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NIDA



**NATIONAL INSTITUTE
ON DRUG ABUSE**

Capsules

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ACQUISITION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM THE 1991 NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY ON DRUG ABUSE

In 1991 the Survey was expanded to provide the most accurate estimates of drug use prevalence of any of the surveys conducted since 1971. Because of the short time interval since the last survey in 1990, few changes in drug use prevalence were detected in the 1991 survey. For some measures, such as drug use among youth, a continuation of previously reported decreasing trends are suggested by the new data even though changes since 1990 are not statistically significant.

While other measures, such as drug use among adults, show little change since 1990, the 1991 survey confirms the previously reported decreases in marijuana use from the peak year of 1979 and in cocaine use from the peak year of 1985. Overall, the 1991 data also suggest that the substantial declines in drug use prevalence since 1985 have either slowed or have levelled off.

TREND ANALYSIS

- o Prevalence rates for current use (past month) of any illicit drug among youth (12-17 years old) declined by more than one-half between 1985 and 1991, dropping from 14.9% to 6.8%. However, drug use in this age group remained virtually unchanged from 1990 to 1991.
- o The number of current cocaine users age 12 and older had decreased significantly from 5.8 million (2.9%) in 1985 to 1.6 million (0.8%) in 1990. In 1991, the estimate of current cocaine users (0.9%) was essentially the same as the 1990 rate. The rate had been three times higher in 1985 (2.9%) and nearly twice as high in 1988 (1.5%).
- o Slightly over one-quarter of the population (27%) have smoked cigarettes in the past month, the same as 1990 (26.7%).
- o There were 103.2 million current drinkers of alcoholic beverages in 1991 compared with 105.8 million in 1988, and 113.1 million in 1985. There was no change in the alcohol use rates since 1990.

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- Experimentation with marijuana among the youngest persons in the survey, those age 12-13, has continued to decline. Rates of lifetime use were 7.9% in 1982, 5.8 % in 1985, 4.2% in 1988, 2.9% in 1990, and 2.3% in 1991. However, rates of alcohol and cigarette use among this age group have stabilized at about 22-23%, the same levels seen in 1988.

1991 ANALYSIS

- In 1991, 75.4 million Americans age 12 and older (37% of the population) had tried marijuana, cocaine or other illicit drugs at least once in their lifetime.
- Twenty-six million Americans (12.8%) used marijuana, cocaine or other illicit drugs at least once in the past year.
- Among youth (12 to 17 years old), 14.8% used an illicit drug in the past year and 6.8% used an illicit drug at least once in the past month. Comparable rates for young adults (18-25 years old) are 29.2% and 15.4%, respectively; and for adults 26 years old and over the rates are 9.6% and 4.5%, respectively.
- The overall current prevalence rate for any illicit drug use (age 12 and older) was 6.2%. Rates for males and females are 7.5% and 5.0%, respectively. In addition to males, other demographic subgroups with rates in excess of the overall rate are blacks (9.4%), those living in the West region (8.1%), and the unemployed population (16.8%).

ANALYSIS BY DRUG

Cocaine

- While the number of past year and past month cocaine users has decreased significantly since the peak year 1985, frequent or more intense use has not shown a statistically significant change. Among the 6.4 million people age 12 and older who used cocaine in the past year, 855,000 used cocaine once a week or more in 1991 compared to 662,000 in 1990. Estimates of daily or almost daily cocaine use were 278,000 in 1991 compared to 336,000 in 1990.
- Rates for past year cocaine use among youth (12-17 years old) remained virtually unchanged, 1.5% in 1991 and 2.2% in 1990. Past year cocaine use among 26-34 year olds declined significantly to 5.1% in 1991 from 6.8% in 1990. Among persons age 35 and older past year cocaine use increased significantly to 1.6% in 1991 from 0.9% in 1990.

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- o The rate of current cocaine use was 0.9% overall, essentially the same as the 1990 rate of 0.8%. The rate of current cocaine use for males (1.3%) was over twice as high as that for females (0.6%). Other demographic subgroups for which the rates of current cocaine use are the highest were the unemployed (4.5%), blacks (1.8%) and Hispanics (1.6%). Metropolitan areas have higher rates (1.0%) than nonmetropolitan areas (0.6%). The west region of the country has the highest rate (1.3%).
- o One million people (0.5%) used crack in the past year, the same as in 1988 and 1990. Past year crack use in 1991 is highest among young adults 18-25 years old (1.0%), males (0.8%), blacks (1.5%), the unemployed (3.7%), and those who have not completed high school (1.0%).

Marijuana

- o Marijuana remains the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States. Approximately 67.7 million Americans (33.4%) have tried marijuana at least once in their lives. Approximately 2.6 million youth, nearly 14.4 million young adults (18-25 years old), and almost 51 million adults aged 26 and older have tried marijuana.
- o In 1991, 9.7 million people (4.8%) used marijuana in the past month. Rates were highest for males (6.3%), blacks (7.2%), and the unemployed (13.6%).
- o In 1991 the rate of current marijuana use for youth was 4.3% while the rate for young adults was 13.0%, representing no significant change from 1990 when the rates were 5.2% and 12.7%, respectively. However, marijuana use among youth and young adults has declined significantly from the peak year of 1979 when the rates were 16.7% and 35.4%, respectively.
- o Of the 19.5 million people in 1991 who used marijuana (at least once) during the past year, 5.3 million used the drug once a week or more and 3.1 million used daily or almost daily.

Alcohol and Tobacco Products

- o The overall rate for current alcohol use in 1991 is 50.9%, virtually unchanged from 51.2% in 1990. Current use of alcohol among youth declined significantly from 24.5% in 1990 to 20.3% in 1991 among youth.
- o Of the 138 million people age 12 and older (68% of the 12 and over population) who drank alcohol in the past year, nearly one-third, or over 43 million, drank at least once a week and 19 million drank daily or almost daily.

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- Of the American population age 12 and older, slightly over a quarter (27%) smoked cigarettes in the past month. Current use of cigarettes among youth is 10.8% and 32.2% among young adults. Cigarette use among adults 26-34 years old decreased significantly to 32.9% in 1991 from 37.5% reported in 1990. Current smoking rates were highest among the unemployed (50.3%).
- Of the 6.9 million current users of smokeless tobacco, over 91% are males. In contrast with patterns of illicit drug use, rates of use of smokeless tobacco are highest for whites, those living in non-metropolitan areas, and those living in the South.

Other Drugs

- Hallucinogens, which first gained prominence during the mid-sixties, include such drugs as LSD, PCP, mescaline, and peyote. The past year prevalence rate for hallucinogens was 1.4% in 1991. Males (1.7%) exhibit the highest prevalence rates. Past year prevalence is highest among the two age groups, 12-17 (2.1%) and 18-25 (4.8%).
- The survey estimates that 2.9 million people have tried heroin and 700,000 have used it in the past year. Because a large percentage of heroin users are believed to be outside the household population, these estimates are conservative. Over half of the estimated past year users are age 35 or older.
- Over 1.4 million youth (7.0%) and 3.1 million young adults (10.9%) have experimented with inhalants. Current use is 1.8% for youth and 1.5% for young adults.
- Past month nonmedical use of psychotherapeutic drugs, i.e., sedatives, tranquilizers, stimulants, and analgesics, have stabilized at the 1988 rate of under 2% from the higher (3.2%) rate in 1985. Past year tranquilizer use reported a significant increase to 1.7% in 1991 from 1.3% in 1990.
- The 1991 survey for the first time estimated the prevalence of anabolic steroid use. An estimated 1 million people have used steroids, with nearly 90% being male and 50% living in the South. Rates of past year use are highest among persons age 12-25.

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OTHER FINDINGS

- o Among 20-34 year olds who did not complete high school, 16.6% used an illicit drug in the past month compared to 9.9% of high school graduates. Current marijuana use among those who did not complete high school was 14.1% compared to 7.9% of the graduates. Current cocaine use among high school drop outs was 3.6% compared to 1.6% for graduates.
- o Among 18-34 year olds who are unemployed, 21.5% used illicit drugs in the past month compared to 9.7% who are employed full time. Current cocaine use was 4.9% among the unemployed and 1.8% among the employed. Current marijuana use was 18.5% among the unemployed and 7.9% among the employed.
- o Among the 23 million adults (age 18 and older) who used illicit drugs within the past year, 55% (12.6 million) were employed full time and another 13% (3.0 million) were employed part time. Overall, 13.5% of employed adults used an illicit drug in the past year.
- o Over 4.5 million (7.7 percent) of the 59.2 million women 15-44 years of age (the height of childbearing years) have used an illicit drug in the past month. Slightly over 600,000 (1.0%) of women aged 15-44 used cocaine and 3.3 million (5.6%) used marijuana in the past month.
- o Among women 15-44, the lowest rates of drug use are found among women whose children are 2 years of age or older. For mothers with at least one child under 2 years of age, current use of any illicit drug is 5.9% and past year use of cocaine is 2.5%. Women age 15-44 with no children have the highest rates at 11.4% for current drug use and 4.7% for past year cocaine use.
- o Cocaine is believed to be fairly easy or very easy to obtain by 44 percent of the population. Cocaine was reported to be easy to obtain by higher percentages of blacks (62.5%), persons living in the West (50%) and 18-34 year olds (52%). Sixty-two percent of the population reports that marijuana would be easy for them to get, if they wanted it. LSD, PCP, and heroin, were considered easy to obtain by less than 30 percent.
- o Since 1988, there have been no increases and some decreases in the percentages of people who believe drug use is harmful. Fewer people believed that occasional cocaine use was associated with great risk in 1991 (80.6%) than in 1990 (83.3%) or in 1988 (84.9%). The same is true for those who see great risk in occasional marijuana use for which the percentage fell from 49.6% in 1988 to 45.0% in 1990 to 42.3% in 1991. Occasional use of cocaine was associated with "great risk" by 74.8% of youths in 1991, compared with 80.4% in 1990.

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MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS

- o In both 1990 and 1991 the survey included an oversampling of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The prevalence rate for past month use of any illicit drug in 1991 was 5.7%, smaller than but not statistically different from the rate for all large metropolitan areas (6.9%) and the rate for Washington, D.C. in 1990 (6.8%) Cocaine use in the past year was 3.6%, similar to rates in all large metropolitan areas (3.6%) and in D.C. in 1990 (4.0%).

- o Five additional major metropolitan areas -- New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Denver, and Miami -- were oversampled in 1991. Rates for past month use of any illicit drug was lowest in Miami (5.4%) and highest in Los Angeles (8.5%). Past year cocaine use ranged from 3.9% in Los Angeles and 3.7% in Denver to 2.9% in Chicago and 3.0% in Miami. Past month marijuana rates were highest in Denver (6.3%) and Los Angeles (6.2%) and lowest in Miami (3.5%).

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