

# Teen Drug Use In Boarding Schools: Understanding The Phenomenon And Implementing Supportive Strategies

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**Abstract:** Teen drug use in boarding schools encompasses any behavior in which teenagers, typically aged 12-17, engage in the experimentation, regular use, or abuse of drugs while residing and attending school at a boarding facility. This paper aims to explore the issue of teen drug use within boarding school environments, including its prevalence, underlying causes, and potential consequences. By examining relevant studies, and statistics, this paper provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to drug use among teenagers in boarding schools. Furthermore, it highlights effective strategies for support and intervention to address this concerning trend. These findings emphasize the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment within boarding schools, fostering open communication, implementing preventive measures, and providing timely interventions to address drug-related challenges.

**Keywords:** Boarding School, Boarding School Students, Drug Use, Teen Drug Use, Teen Mental Health, Teen Substance Use.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Significance of Study

Exploring and solving teen drug use in boarding schools is crucial for ensuring the welfare and well-being of adolescents. Drug use among teenagers can lead to a range of safety and health risks, including accidental injuries, impaired judgment, unsafe sexual behaviors, and the potential for addiction. Substance abuse can significantly impact a student's academic performance, leading to poor grades, absenteeism, and even expulsion. By addressing teen drug use in boarding schools, educators and administrators can support students in maintaining focus on their studies, enhancing their educational opportunities, and improving their future prospects. Overall, teen drug use in boarding schools can impede the formation of healthy relationships, hinder the development of critical life skills, and exacerbate existing emotional and behavioral challenges. By addressing this issue, boarding schools can provide a supportive environment that nurtures positive social interactions and emotional growth. Preventing and addressing drug use within boarding schools contributes to the overall health and safety of students, fostering an environment conducive to their physical and emotional well-being.

### 1.2 Context of Problem

Teens in boarding schools face unique challenges such as academic pressure, higher proximity to peer influence, higher accessibility to substances, and the absence of consistent family support. All these factors may increase the vulnerability of teenagers and make them more susceptible to engaging in drug use as a means of coping or fitting in. Thus, understanding these unique challenges and characteristics of boarding school environments helps shed light on the factors that contribute to teen drug use in such settings. It enables educators, administrators, parents, and mental health experts to develop targeted interventions and support systems that effectively address and mitigate this issue.

## II. PREVALENCE AND STATISTICS

### 2.1 Limitations of Data

This section will present empirical data and statistics regarding the prevalence of drug use among teenagers in boarding schools. It will draw upon relevant studies and surveys conducted within the past decade to offer a comprehensive understanding of the scope of the problem. It is important to note that prevalence rates

may vary depending on factors such as geographic location, cultural context, and specific characteristics of the boarding school in question. Additionally, drug use statistics can change over time, highlighting the need for ongoing research and monitoring. These empirical findings provide a glimpse into the prevalence of drug use among teenagers in boarding schools. However, it's important to consult more recent studies and surveys on the specific boarding school student population to obtain the most up-to-date and context-specific data.

## **2.2 National Survey on Drug Use and Health**

According to the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), approximately 10.5% of youth aged 12 to 17 reported past-year illicit drug use, with marijuana/cannabis being the most used illicit drug.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the 2021 NSDUH report also states that among adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021, about 20% had a past year major depressive episode (MDE), and about 15% had a past year MDE with severe impairment. Adolescents aged 12 to 17 in 2021 with a past year MDE were more likely than those without a past year MDE to have used most illicit drugs in the past year. For instance, 27.7% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 with a past year MDE used illicit drugs in the past year compared with 10.7% of those without a past year MDE. Thus, one can extrapolate that drug use and mental health among adolescents are closely correlated, as adolescents tend to seek drug use to cope with depression and other mental health issues.

## **2.3 Boarding School Studies**

Several studies have explored substance use among boarding school students. While the prevalence rates vary, they provide insights into the issue within this specific context. For example, a study published in the *Journal of Adolescence* (2013) found that among a sample of British boarding school students aged 14-18, 34.5% reported using illicit drugs at some point, with cannabis being the most used drug. Additionally, in that boarding school, the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and stress were 39.7%, 67.1%, and 44.9%, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a study published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020) examined a similar population and discovered that students who reported higher levels of depression and anxiety were more likely to engage in substance abuse.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that the presence of mental health challenges may contribute to the vulnerability of these students to substance use.

## **2.4 Monitoring the Future Study**

The Monitoring the Future (MTF) Study, an ongoing survey in the United States that examines substance use behaviors among American youth, elucidates on the teen drug use landscape. From February through June 2022, the MTF investigators collected 31,438 surveys from students enrolled across 308 public and private schools in the nation. This survey is therefore representative of the United States and includes 75% of the sample size of a typical year's data collection. While it doesn't exclusively focus on boarding schools, it provides valuable data on adolescent substance use trends. According to the 2021 Monitoring the Future Study, among 12th graders, the prevalence rates for drug use were as follows: cannabis (30.7%), nicotine vaping (27.3%), alcohol (51.9%).<sup>4</sup> These substances are more easily accessible than more illicit drugs, and adolescents may perceive the risks associated with these substances as lower than they actually are. With many substances fairly accessible to them, boarding school adolescents may engage in experimentation to satisfy their curiosity.

# **III. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO DRUG USE IN BOARDING SCHOOLS**

## **3.1 Overview**

This section will delve into the underlying factors that contribute to drug use among teenagers in boarding schools. It will explore various individual, social, and environmental factors such as peer influence, academic pressure, stress, mental health issues, and accessibility to substances. The discussion will also include insights from psychological research.

### **3.2 Unique Boarding School Characteristics**

Separation from family and increased peer influence can greatly exacerbate negative feelings leading to drug use. Boarding schools often involve separation from family and home, which can contribute to feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and isolation. These factors may increase the vulnerability of teenagers and make them more susceptible to engaging in risky behaviors, including drug use, as a means of coping or fitting in. In boarding schools, also students live near their peers, often with limited supervision during non-academic hours. This intense peer environment can amplify peer influence and social pressures, including the pressure to experiment with substances. The desire to belong or conform to certain social groups may further contribute to the prevalence of drug use.

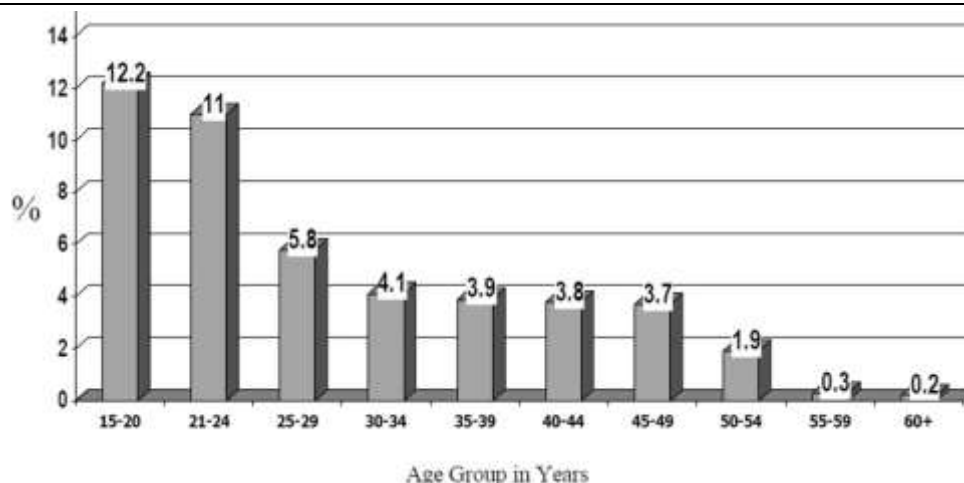
Additionally, boarding schools often have rigorous academic expectations and intense competition, leading to increased stress levels among students. The pressure to perform academically, coupled with extracurricular activities and the need to maintain a balanced lifestyle, can create a significant amount of stress. Some students may turn to drugs as a coping mechanism, seeking relief from academic pressures or enhancing their cognitive performance. For example, a common “study” drug is Adderall, a prescription medication containing amphetamine and dextroamphetamine. It is commonly prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) but is sometimes misused by students as a study aid due to its stimulant effects, such as increased focus and alertness.

Lastly, due to the residential nature of these schools, students may have increased opportunities to acquire and use drugs discreetly within the confines of the campus. Limited parental oversight and the presence of older students may also contribute to the availability and prevalence of substances. Boarding schools may often fail to effectively monitor and control access to substances.

### **3.3 Psychological Rationale**

During adolescence, individuals are in a stage of exploration and self-discovery. Teens may be curious about the effects of substances and may engage in experimentation to satisfy their curiosity or to rebel against authority. Brain maturation during adolescence increases risk-taking and may contribute to decisions to use drugs. The adolescent brain is still developing, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making and impulse control. This development imbalance may lead to increased risk-taking behavior, including substance use. Cohen (2010) demonstrates that during highly emotional situations, teens are psychologically prone to risk-taking and more likely to be influenced by peers.<sup>5</sup> Peer pressure can also play a significant role in increasing drug dependence. Adolescents often have a strong desire to fit in and be accepted by their peers. They may feel pressured to engage in drug use to be part of a particular social group or to gain acceptance. The fear of being excluded or ostracized can push them to experiment with drugs and potentially develop a dependence.

Furthermore, adolescence is a time of emotional volatility and increased stress due to various factors such as academic pressure, hormonal changes, and social challenges. Some teens may turn to substances as a means of coping with these emotions or to self-medicate symptoms of anxiety or depression. Studies have shown that adolescents have higher rates of alcohol and marijuana abuse or dependence disorders. Grant (2004) analyzed national data and found that among youth aged 15–20 years old, 12.2% met an official definition, according to the American Psychiatric Association, of an alcohol dependence disorder within the past year.<sup>6</sup> This rate was much higher than the other age groups (Fig 1).



*Figure 1. Prevalence of Alcohol Dependence Disorder by Age*

#### **IV. STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORT AND INTERVENTION**

##### **4.1 Overview**

This section will focus on strategies and interventions to prevent and address teen drug use in boarding schools. It will discuss the importance of a multidimensional approach that involves parents, mental health professionals, faculty, other peers, and the broader boarding school community.

##### **4.2 Involve Family in Prevention Programs and Education**

Boarding schools can focus on preventive measures such as evidence-based drug education programs, to equip students with knowledge about the risks associated with drug use and to develop resistance skills. As discussed early, because a key factor in drug use in boarding schools is the lack of familial support and separation from family and home, these educational efforts should include parents and guardians. Scott (2019) demonstrates that teens are less likely to use addictive substances if their parents discuss the risks early on and establish clear rules.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the proactive involvement of adults and parents is important in preventing teen drug use.

##### **4.3 Collaboration with Mental Health Professionals**

Because teen drug use is often correlated with underlying mental health issues, collaboration with mental health professionals is imperative to address the root of the problem. Thus, supportive solutions should focus on the integration of mental health services within the boarding school system and the benefits of collaboration between school counselors, psychologists, and external experts. These experts can help with proactive, preventive educational programs as well as identify at-risk students early on. Furthermore, they can be a resource for effective intervention strategies such as counseling, support groups, and referral to treatment when necessary.

##### **4.4 Reinforcing School-Wide Principles and Policies**

The boarding schools themselves should take a clear stance against drug use and emphasize the importance of fostering a supportive and drug-free environment. This includes implementing clear policies, enforcing consequences for drug-related behaviors, and promoting a sense of belonging and well-being among students. The entire faculty and student body should be involved in this initiative and help promote a supportive yet stringent culture around anti-drug use.

#### **4.5 Improve Peer Network Health**

Mason (2019) demonstrates that peer network health (the sum of peer risk and protective behaviors) moderates the effects of substance use and mental health conditions.<sup>8</sup> The relationships among peers can drive the direction of drug-use, prevention, and treatment models. As discussed earlier, peer influence and pressure can exacerbate drug use, and thus, it is imperative that supportive strategies involve addressing this phenomenon. For example, the school can focus its educational efforts on improving interpersonal peer relations, identifying peer pressure, and discussing strategies to disengage from negative peer influences.

### **V. CONCLUSION**

Through a comprehensive examination of relevant studies and statistics, the paper delves into the prevalence of drug use among boarding school students, identifies underlying causes, and explores potential consequences. It is important to note that not all teenagers in boarding schools engage in drug use. However, the unique challenges and characteristics of the boarding school environment, such as peer influence, academic pressures, and separation from family, can contribute to an increased risk of drug experimentation and use among certain individuals.

Understanding teen drug use in boarding schools involves examining the factors that contribute to substance abuse within this specific context, as well as implementing strategies for prevention, intervention, and support to ensure the well-being and success of students in these educational settings. Further research is warranted to deepen our understanding of this issue. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of specific preventive programs and interventions tailored to the unique circumstances of boarding school environments. Additionally, exploring the long-term outcomes of drug use in this context and examining the role of family involvement and community support systems could contribute to the development of more comprehensive strategies.

Ultimately, the insights gained from this paper serve as a call to action for boarding schools, educators, parents, and policymakers to collaborate in creating proactive measures that prioritize the well-being of students. By addressing the root causes of teen drug use, promoting healthy coping mechanisms, and fostering an atmosphere of support and understanding, we can mitigate the negative impact of drugs on the lives of adolescents in boarding school settings.

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