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Drug usage is high, national survey shows

American young people substantially increase their levels of drug use in their early 20s. University of Michigan researchers have found in preliminary results of a new national survey sponsored by the White House Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention.

Although this finding may surprise few Americans, the resulting levels may be higher than are generally supposed, the researchers say.

The study on "Drugs and American Youth" is being conducted by the U-M Institute for Social Research as part of its larger "Youth in Transition" Survey.

In this unique national sampling, the same group of young people has been followed for eight years—from the start of high school until five years after graduation.

The drug experiences of these 1,600

young men have been followed during much of that time. The latest results are reported on by study director Loyd Johnston and ISR associates Patrick O'Malley and Leslie Eveland.

JOHNSTON NOTES that the study findings have always run counter to popular beliefs: "The findings we reported in 1970 did not reinforce public opinion; drug use turned out to be far less prevalent among young people than was commonly believed," he said.

"Before graduating from high school in 1969, less than a quarter of these young people had used any illicit drug, and about half of those using had merely experimented once or twice, usually with marijuana.

"Now, the common belief seems to be that the problem of young people using illicit drugs has subsided consid-

erably. In fact, however, our data indicate that substantial proportions and absolute numbers of young people are involved with drugs to some degree."

For example, in the 12 months prior to June 1974, more than one-half of all the 23-year-old males in the United States smoked some marijuana. Over one-fifth made some use of amphetamines without a prescription, and the proportions for barbiturates, cocaine and psychedelics were all greater than one-tenth during that year.

The number who had tried these drugs at some time during their lives, of course, is even higher: 62 percent for marijuana; 32 percent for amphetamines; 12 percent for barbiturates; 22 percent for psychedelics. Over six percent had tried heroin.

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