Setting the Scene:
Drug and Alcohol Use Among Vancouver Youth Aged 16–24 years

Dr Cameron Duff,
Manager - Research and Prevention Services
Some Initial Observations…

- Drug use is fundamentally a phenomenon of culture and context – culture matters!
- As a result, drug use patterns are incredibly dynamic; great local divergence.
- Shaped by availability and accessibility but also attitudes, values, customs and culture.
- Drug prevention demands attention to both access and availability as well as values.
- What does drug prevention grounded in values look like? Good discussion point…
Some Initial Observations…

- We’ll reflect some more on values shortly.
- First let’s explore substances young people are using in Vancouver and across the province.
- Recall the dynamic nature of drug cultures.
- Great diversity across the province primarily due to two factors – availability and culture.
- Access and availability varies considerably across the province although gap closing.
- Great diversity in different cultural communities (eg Anglo vs Chinese)
Some Initial Observations…

- Drug trying rates are increasing across the province for many substances.
- Esp more tolerated substances (cannabis, ecstasy, mushrooms, cocaine); not true of harder drugs.
- Seems to work in cycles – experiencing stimulant phase now?! Youth want to be “up”.
- Greater tolerance of drug experimentation in most youth cultures – crucially heavy drug use is still stigmatized – OK to try but not to misuse.
- Importantly, VERY few youth develop problems associated with AOD use.
Research Aims – VCH Youth Addictions

- Monitor drug use patterns and harms:
- Provide accounts of new drug use trends;
- Examine developmental pathways that may lead individuals to become involved in drug use;
- Develop an “early warning system” by identifying areas/issues requiring further investigation.
Research Findings – 2006 YDRS

- We conducted 604 face-to-face confidential surveys between May and August of 2006
- Youth specific 16 – 24 years (some 25 yo)
- Surveys were conducted in all six VCH community health areas in Vancouver (exc Richmond and the North Shore)
- Participants were recruited via a mix of outreach recruiting plus promotional posters, ads etc.
Drug Prevalence: Summary

Drug Use Prevalence

- Ever Used
- Used in last 12 months
- Used in last month
- Used in last week

Percent

Marijuana
Mushrooms
Ecstasy
Cocaine
Crystal Meth
Key Findings: 16 – 24 year olds

- Let’s focus on the two substances that youth aged 16-24 use consistently – alcohol and cannabis
- We found that around 90% of all youth reported “lifetime” use of alcohol around 70% for cannabis.
- Need to watch ecstasy? Rising across the province...little attention so far.
Opportunity: Marijuana

In the last 12 months, how many times have you been offered MARIJUANA?

- Never: 20%
- Once or twice: 15%
- 3 to 5 times: 10%
- 6 to 10 times: 7.5%
- 11 to 24 times: 7.5%
- More than 25 times: 25%
Opportunity: Ecstasy

In the last 12 months, how many times have you been offered ECSTASY?

- Never: 50%
- Once or twice: 20%
- 3 to 5 times: 10%
- 6 to 10 times: 10%
- 11 to 24 times: 5%
- More than 25 times: 5%
Opportunity: Mushrooms

In the last 12 months, how many times have you been offered MAGIC MUSHROOMS?

Percent

Never | Once or twice | 3 to 5 times | 6 to 10 times | 11 to 24 times | More than 25 times

In the last 12 months, how many times have you been offered MAGIC MUSHROOMS?
Opportunity: Cocaine

In the last 12 months, how many times have you been offered COCAINE?

![Bar chart showing the frequency of offers for cocaine in the last 12 months. The chart indicates that the majority have never been offered cocaine.](chart.png)
Opportunity: Crystal Meth

In the last 12 months, how many times have you been offered CRYSTAL METH?

Percent

- Never: 100%
- Once or twice: 0%
- 3 to 5 times: 0%
- 6 to 10 times: 0%
- 11 to 24 times: 0%
Alcohol

- 87% of 16-24 year olds reported “lifetime” consumption of alcohol;
- 73% reported drinking at least once in the last 12 months.
- Mean age of first use for alcohol - 13.7 years
- Among those who identified as drinkers;
  - 23% report drinking “once a week or more often”
  - 22% report drinking “once every 2 weeks”
  - 20% report drinking “once a month”
  - 35% report drinking “once every couple of months”
67% of the youth reported the “lifetime” use of cannabis (70% males; 62% females).

43% used cannabis past year: 26% past month.

9% of 16-24 who report the use of cannabis in the past year (“current” users) smoke every day. This represents 6% of the total sample of 604 youth.

The average age of first use was 13.9 years (13.7 for alcohol).
17% of males and 15% of females who are “current” users reported difficulty stopping or cutting down on their use in the last year.

This represents 7% of the entire sample.

This is the most pressing AOD related issue for youth I would argue – how to help kids who want to cut down their use of cannabis?
Comparing Alcohol and Cannabis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Use</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Cannabis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I never use this substance</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use every day</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use once week or more</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use about every 2 weeks</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use once a month</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use every few few months</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Work Ahead; Better Prevention!

- These results provide some sense of what local youth are experiencing.
- Most youth stick with alcohol and cannabis.
- Small numbers are using other drugs.
- The greatest challenge concerns the apparent “normalization” of alcohol and cannabis use.
- How to develop prevention initiatives in this kind of cultural climate?
- This is a clash of values!
Thank you for listening…

For more information:
Dr Cameron Duff
Vancouver Coastal Health
cameron.duff@vch.ca