



Illicit Drug Usage and Juvenile Justice System Involvement

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Introduction

Drug usage is strongly associated with significant social and psychological problems for youth, including juvenile justice system involvement. Research shows that approximately 4.5 million youth, ages 12-17, have used an illicit drug in the past year. Youth drug usage is related to juvenile justice system involvement. In fact, substance abuse is a top eight risk factor for juvenile offending and reoffending. Once youth are involved within the judicial system, the correctional system must then assume the responsibility of intervening in the youth cycle of drugs and delinquent behavior. Unfortunately, research shows that substance use treatment is available only sporadically for system-involved youth, and at times, is not integrated within the youth's other treatment needs. This poster outlines the prevalence of substance misuse for youth as well as system involvement. Additionally, this research will highlight solutions for reducing system issues.

Juvenile Justice Substance Usage

History

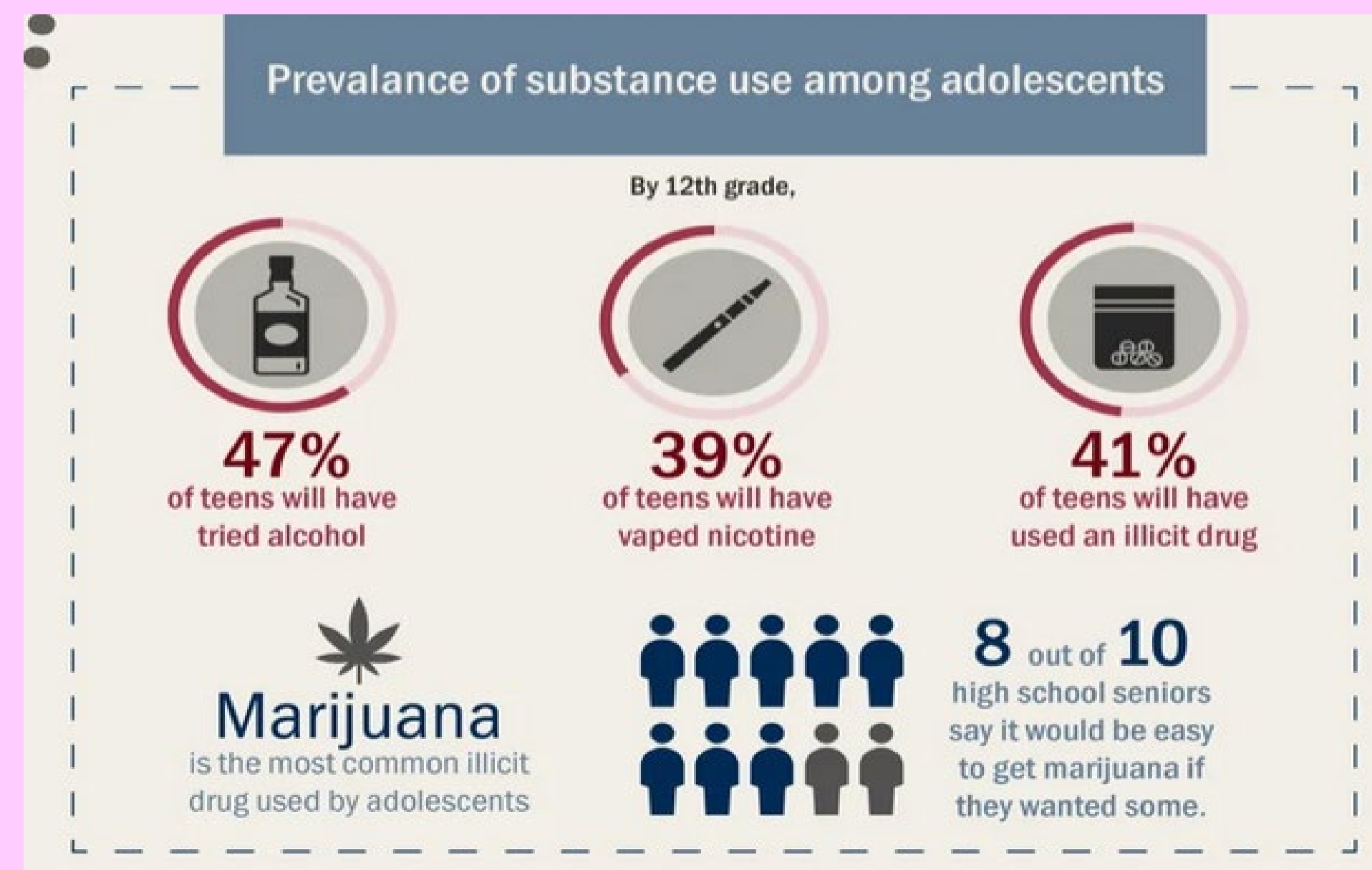
- During the 1960s and 1970s there was an increase in drug usage for marijuana and LSD, including usage within the adolescent population (Nissen, 2006).
- During the 1980s, the U.S. took on a zero-tolerance policy known as the "War on Drugs," which sought to criminalize drug users, including youth.

"War on Drugs"

- Eighty-four percent of detained youth report ever using drugs with 60% meeting criteria for a substance use disorder within the last past 12 months (BJS, 2023).
- After the tough-on-crime era in the 1980s-1990s, the juvenile justice system took on more of a preventive and rehabilitative approach (Nissen, 2006).

Prevalence

- Approximately 20.3 million American adults (ages 12 and older) struggle with a substance use disorder (NIDA, 2018).
- Girls report more frequent drug use, but boys report more usage among a variety of drug types (BJS, 2023).
- Data has shown a dramatic increase in overdose deaths among adolescents between the years of 2020-2021.



“Traditionally, minors found guilty of serious juvenile offenses were sent to locked juvenile detention facilities. Many of these minors suffered from substance abuse disorders and received no treatment while in custody”
(Kraut, 2023, p. 1).

System Responses

Law Enforcement

- Studies show that youth who have police contact are more likely to use substances later in life (Jackson et al., 2022).
- The Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program placed law enforcement officers in schools to teach youth how to resist peer-pressure of experimenting with drugs; however, findings do not support the programs effectiveness (Ennett et al., 1992).

Judicial System

- In recent decades, the juvenile justice system has begun to recognize the importance of the underlying causes of drug use such as trauma and social inequalities (Terry et al., 2000).
- In the last few decade, a more holistic approach has been promoted with support and mentoring services for adolescents (Nissen, 2006).

Correctional System

- Research estimates 1.9 to 2.4 million youth within the juvenile justice system have addiction issues (Kraut, 2023).
- Although millions of system-involved youths have addiction needs, estimates suggest that only about 68,000 receive treatment (Kraut, 2023).

Solutions

School Options

- Schools should improve access to extracurricular activities and move away from tough-on-crime school policies.
- The educational system could also implement a mentoring program focused on emotional support for students at-risk of using drugs (Thomas et al., 2013).

Family Options

- At-risk youth and their families should have access to drug prevention programs aimed at providing information, resources, and strategies to address drug use at home.
- Multi-dimensional Family Therapy is an evidence-based approach that helps treat youth substance use and other behavioral issues (Horigian et al., 2016).

Court Options

- The judicial system should require a comprehensive evaluation of the youth's needs to ensure correct treatment is ordered.
- Drug court is an alternative option to incarceration and has been shown to decrease future substance usage for youth (Horigian et al., 2016).

Correctional Options

- Following the court-ordered evaluation, correctional facilities should offer a variety of individual and group counseling options (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).
- Prior to community reentry, facilities must coordinate comprehensive transitional services to providing ongoing treatment needs (Young et al., 2007).

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