Bahamas Secondary School Drug Prevalence Survey

2008

Executive Summary

National Anti-Drug Secretariat
Ministry of National Security

For further information relative to this report, contact:

National Anti-Drug Secretariat
Ministry of National Security
P.O. Box N-3217
Church House Complex
East St. & Sands Lane
Nassau, Bahamas
Telephone: (242) 326-4118, 4123
Fax: (242) 326-1462
Email: terrancefountain@bahamas.gov.bs

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

The Ministry of National Security thanks the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) for the technical assistance provided in the conduct of the 2008 Secondary School Drug Prevalence Survey.

Thanks also go out to the staff of the Ministry of National Security, in particular, Mr. Terrance Fountain, Principal Researcher of the survey; the Accounts Section, for their administrative assistance; and to the staff of the National Anti-Drug Secretariat, most notably, Carla Johnson-Toote, for the coordination of all survey activities.

The Ministry also recognizes the facilitators, supervisors and all other persons involved in the collection, handling and analysis of the data, as well as the drafting and editing of the report for the invaluable role that they played in completing this project within the very narrow time-frame allowed. Without their dedication, this would not have been possible.

Finally, and most importantly, a special debt of gratitude is extended to all of the various educational authorities and schools for their cooperation and to the students who agreed to participate and without whom there would have been no survey.

Ministry of National Security
17th February 2010

Glossary of Terms

Prevalence Indicators

Lifetime	The use of a substance at any point in the students' life; whether it was 10 years ago, last year, last month or yesterday;
Last Year	The use of a substance within the 12 months immediately preceding the survey;
Last Month	The use of a substance within the four weeks immediately preceding the survey; and
Current Use	Prevalence in the last month.
Binge drinking	Had 5+ drinks on one occasion in the last 2 weeks.

Categorization of Substances

The drug categories used in this report are identical to the categories used in the questionnaire and follow the descriptions and examples provided to students, as follows:

Alcohol	Beer, wine, wine coolers, spirits, liqueurs, sherry or port;
Cocaine	Cocaine or crack;
Ecstasy	Ecstasy or XTC, E, MDMA, EX;
Hallucinogens	LSD, acid;
Inhalants	Substance deliberately sniffed (inhaled) in order to get high; e.g.: glue, paint, white out, petrol or paint thinners;
Marijuana	Marijuana, ganja, grass, weed, cannabis, dope, pot or joint;
Opiates	Heroin, or other narcotics such as methadone, morphine or pethidine.
Stimulants	Amphetamines or speed, uppers, MDA.
Tranquillizers	Sleeping tablets, or sedatives.
Tobacco	Cigarettes, Black & Mild, Backwoods

Survey Management Team

Terrance Fountain - Principal Investigator, Author

Field Coordinators

New Providence
Carla Johnson-Toote – National Anti-Drug Secretariat

Grand Bahama
Michelle Lundy – Psychologist, Rand Memorial Hospital

Other Members - Core Planning Committee

- Nanika V. Brathwaite – Statistician, Health Information and Research Unit, Ministry of Health
- Marcia Munnings – Manager, Bahamas National Drug Council
- Tyrone Johnson – Adolescent Health unit, Ministry of Health
- Brenda Bain – Planning and Research Unit, Ministry of Education
- Sherry A. King – Family Life Education Division, Ministry of Education
- Maria Kelley – Assistant Director, Health Social Services
- Corporal Jestina Rigby – Drug Enforcement Unit, Royal Bahamas Police Force
- Vincente Roberts – Director, Student Life, College of The Bahamas

Facilitators
New Providence

- Donell Musgrove – National Anti-Drug Secretariat
- Chavasse Turnquest-Liriano – Ministry of National Security
- Anasika Ferguson-Delson – Ministry of National Security
- Paul Williams – Bahamas National Drug Council
- Marcia Munnings – Bahamas National Drug Council
- Marian Pinder – Bahamas National Drug Council
- Heloise B. Stuart – Ministry of National Security
- Nanika Brathwaite – Health Information and Research Unit
- Valarie Minus – Health Information and Research Unit
- Camille Deleveaux – Health Information and Research Unit
- Esther Cleare – Health Social Services
- Rosemary Sands – Health Social Services
- Pandora Charlton – Health Social Services

Grand Bahama

- Monique Wilchcombe
- Clarence Heild
- Dr. Simmona Neely

Editorial Team

- Missouri Sherman-Peter – Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security
- Peter Deveaux-Isaacs – Undersecretary, Ministry of National Security
- William Fielding - Planning Unit, COB
- Terrance Fountain

1. Introduction

Regular monitoring of the prevalence of psychotropic substance use provides up-to-date information on trends that can be used in the planning, implementation and evaluation of school, community and national level interventions intended to reduce and/or prevent the use and abuse of licit and illicit substances. This information is imperative as effective prevention requires that relevant and consistent messages encouraging healthy choices be delivered by multiple messengers repeatedly throughout childhood and adolescence[1]. These should include key stakeholders such as the schools, parents, peers, and the community that all of have a critical role to play in the development of young persons and in the determination of whether they will try drugs. The greater the engagement of all of these groups, the less likely that these young persons will engage in such risky behaviour.

This report contains the findings of a survey conducted in Bahamian Secondary Schools during 2008. The survey was the second in a series of surveys conducted using the methodology devised by the Inter-American Drug Control Commission under its SIDUC program; the first having been completed in 2002[2]. In that study, it was determined that alcohol was, by far, the drug of choice of Bahamian secondary school students, with just below one-half (43.9%) of all students and 61.4% of all 12th graders using in the past year, and 1 of every 3 (33.9%) 12th graders using within the past month.

In 2002, alcohol use was followed by the use of marijuana, which was the most widely used of the illicit drugs. This was no surprise as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) 2003 report on Global Illicit Drug Trends[3] stated that "cannabis continues to be the most widely produced, trafficked, and consumed illicit drug worldwide". A total of 1 of every 4 of the 12th grade students had tried marijuana and overall more had used it within the past year and past month than had smoked cigarettes.

Regarding those factors that increased the likelihood of drug use in 2002, results from the multiple logistic regression revealed that being male, older, curious about trying illicit drugs, holding the view that smoking marijuana "sometimes" was only "slightly harmful" or "not harmful", having "some" or "a lot" of friends that used, finding it "very easy" to access drugs, having smoked cigarettes in the past 12 months, or having experienced academic problems "once" or having been disciplined for behavioral problems "often or a lot" were all significant independent correlates of experimentation with marijuana at least once in the students' life.

The impact of student substance use was also evident in the number of adolescents treated for substance abuse at the Community Counseling and Assessment Centre; the Bahamas Government's flagship outpatient treatment facility. Between the years 2000 and 2005, the number of teens under 15 years and young persons between 16 and 20

[1] Preventing Adolescent Substance Abuse, Research Update. May, 2000
[2] Health Information and Research Unit, Ministry of Health. Secondary School Drug Prevalence Survey, 2003.
[3] Global Illicit Drug Trends, 2003: Executive Summary. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

years treated as outpatients for substance abuse increased 64.8% and 50.5%, respectively. In 2005, of the 89 new cases under 15 years and the 137 cases between 16 and 20 years, a total of 92% were seen for the use and/or abuse of marijuana[4].

The goal of the 2008 survey was to provide a complete assessment of the drug situation among adolescent girls and boys, as part of an assessment of needs and priorities for youth-oriented drug prevention programs. More specifically, the study is designed:

- To determine the prevalence of alcohol and cigarette use;
- To determine the extent to which students use and/or abuse prescription drugs;
- To determine the prevalence of illicit substance use; and
- To determine the association between the use of these psychotropic substances and other risk and protective factors.

[4] Health Information and Research Unit, Ministry of Health. Unpublished Community Counseling and Assessment Centre Data; November 2006

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design

The survey was a general population-based cross sectional survey and, as such, collected information on both potential risks and outcomes at the same point in time. This could be equated to a snapshot of the current situation both with respect to outcomes and possible risk and/or protective factors. As a result, it cannot be said whether the potential risks preceded the outcome or vice versa, only that an association was or was not observed.

2.2. Sample Selection

The selection of islands targeted for the survey was based on a combination of convenience and economics and included the 8 most populated islands of the Bahamas. Together, these islands accounted for approximately 96.1% of the total population (2000 Census).

To be consistent with the SIDUC methodology and to allow for a fairly broad age representation, the survey included students in grades 8, 10 and 12 from both public as well as private schools. Once a class was selected, all students in the selected classes anonymously completed a self-administered, pre-coded questionnaire.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The survey collected data on the use of the following drugs: tobacco; alcohol; tranquilizers; stimulants; marijuana; cocaine hydrochloride; crack cocaine; ecstasy; methamphetamines; hallucinogens; heroin; opium; morphine; and inhalants. In addition, the variable “any illicit drug” was created to obtain an overall assessment of illicit drug use.

Drug usage was measured through three primary indicators:

- Lifetime prevalence – The use of a substance at any point in the students’ life; whether it was 10 years ago, last year, last month or yesterday;
- Prevalence in the last year – The use of a substance within the 12 months immediately preceding the survey; and
- Prevalence in the last month – The use of a substance within the four weeks immediately preceding the survey.

In addition to the prevalence data, information was also collected on other relevant risk and protective factors such as the students’ family composition, exposure to drugs and alcohol through friends and the community, academic performance, personal opinions about the danger of using certain drugs, personal predisposition to drug use, exposure to prevention measures, indicators of emotional state, parental problems, etc.

The data was entered and analyzed with the use of the statistical software SPSS (Ver. 17.0).

3. Highlights

3.1. Student Demographics

The final analysis was performed on a total of 2036 students selected from 26 educational institutions across 7 islands. The majority of the students were female (52%), from the 8th grade (35.7%), enrolled in public schools (70.4%) and from the island of New Providence (68%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Student Demographics

Demographic Indicator	Distribution of Students	
	Number	Percent
Gender		
Males	974	48.0
Females	1057	52.0
Grade in School		
8th	727	35.7
10th	658	32.3
12th	651	32.0
Age Groups		
11 – 12 Yrs	292	15.4
13 - 14 Yrs	619	32.6
15 – 16 Yrs	656	34.6
17 Yrs and Over	329	17.4
Islands		
New Providence	1385	68.0
Grand Bahama	320	15.7
Abaco	84	4.1
Andros	61	3.0
Eleuthera	78	3.8
Long Island	33	1.6
Cat Island	75	3.7
Type of School		
Public	1434	70.4
Private	602	29.6

3.2. Cigarettes

3.2.1. Overview

The use of cigarettes, as compared to the 2002 Survey, was down for Lifetime use, use in the past year and use in the 30 days immediately preceding the survey.

- Approximately 12.9% of all students smoked a cigarette at least once during their lifetime; as compared to 19.8% in 2002;
    - Males (15.9%) were more likely to experiment with cigarettes than females (10.2%);
    - Prevalence increased with an increase in grade level; from 10.7% in grade 8 to 15.7% among 12th graders;
- Only 3.5% had smoked a cigarette in the year preceding the survey;
- 1.6% smoked within the past month; as compared to 2.2% in 2002;
- Of those who smoked in the past month:
    - 40.7% did not smoke everyday while 29.9% smoked between 1-5 cigarettes per day;
    - One-third (32.6%) smoked most often at home and another 26.8% while on the block;
    - Approximately one-quarter "usually" got their cigarettes from friends (24.6%) or purchased them from a store (27.1%).

Table 2: Prevalence of Cigarette Smoking by Gender and By Grade Level

Selected Independent Factors		Prevalence		
		Lifetime	Last 12 Months	Last 30 Days
Gender	Females	10.2	3.3	1.6
	Males	15.9	3.8	1.6
	Total	12.9	3.5	1.6
Grade Level	Grade 8	10.7	3.2	1.8
	Grade 10	12.8	3.5	1.4
	Grade 12	15.7	3.8	1.5

3.3. Alcohol

3.3.1. Overview

The use of alcohol remains popular among Bahamian secondary school students with usage rates actually increasing between 2002 and 2008 for each of the three prevalence indicators (Figure 1).

- Overall Lifetime usage was 68.2%; an increase from the 64.4% observed in 2002;
- A total of 28.9% drank an alcoholic beverage within the past month; up from the 22.6% in 2002;
- While males were significantly more likely than females to try an alcoholic beverage and to use in the past year, it was interesting to note that females were equally as likely to use in the past month;

- Male lifetime usage was 70.9%, as compared to 65.9% for females; 28.8% of all females used in the past month, as compared to 29.2% of males;

➢ Drinking rates increased consistently with grade level for all indicators;

- 42.4% of 12th grade students drank within the past month, as compared to 17.0% of the grade 8 students.

Figure 1:

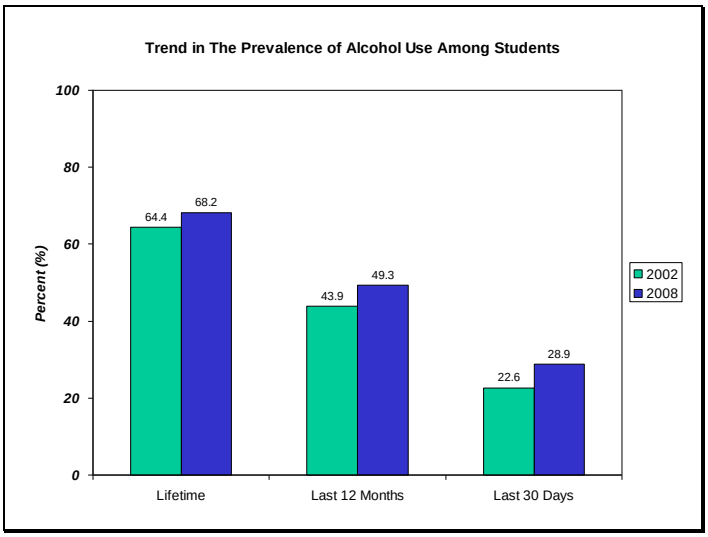


Table 3: Prevalence of Alcohol Use by Gender and by Grade Level

Selected Factors		Prevalence		
		Lifetime	Last 12 Months	Last 30 Days
Gender	Females	65.9	47.1	28.8
	Males	70.9	51.9	29.2
	Total	68.2	49.3	28.9
Grade Level	Grade 8	54.4	31.8	17.0
	Grade 10	68.2	51.5	29.9
	Grade 12	85.1	67.9	42.4

3.3.2. Binge Drinking

Students were asked about the incidence of binge drinking, which was defined as drinking five or more drinks on any one occasion.

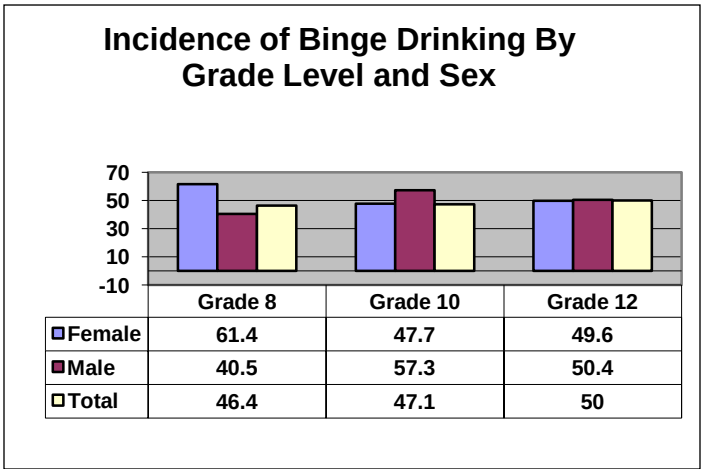
➢ A total of 51.8% of the students who drank within the month prior to the survey had engaged in one or more sessions of binge drinking in the two weeks preceding the survey;

- 20.3% once only; 18.1% between 2-3 times; and 13.4% four or more times.

There was no difference in the overall incidence of binge drinking between males and females who drank within the last 30 day. However, a statistically significant association was observed between the sexes at the grade 8 and grade 10 levels.

- Grade 8 females engaged in binge drinking more often than their male counterparts (females 61.4%; males 40.5%).
- Grade 10 males engaged in binge drinking more than the females; (females 47.7%; males 57.3%).
- There was no difference in binge drinking between the sexes among grade 12 students;

Figure 2:



	Grade 8	Grade 10	Grade 12
Female	61.4	47.7	49.6
Male	40.5	57.3	50.4
Total	46.4	47.1	50

3.3.3. Place Where Students Drink

Of those who drank in the 12 months immediately preceding the survey, the place where drinking took place most often was at social events and at home.

- One-half (53.0) of all students who drank within the past year did so most often at "Other Social Events";
- 19.1% drank most often at home.

3.3.4. Source of Alcohol

The primary source of alcohol for those students who admittedly drank within the year preceding the survey was:

- Friends - 24.8%; Other Relative -19.6%; Shop - 17.2%; and Parents -12.5%.

3.4. Marijuana

3.4.1. Overview

Compared to 2002, marijuana usage rates decreased slightly with fewer students having tried marijuana and less continuing to use.

- 12.7% of all students had tried marijuana at least once in their lifetime, with 7.2% having used within the past year and 3.4% in the 30 days immediately preceding the survey;
    - Usage rates in 2002 were 14.1% lifetime, 8.3% in the past year and 4.7% in the past month;

- Of those who did admit to smoking marijuana within the past year, 29.7% did so only once and another 31% occasionally;
- 27.5% of those smoking marijuana within the past year smoked on a weekly or more frequent basis;

Figure 3:

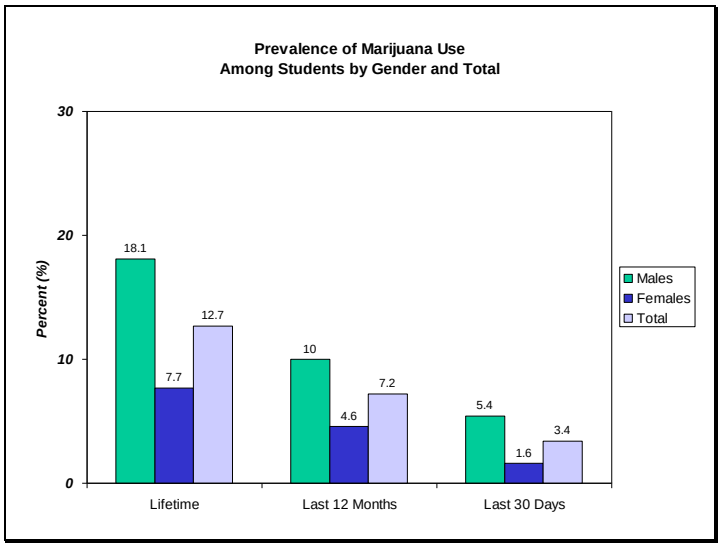
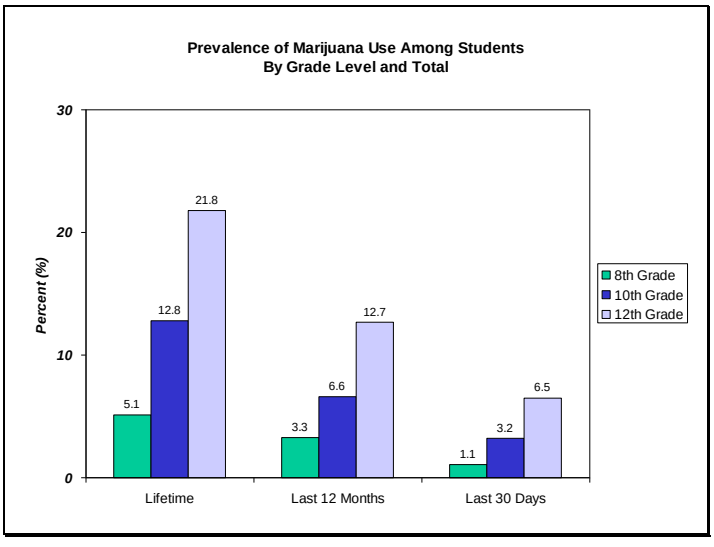


Figure 4:



While the overall prevalence of marijuana use is decreasing, there are still pockets of users that continue to cause concern.

- Overall, males use marijuana at more than double the rate of their female counterparts and 12th graders used at almost four times the rate as did the 8th graders;
    - 18.1% of all males had tried and 5.4% had used in the past 30 days as compared to 7.7% and 1.6% in females, respectively;
    - 21.8% of all 12th graders had tried and 12.7% used in the past year as compared to 5.1% and 3.3% among 8th graders, respectively;

- 30.9% of all 12th grade males had tried marijuana at least once and 17.3% had used within the past 12 months.

3.4.2. Place Where Students Smoke Marijuana

Of those who smoked marijuana in the 12 months immediately preceding the survey, the place where they went to use most often was on the corner or block of their neighborhood (39.6%), at home (20.8%) or at a friend's house (16.7%);

3.4.3. Source of Marijuana

The primary source of marijuana for those students who admittedly smoked within the year preceding the survey was from Friends (46.5%) and Street pushers (27.8%).

3.5. Solvents and Inhalants

After alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana, the substance tried most often by the students was solvents and inhalants.

- 5.4% or one of every twenty students reportedly tried a solvent or inhalant at least once in their lives;
- There was no difference in the proportion of males and females who used a solvent or inhalant at least once in their lives, in the past year or past month;
- 62.9% of all students who used within the past year had used it only once or "occasionally";
- 54.5% of those using a solvent or inhalant in the past year indicated that they got the substance from inside their homes.

3.6. Any Illicit Drug

The variable "Any Illicit Drug" was created to obtain an overall assessment of drug use for the three prevalence indicators. In the event any illicit drug was used within the specified time period, then the response for any illicit drug would be positive.

- Approximately 1 of every 5 students (18.5%) had tried at least one illicit drug in their lifetime, 9.8% within the past year and 4.7% within the past month.

Figure 5:

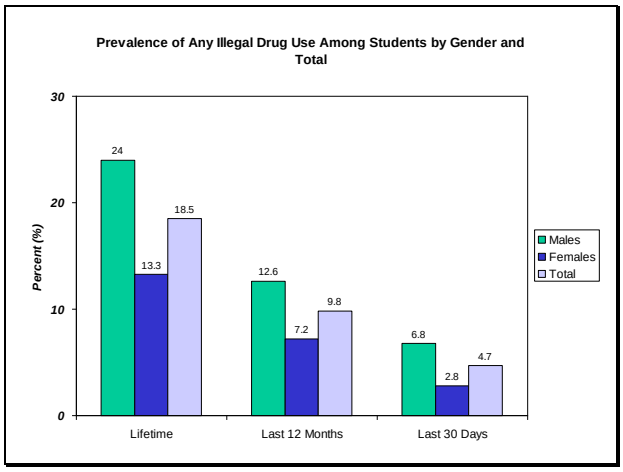
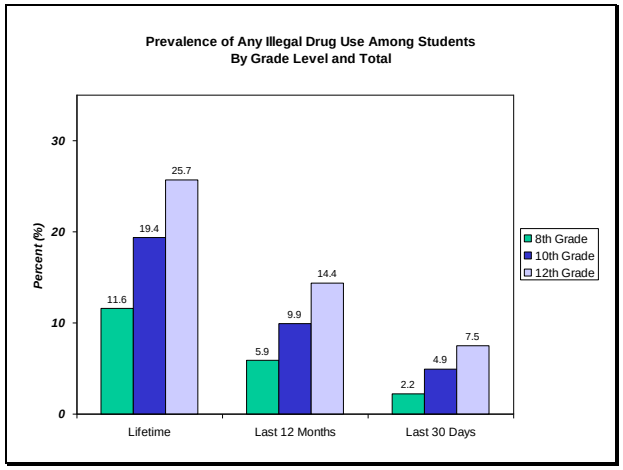


Figure 6:



Compared to the 2002 rates, all three of these indicators showed a slight reduction. In 2002 the rates for illicit drug usage were:

- : 20.0% lifetime; 10.3% past year; and 5.6% past month.

As was the case for marijuana, which accounted for the majority of the students' illicit drug use, illicit drug use increased significantly as grade level increased for each of the 3 prevalence indicators.

3.7. Other Drug Use

The abuse of prescription drugs, both tranquilizers and stimulants, including ecstasy, was not common among Bahamian secondary school students.

- A total of 2.1% had tried tranquilizers at least once while 1.9% had experimented with stimulants.

Additionally, other synthetic drugs, as well as hallucinogens and the opium derivatives, were not popular among the Bahamian students.

Table 4: Prevalence of Other Drug Use by Gender

Drug	Gender	Prevalence		
		Lifetime	Last 12 Months	Last 30 Days
Solvents or inhalants	Females	5.3	2.2	0.9
	Males	5.5	2.1	1.0
	Total	5.4	2.1	0.9
Ecstasy	Females	0.6	0.4	0.2
	Males	1.0	0.3	0.3
	Total	0.8	0.3	0.2
Tranquilizers	Females	2.7	1.4	0.7
	Males	1.4	0.5	0.4
	Total	2.1	1.0	0.5
Stimulants	Females	2.3	1.0	0.6
	Males	1.4	0.8	0.4
	Total	1.9	0.9	0.5
Cocaine	Females	0.6	0.3	0.2
	Males	1.1	0.1	0.1
	Total	0.8	0.2	0.1

3.8. Average Age of First Use

During the 7-year period between surveys, there were no major changes in the mean age of first use for those substances used most often by the teens.

- The mean age of first use for the legal substances such as cigarettes (11.3 years) and alcohol (11.4 years) continues to be lower than the mean age of first use for illicit substances such as marijuana (13.3 years); in this case by almost 2 years.
- The mean age of first alcohol use for females (11.5 years) was almost the same as that for their male counterparts (11.5 years).
- Males, on average, continued to experiment with marijuana and cigarettes and a slightly earlier age than females.

Table 5: Trend in Average Age of First Drug Use, By Type Of Drug and Gender

Gender	Marijuana		Cigarettes		Alcoholic Drink	
	2002	2008	2002	2008	2002	2008
Male	12.9	13.1	11.2	10.9	11.2	11.2
Female	14.0	13.6	11.7	11.9	11.9	11.5
Total	13.2	13.3	11.4	11.3	11.5	11.4

3.9. Risk and Protective Factors

- Results from the bivariate analysis revealed the following factors as significant independent correlates of experimentation with or the use of a psychotropic substance at least once in the students' life.
  - being male;
  - older;
  - curious about trying illicit drugs;
  - holding the view that smoking marijuana "sometimes" was only "slightly harmful" or "not harmful";
  - having "some" or "a lot" of friends that used;
  - finding it "very easy" to access drugs;
  - having smoked cigarettes prior to age 10 years;
  - having experienced academic problems "once"; or
  - having been disciplined for behavioral problems "often or a lot".

- Persons who smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol had much higher prevalence rates for other substances than persons who did not smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol, lending support to the gateway phenomenon which suggests that early cigarette and alcohol use can serve as a predictor of subsequent use of other more harmful substance.

- With respect to those factors related to a decrease in risk, results revealed a clear protective effect when both father and mother were present as compared to other family structures.

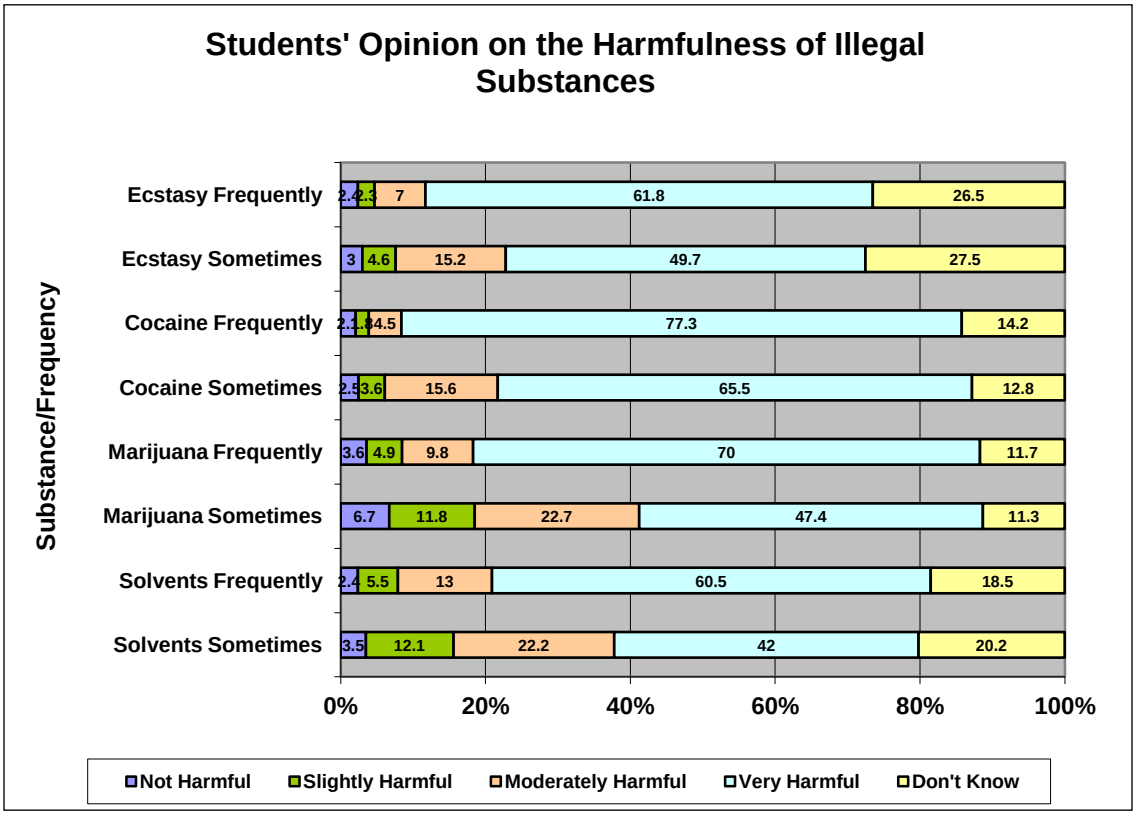
3.10. Student Perception of the Risk of Taking Selected Substances

The students were asked to indicate the level of harm they associated with engaging in various levels of substance use. Students rated these items on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 indicated the behaviour was seen as not harmful; 2 indicated the behaviour was a slightly harmful; 3 indicated the behaviour was moderately harmful; 4 indicated the

behaviour was very harmful; and 5 indicated the students didn't know how harmful the behaviour was.

- The proportion of students who considered drinking alcohol “often” as “very harmful” decreased from 58.3% in 2002 to 51.5%; This may partially account for the increase seen in alcohol consumption in all three prevalence indicators.
- 41.2% of all students felt that smoking marijuana sometimes was only moderately or less harmful: 6.7% not harmful; 11.8% slightly; and 22.7% moderately harmful;
- 31.4% of 12th grade males felt that smoking marijuana sometimes was either not harmful or only slightly harmful;
- The proportion who thought that smoking marijuana only occasionally was “very harmful” decreased from 51.6% in 2002 to 47.4% in 2008; in contrast to the slight reduction in marijuana consumption for all three indicators;
- 29.1% of students thought that smoking cigarettes sometimes and cigars “sometimes” (29.0%) was either not or only slightly harmful.

Figure 7:



As indicated by the proportion who said “Don’t Know”, those drugs used less often by the students are also those less well known as regards their harmfulness.

- One of every 5 students said that they “Don’t Know” how harmful is taking tranquilizers or stimulants sometimes (20.4%) or solvents or inhalants sometimes (20.2%);
- 27.5% indicated that they “Don’t Know” how harmful is taking Ecstasy sometimes.

3.11. Predisposition to Substance Use

- The proportion of students who responded “maybe” or “yes” to the question “Whether you had ever been curious about trying drugs” remained relatively constant between 2002 and 2008;
    - 32.1% in 2008 and 31.8% in 2002.

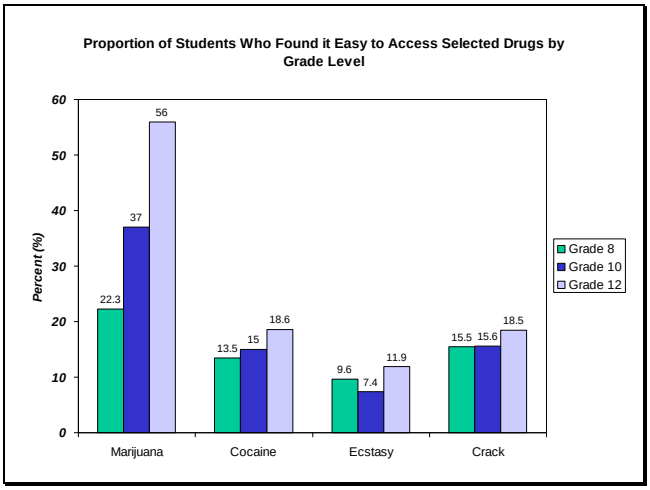
- The students were also asked the direct question “Would you try drugs if given the chance”.
    - A total of 25.3% said “maybe” or “yes” that they would try drugs; an increase from the 16.7% responding similarly in 2002.

3.12. Ease of Access and Exposure to Various Substances

3.12.1. Ease of Access

Overall, more of the students felt that it was easy to access marijuana than it was to access cocaine powder, ecstasy or crack;

Figure 8:



- A total of 37.9% indicated that it would be “easy” to get marijuana; this compared to 15.6% for cocaine, 16.5% for crack and 9.7% for ecstasy;

- The proportion who felt that it was easy to access marijuana increased significantly as grade level increased:
    - 22.3% - 8th grade; 37.0% - 10th grade; and 56.0% - 12th grade.

3.12.2. Presence of friends who drink too much

The proportion of students who indicated that they had at least one friend who they thought drank too much actually increased between 2002 and 2008 from 52% to 60.7%.

- A total of 8.0% had one friend; 40.4% - some friends; and 12.3% - a lot of friends;

3.12.3. Presence of friends who use illicit drugs

As compared to results from the 2002 (37.6%) survey, there was relatively no change in the proportion of students with a friend or friends who used illicit drugs.

- Approximately one of every four students (38.2%) was exposed to drugs through the presence of friends who used an illicit substance;
    - 6.0% - one friend; 26.6% - some; and 5.6% a lot of friends.

3.12.4. Parents with past or current problems related to drinking and drugs

Students were also exposed to drug and alcohol use and its dangers at home through their parents drinking and drug use.

- One-fifth (20.8%) of all students reported that they had at least one parent who had problems related to drinking alcohol.

- 5.4% of the students revealed that they had a parent with past problems related to drug use.

3.13. Exposure to Drug Prevention Programs

As was the case in 2002, the proportion of students receiving the benefits of drug prevention education was at an unacceptably low level.

- Overall, 73.4% of the students indicated that they had never participated in any drug prevention activity; up slightly from the 69.4% in 2002;
- Of those who had taken at least one drug prevention course, only 37% had done so within the past year.

Drug prevention education programs were not universally implemented within schools and varied in its coverage across schools.

- 73.4% of grade 12 public school students, reportedly, never participated in any prevention activity, as compared to 83.1% of students in grade 8;

- 27.7% of grade 8 private students received drug prevention education as compared to only 16.9% of grade 8 public students;

As a result, a relatively large proportion of students, in particular the younger cohort, admittedly were not knowledgeable about some of the prescription and other drugs like tranquillizers, stimulants and solvents or inhalants.

Table 6: Comparison of Participation Levels in Drug Prevention Activities By Type of School and Grade Level

Drug Prevention Activity	Grade 8		Grade 10		Grade 12	
	2002	2008	2002	2008	2002	2008
Public Schools						
Never Participated	84.1	83.1	73.0	79.0	61.8	73.4
Participated Once	10.1	8.7	16.5	12.8	24.4	13.7
More than once	5.8	8.2	10.5	8.2	13.8	12.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Private Schools						
Never Participated	65.4	72.3	59.7	61.2	55.7	46.2
Participated Once	21.6	17.6	25.7	23.0	23.5	26.4.
More than once	13.1	10.1	14.6	15.7	20.9	27.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

3.14. Consequences for Using and Selling Drugs in School

Students were also asked what would happen to them if they were caught either selling or using drugs.

- In the event they were caught using drugs, similar proportions of students indicated that they would most likely be expelled (37.6%) or turned over to the police (36.3%).

If the students were caught selling drugs, the top two response options were the same, but with a very different distribution.

- 51.6% said they would be turned over to the police if caught selling drugs while 27.5% said they would be expelled.

4. Conclusions

The results from the 2008 survey of secondary students revealed that a far greater proportion of students were using licit substances, in particular alcohol, than they were illicit substances. As was the case in the 2002 survey, the use of alcohol was a large part of the experience of adolescence and was by far the most prevalent substance used by the teens. The prevalence of cigarette smoking among Bahamian secondary school students was relatively low, particularly when compared to countries in North and South America. Of the illicit substances included in the survey, marijuana was the one most widely used. In fact, the current usage rates of marijuana even surpassed that of tobacco use.

Alcohol use continues to be a common behaviour among secondary students with the proportion of students who have tried (lifetime) and who continue to use (past year and past 30 days) having increased since 2002. Of concern was that overall, almost one-half of all students who drank within 30 days of the survey had binged at least once, with binge drinking seemingly common amongst younger students. Among current drinkers or those who drank within the past 30 days, binging by females was most prevalent among the grade 8 students, while among the males, binge drinking was more prevalent among the grade 10 students. Given the broad acceptance of alcohol use in The Bahamas, education programs should encourage responsible drinking and focus on preventing adolescents from getting drunk.

Trends in the use of marijuana suggest that marijuana use in 2008 was less popular than it was in 2002 and remains a behaviour practiced, primarily, by males and older students. Approximately 40% of the students who had used marijuana in the year prior to the survey reportedly used it on a monthly or more frequent basis. While the observed decrease in the prevalence rates is positive, these results still gives cause for concern as marijuana is still illegal, and the potential danger its possession and use poses to health and social functioning presents a challenge to those working with Bahamian adolescents.

The use of solvents and inhalants, similar to the results from 2002, was surpassed only by alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana and at all prevalence levels was more common among younger students. This pattern may suggest that the use of inhalants is a relatively recent phenomenon that may be viewed by older students as immature behaviour. The public health threat presented by solvents and/or inhalants is related to the fact that these substances are very cheap and easy to obtain, which makes their control extremely difficult, and usage can result in severe mental problems and probably even death. If the observed differences in inhalant use is true, and is not a reflection of younger students having misinterpreted the question, the results would suggest that this issue needs to be further studied and addressed.

The results regarding the prevalence of other drugs suggest that the use of hallucinogens, amphetamines, cocaine and other illicit substances by secondary students did not vary between 2002 and 2008 and can be described as experimental

rather than regular. The lifetime prevalence rates for none of these substances rose appreciably above 2%.

Regarding the exposure to drugs and other psychotropic substances, it can again be concluded that the presence of friends who drank frequently and used drugs in the lives of the students played a significant role in the etiology of the students' own drug and alcohol use. The more alcohol and drug-using friends the students reported, the more likely that they themselves would both try and continue using these substances. This is coupled with the fact that accessibility increased with increasing grade levels to the point where approximately 6 of every 10 grade 12 students believed that obtaining marijuana would be easy.

Once again, the proportion of students receiving drug prevention education in school was at an unacceptably low level. As was the case in 2002, drug prevention education programs were not universally implemented within schools and varied in its coverage across schools. Consequently, one must seriously question the existence of a national school drug education policy or the adherence to such a policy, if one exists. Given these findings, it was good to know that the large majority knew about the dangers of drugs such as marijuana and cocaine etc, however, there is still considerable ignorance, particularly among the younger cohort, regarding the harmfulness posed by the use and/or abuse of prescription drugs like tranquillizers and stimulants as well as by solvents or inhalants.

In summary, the most widely and regularly used substances among Bahamian secondary school students in 2008 were found to be alcohol and marijuana. While alcohol usage rates had increased between 2002 and 2008, the opposite was true of marijuana. The use of all other licit and illicit drugs was low and use was mainly experimental. However, there is a level of concern over the use of solvents and/or inhalants, which use was more prevalent among young students.

While the results of the survey supports the need for the authorities to continue and possibly enhance efforts to limit access to and the availability of alcohol and drugs, it also underscores the need to emphasize educational and preventative programs for all drugs and for all segments of society involved in the rearing and care of Bahamian children.

5. Recommendations

A number of the recommendations proffered based on the results of this survey have been repeated from other similar surveys conducted in the past; i.e., the 1997 Adolescent Health Survey[5] and the 2003 Secondary School Drug Prevalence Survey. In general, the recommendations reflect:

- Policies that should be agreed upon as the guiding principles for shaping the response to the key issues;
- Programs and/or projects that should be implemented; and
- The research that is necessary to periodically assess drug-related trends in the adolescent population and to monitor and evaluate subsequent interventions.

The program recommendations put forth in this document is not intended to serve as a detailed plan but only to direct program planners and managers to those areas in need of intervention. These should be followed up with comprehensive action plans, supported by annual budgets, whose implementation should be closely monitored and evaluated.

5.1. Policy

5.1.1. Classify the prevention of psychotropic substance use and abuse as a priority in every community;
5.1.2. Enforce existing laws regarding the sale of alcohol to minors;
5.1.3. Ensure that every adolescent with a substance abuse problem can receive treatment via a school-based program or a good referral system;
5.1.4. Strengthen anti-drug cooperation efforts, in particular at the technical level, between relevant government departments and ministries, non-government organizations and international agencies in order to maximize opportunities for assistance and support and to better position stakeholders to develop more comprehensive policies and implement more effective programs;
5.1.5. Improve evidence-based decision-making through the development of a culture of program and project monitoring and evaluation and an improvement in the information system on drugs and drug use in the schools;
    - Such surveillance should capture records of drug-related incidences and resolutions, anti-drug program participation, etc.

5.2. Programmatic

5.2.1. Implement or strengthen substance abuse prevention programs in the schools, beginning in the primary schools, with reinforcements continuing throughout the students' school careers and ensuring that programs are age appropriate and address all drugs;
    - Sessions should incorporate, along with others, messages on the dangers of binge drinking, particularly alcohol poisoning, the link between health,

[5] Health Information and Research Unit, Ministry of Health. Bahamas Adolescent Health Survey, 1997.

behavioral and other problems and drug or alcohol use, and strengthening the students' decision-making skills.

5.2.2. Strengthen substance abuse prevention in the community by targeting young persons after school, dropouts, parents and high-risk families;

Parents should be educated about access to alcohol within the homes; excessive drinking by adults within the home and its impact on teens; the influence of friends on the teens' own drug and alcohol use; the gateway phenomenon; etc;

5.2.3. Increase mass media coverage of substance abuse and prevention issues and develop more targeted messages designed to encourage protective factors while discouraging risk factors.

5.3. Research

5.3.1. Conduct similar cross-sectional prevalence surveys every 2-3 years;

5.3.2. Supplement quantitative survey Information with that from qualitative assessments such as focus groups and panel surveys that target all stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, administrators, etc).