Substance Use and Youth

In 1984, federal law mandated that all states adopt 21 years old as the legal drinking age. Approximately 49% of K-State students are 20 years old or younger, and a recent survey revealed that roughly 78% of K-State students drink alcohol. Given these facts, we thought it would be interesting to look at what we know about alcohol use patterns of young people before they arrive on campus. The statistics below reveal an interesting portrait of underage drinking and drug use.

A 2010 national survey of 46,000 8th, 10th and 12th graders showed the following:
- 71% of students had used alcohol by the time they had graduated from high school.
- 36% had consumed more than a sip or two of alcohol by the end of 8th grade.
- A little over half of 12th grade students (54%) said they had been drunk at least once.

Each year, schools across the state of Kansas administer the Communities That Care survey to 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th graders. The survey assesses adolescent alcohol and other drug use patterns, as well as youth violence, delinquency, and other health risk factors. A compilation of survey results from the past few years indicates that:
- Kansas youth are between the ages of 12 and 13 when they have their first drinking experience (i.e., more than a sip or two of beer, wine or hard liquor).
- Kansas students are, on average, age 14 when they first begin using alcohol regularly (once or twice a month).
- Cigarette smoking typically begins at age 12, and the average age for first trying marijuana is age 13.

In the spring of 2011, 56% of all Riley County high school seniors participated in the Communities That Care survey. Their responses to some of the questions are listed below:
- 16% had smoked cigarettes and 17% had used marijuana at least once in the past 30 days.
- At least once in the previous 30 day period, 5% had used prescription stimulants or tranquilizers, and 8% had used prescription pain relievers NOT prescribed for them by a doctor.
- 51% answered that they had consumed beer, wine or hard liquor at least once in the past 30 days, and 30% indicated that they had five or more alcoholic drinks in a row at least once in the past two weeks.
- 38% indicated that it was “very easy” for them to obtain beer, wine or hard liquor.

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