Moreover, it appears that some students are encountering trouble at school and with the law because of illicit substance abuse, and although somewhat less available than alcohol, illicit substances are still readily available to Texas students.

### Conclusions

The data indicate that substance abuse among Texas youth has increased in the past eight years. Since 1980, when Texas substance abuse was well below national averages, substance abuse among youth has increased to the point where patterns are very similar to national averages. This trend underscores the need for even more effective programs for prevention of substance abuse among Texas youth.