Tracking Substance Use and Mental Health in Adolescents

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ADVANCE Study Abstract

Background: There is an abundance of studies surrounding the mental health and substance use of adults, however, minors – specifically high-schoolers – are underrepresented in this research. Politicians have emphasized a ‘mental health crisis in America.’ If true, further investigation is needed on the well-being of American teenagers.

Objectives: The purpose of this research is to find out the attitudes, behaviors, and factors contributing to mental health and substance use.

Methods: The ADVANCE study collects school-based data from partnered high schools around Southern California. Surveys are sent out twice a year to a sample size of about 3000 students during their time in high school.

Results: Data displayed was collected from one high school in Southern California. 296 valid responses were collected in Fall 2022 and 277 valid responses were collected in Spring 2023.

Conclusions: Substance use increases as students approach their senior year. The amount of students with anxiety and depression symptoms lowers as the effects of the pandemic waver off.

Methods

Measures: The demographics (gender identity, race/ethnic identity, sexuality) of the participants are recorded. The study examines the prevalence of symptoms of conditions such as OCD and ADHD, as well as other problems: lack of sleep, depression, and anxiety. Marijuana, nicotine, and alcohol use are surveyed as well; participants are asked to specify their devices, dosages, or products. Stressors like discrimination, shootings, and violence are contributing factors to mental health and substance use.

Procedures: Data collectors went on-site and administered surveys by laptop. Absent students received remote service.

Analysis: 23.9% of students at this school have vaped nicotine and 29% of the participants have used marijuana. 89% of students felt that mental health was one of the top issues facing teenagers today. Only 57.5% of students felt comfortable talking to at least one teacher about their mental health. 47% of students were reported to be physically active at least 5 days a week.

Results: Societal Concerns

- Anxiety Symptoms
  - OCD Symptoms: 6.2%
  - ADHD Symptoms: 39.6%
  - Sleep Problems: 35.3%

- Depression Symptoms
  - 26.2% reported feeling depressed or worried about their mental health in Spring 2023.

- Mental Well-being of Peers
  - 39.5% of students felt that their mental health was one of the top issues facing teenagers today.

- Climate Change
  - 41.5% of students were concerned about global warming.

Demographics

- Gender Identity
  - 10.0% male
  - 43.4% female

- Race/Ethnicity
  - 30.0% Black/African American
  - 14.4% Hispanic/Latino

- Sexual Minority
  - 46.0%

Results: Mental Health

In Spring 2023, students who screened positive* for significant levels of:

- Anxiety Symptoms: 6.2%
- Depression Symptoms: 39.6%
- Sleep Problems: 35.3%

Results: Substance Use

Past 6 month use of...

- E-cigarettes: 18%
- Cigarettes: 18%
- Oral Nicotine Products: 18%

Past 6 month use of cannabis:

Past 6 month use of alcoholic beverages:

Summary

1. 8.16.2% of students were screened positive for significant levels of anxiety symptoms and 19.9-26.7% was the figure for depression.
2. More than a third of students screened positive for significant levels of ADHD and sleep problems.
3. 23.9% of students reported seeing a school counselor or psychologist this past year; 15.1% reported seeing a therapist outside of the school setting.
4. By Spring 2023, 24.7% of students had drunk alcohol, 21.3% used marijuana, and 15% had used e-cigarettes in the past 6 months.
5. Students that identified as a man or a sexual minority were more likely to use cannabis.
6. Reported concerns and stress were academic stress, social media, the mental well-being of peers, climate change, shootings or violence in society, and discrimination.

References


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