

HS Drug Epidemic? Not So!

ANN ARBOR
Fears of a drug epidemic in the nation's high schools appear to be exaggerated, says the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR).

A nationwide study by ISR researchers asked questions about previous drug use of a representative sample of 1,600 young men in the class of 1969, one year after they had graduated from high school.

"Over three-quarters of these males used no illegal drugs before leaving high school," reports Lloyd Johnston, director of the study and author of the forthcoming book, "Drugs and American Youth," being published by the Institute.

THE STUDY, one of the first nationwide examinations of drug use among a normal population of young people, also revealed that 10 per cent had used marijuana, but nothing more serious, while another 12 per cent had at least experimented with a more serious illegal drug.

Youth attitudes toward drugs appear more conservative than is often thought, Johnston says.

"Over two-thirds of the sample said they strongly disapproved of regular use of each of the more serious illegal drugs," he explains. "Attitudes about marijuana, however, were in sharp contrast to those about the more serious drugs. Exactly the same number of respondents approved of or felt neutral about the experimental use of marijuana as disapproved of it."

"The two most frequently chosen answers were 'strongly disapprove' and 'feel neutral' which suggests that this sample of young men is more polarized on the ethics of marijuana use than on the use of any other drug."

"DRUGS AND American Youth" (\$3, paperback) will be available this spring from the ISR Publications Division, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

"Marijuana was by far the most popular illegal drug," Johnston says, "with 21 per cent having tried it, although less than two per cent had used marijuana daily."

The author found that 10 per cent had tried amphetamines, seven per cent hallucinogens such as LSD, and six per cent barbiturates. Fewer than two per cent reported every trying heroin.

These percentages are somewhat higher than would be found in the entire high school class since girls less often use illegal drugs, Johnston notes.

"The two traditionally acceptable drugs - alcohol and cigarettes - although they often cannot be legally purchased by minors, clearly remain the favorite of this younger generation," Johnston reports.

"Roughly a third had used alcoholic beverages on a weekly basis (or more often) during the high school years and little over a third smoked cigarettes daily."

IN THE YEAR after high school the ISR study found that the number of users of all drugs jumped substantially.

More than a third (36 per cent) reported using some illegal drug at least once during this year. Marijuana showed the largest increase in the proportion of new users (an increase from 21 per cent in 1969 to 34 per cent reporting any use in 1970); the regular use of alcohol showed the second largest rise (from 22 per cent to 33 per cent reporting regular use).

The findings upset the popular conception that drug use is excessively concentrated in the nation's colleges and universities. Johnston says that experience with marijuana and hallucinogens among college-freshmen was identical to the entire national sample.

Furthermore, those in college used amphetamines, barbiturates, and heroin less often than their peers. The regular use of alcohol and cigarettes was substantially lower on campus than in any other sector.

JOHNSTON REPORTS that, while use of marijuana and hallucinogens was much the same on campus as off, those in college started out with lower rates back in high school and were therefore "catching up" to their peers.

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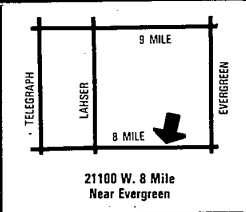
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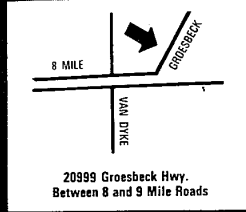
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