

research in brief

**Drug Users
Versus
Drug Abusers**

This study conducted for the Drug Abuse Council draws certain parallels between drug abuse and alcohol use. A national cross section of 1,987 high school and college students, plus nearly 100 drug abusers under treatment, were interviewed.

Sixty-four percent of the college students and 48% of the high school students interviewed had experimented at least once

with drugs, typically marijuana. About one-third of those interviewed (26% in high school and 41% in college) consider themselves regular users. On the other hand, only six percent of the high school students and eight percent of those in college smoke marijuana daily.

College students smoke marijuana more than high schoolers but use other drugs such as psychedelics, barbiturates, cocaine, and even heroin to a lesser extent. Alcohol continues to be used more than other drugs with twice as many regularly using alcohol as drugs (59% in high school and 79% of college students).

There seems to be parallels between drug use and alcohol. The alcoholic differs from the social drinker, as the drug abuser differs from the occasional user. Abusers are more likely to use drugs when they're alone and go through severe periods of depression, anxiety, and frustration more often than users or non-users.

Nonusers aren't a homogeneous group. The combination of college and high school nonusers totalled 58% of all the students interviewed. One group, 35% of all students, rejects the use of drugs on moral grounds. The other group, about 23% of all students, was very similar to the user in basic beliefs and values but appears to have rejected the use of drugs through a deliberate and conscious decision. Unlike users, they do consider drugs dangerous. Yankelovich believes drug education programs may be partially responsible for their decision not to use drugs.

There is much variation in frequency of drug use among users just as there is among drinkers—from once or twice a year to daily. The important point is that vast numbers of student drug users aren't abusers and aren't likely to become so because they don't depend on drugs for psychological reasons. They use drugs for the same reasons that they and adult social drinkers use liquor. Of course, this isn't without danger, for just as a large number of social drinkers form the pool that includes alcoholics, one can expect some of the users to become drug dependent and abusers.

“Drug Users vs. Drug Abusers: How Students Cool Their Drug Crisis.” Daniel Yankelovich. *Psychology Today*, IX (October, 1975), 39-42.

Charles Sappington