

Teenage Girls Increasingly vulnerable to alcohol and drug use

Girls' Unique Vulnerabilities

Scientific research has found that teenage girls are vulnerable to a number of unique physical, psychological and social risk factors for drug and alcohol abuse. More than three times as many young females as males reported depression in 2008 (2009 NSDUH). Stress has been identified as a leading reason for drinking, smoking, and using drugs among girls (The Commonwealth Fund, 1997). Boys are more likely to report drinking to have fun (The Commonwealth Fund, 1997).

The Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Study provides additional insights to the above research. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to give reasons related to stress and low self-esteem for teens' use of drugs. On the other hand, boys are more likely to cite having fun and relaxing as reasons for use.

Importantly, girls were more likely in 2009 than in 2008 to perceive "self-medicating" benefits of using drugs (forgetting your troubles, helping kids with problems) and perceptions of fun and relaxation significantly increased among boys. (See Table below)

	2008	2009
% Girls agree strongly/somewhat		
Drugs help kids deal with problems at home	61	68*
Drugs help you forget your troubles	48	53*
Drugs help kids when they're having a hard time	39	46*
	2008	2009
% Boys agree strongly/somewhat		
Drugs help you relax socially	45	52*
Parties are more fun with drugs	34	41*

* = significant difference at .05 level

Risk and Social Disapproval

Research shows that when young people perceive a drug as more dangerous or more disapproved of by their peers, they are less likely to use it.

From 2008 to 2009 social disapproval of illegal drug use by peers significantly decreased among girls. The change among boys for the same time frame was not significant. (See Chart 1)

	Girls	Boys
% Agree strongly/somewhat		
Kids use drugs to deal with the pressures and stress of school	81*	75
Kids use drugs to help them feel better about themselves	74*	68
Drugs help kids deal with problems at home	68*	60
Drugs help you lose weight	51*	46
Drug users feel adventurous	52	58*
Drugs help you relax socially	45	52*
Parties are more fun with drugs	32	41*

(continued)

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Mission

To help parents prevent, intervene in and treat drug/alcohol abuse by their children.

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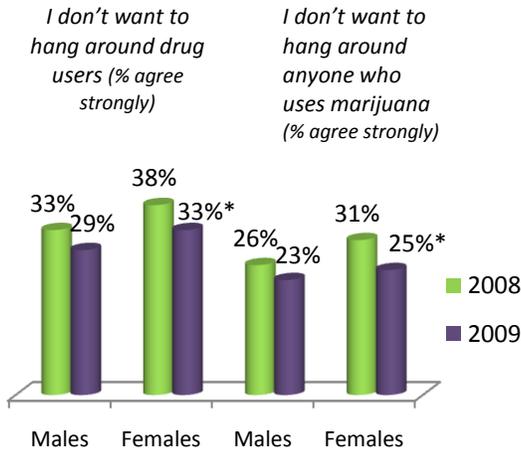
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Chart 1



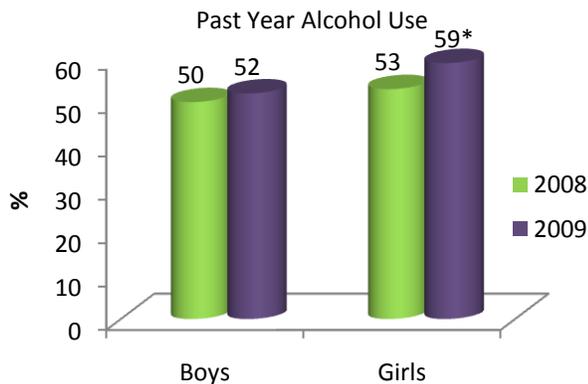
From 2008 to 2009 the perception of risk in using marijuana significantly decreased among both boys and girls. However, from 2008 to 2009 girls were significantly less likely to believe that ecstasy use could be addictive; the change among boys was not significant. (See Table below)

% Great Risk of getting hooked on ecstasy	2008	2009
Girls	82	77*
Boys	70	68

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

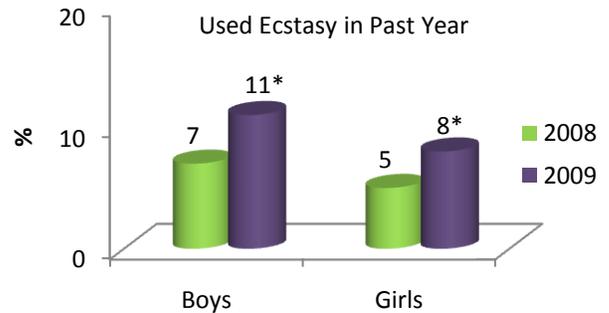
Among girls there was a significant increase in past year alcohol use (up 11%) from 2008 to 2009; however, there was no significant increase among boys during this time frame. (See Chart 2)

Chart 2



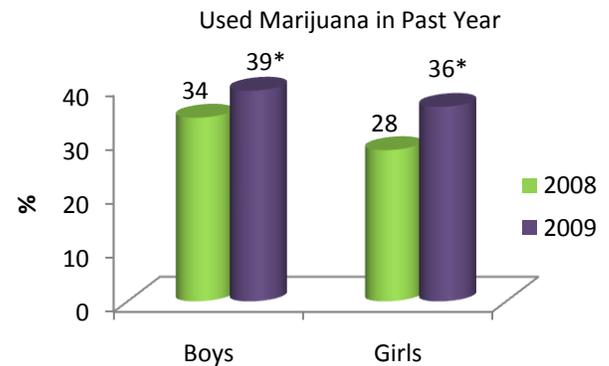
Among girls and boys there was a significant increase in past year ecstasy use from 2008 to 2009. The increase was similar for boys (up 57%) and girls (up 60%). (See Chart 3)

Chart 3



Among girls there was a significant increase of 29% in past year marijuana use from 2008 to 2009. While there was also a significant increase among boys' use during the same time frame it was not as dramatic, up 15%. (See Chart 4)

Chart 4



* = significant difference at .05 level

Implication for Parents

The research indicates that parents of teen girls should be especially attentive to the moods and mental health of their daughters. Parents can help prevent alcohol and drug abuse by addressing their daughters' worries and stresses and by supporting their positive actions.

The Partnership is evolving to become the primary resource and cause leader for parents facing issues about alcohol and drugs and their teens. As in everything the Partnership does, research informs this evolution process. This includes research with experts in child development, substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment. Our major partner in this area is Treatment Research Institute (TRI).

The combination of scientific learning and insights into teens' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior gives us a unique understanding of teens. The Partnership/Met Life Foundation Teens Attitude Tracking Study (PATs) is a quantitative in-school, national probability sample with 3,287 students in grades 9 through 12.

Given the learning from research, the Partnership has mobilized its resources to provide parents with the most comprehensive science-based information and tools to effectively prevent, intervene, and seek treatment for their children. For more information, please visit www.drugfree.org

References

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) 2009. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls, New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1997.

The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Boys, New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1997.

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