

Texas College Survey of Substance Use - 2017 Executive Summary

By: Kevin Davis, M.Ed., LPC

Overview

The *Texas College Survey of Substance Use* is a biennial collection of self-reported data related to alcohol and drug use, mental health status, risk behaviors, and perceived attitudes and beliefs among college students in Texas. The survey is conducted by the Public Policy Research Institute, a branch of Texas A&M University, in cooperation with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission.

The 2017 survey included 18,327 undergraduate students aged 18-26 from 52 colleges and community college districts from across Texas. Students were invited to participate via email and completed the survey online.

Primary Findings

- Alcohol remains the most commonly used substance on campus; almost 73% of Texas college students drank alcohol in the past year and about 35% binge drank at least once in the past month
- About one in three Texas college students used marijuana at least once in the past year
- There has been a significant decrease in prescription drug abuse

Substance Use Findings

Alcohol

About 73% of Texas college students reported having at least one alcoholic drink in the past year and about 58% reported drinking alcohol in the past month. Binge drinking, defined as five or more drinks in a sitting for males and four or more drinks in a sitting for females, was more prevalent among males (37%) than females (34%). College males were more likely than college females to report binge drinking at least six times in the past 30 days (7% vs. 4%), although this is down from the previous survey. On average, respondents said they had had enough alcohol to feel drunk 2.2 times in the preceding 30 days. Most underage Texas college students obtain alcohol from others, and 70% stated they obtained it from a friend.

Illicit Drugs

Marijuana was the still the most commonly used illicit drug among Texas college students in 2017, with 89% reporting past year use. Past year use of synthetic marijuana continued to decrease from 1% in 2015 to 0.6% in 2017, while past year use of cocaine decreased from 5% to 4.1% in the same two year period. Male college students were more likely to have used illicit drugs in the past year compared with female college students. Asian students had the lowest overall levels of past year illicit drug use, while Anglo students reported having the highest use. Students who reported illicit drug use also showed a slightly lower grade point average: 3.24 for users versus 3.40 for non-users.

Prescription Drug Misuse

There was a significant decrease in prescription drug abuse. In 2015, 26% of respondents reported misuse, while only 22% reported misuse in 2017. About 11% had used pain killers (e.g., Vicodin, OxyContin, and Codeine) in the past year for the experience or feeling they caused. The number of college students who misused prescription stimulants in the past year dropped from 9% in 2015 to 7% in 2017. There was a reduction in lifetime usage of pain killers, with reports of OxyContin misuse dropping from 16% to 11%. The most commonly reported way to obtain prescription drugs was from someone else with a prescription (55%).

Perceptions

A little less than 49% of respondents believed that drug abuse is either a minor, moderate, or major problem on their campus, while 32% said it is not a problem at all (19% said they were not sure). More than 64% of students said that underage drinking is a problem on campus, and about 55% said that heavy alcohol use is a problem on their campus.

Mental Health

Respondents were asked to rate their mental state by describing how often they felt nervous, hopeless, depressed, worthless, or restless. Heavy drinkers reported feeling the highest levels in all four areas with worthlessness and nervousness being the highest reported. Illicit drug users reported higher levels of hopelessness and nervousness than non-users.

Drunk Driving

Reports of drunk driving decreased with 18% in 2017 reporting driving after drinking at least once a month as opposed to 23% in 2015. There was a significant drop in the number of students who said they have driven high or stoned in the past month (13.4% in 2015 versus 11.5% in 2017). Almost 47% said they had been a designated driver at least once a month.