

CHANGES IN ATTITUDES AND THE USE OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND MARIJUANA BY JUVENILE ARRESTEES

While not everyone who uses alcohol, tobacco, or marijuana goes on to use other drugs, it has been frequently documented in national surveys (e.g., National Survey on Drug Use and Health) that these drugs are among the most commonly used and often precede use of other drugs, leading them to sometimes be referred to as “gateway drugs”. Recent national findings from the “Monitoring the Future” study¹ revealed that while alcohol and cigarette use among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders was at all-time lows for the history of the study (1975-2015), recent use of marijuana remained relatively stable and those surveyed expressed a growing acceptance for the use of marijuana and perceived less risk of its use. With the recent release of 2015 data from the local Substance Abuse Monitoring (SAM) study, in which juvenile arrestees booked into Juvenile Hall are interviewed regarding their past and current drug use and other risk factors, analyses were conducted regarding how the use and attitudes regarding these three drugs have changed over time.

What Hasn't Changed That Much...

#1: Most of These Youth Had Tried All Three of the Drugs at Least Once

In 2015, 90 percent of those interviewed had ever tried marijuana, 86 percent alcohol, and 73 percent tobacco.

#2: The Average Age of First Use for All Three was Around 12

In 2015, the average age of first marijuana use was 12.2, for tobacco it was 12.7, and for alcohol it was 12.9.

#3: Youth Who Used a Drug in the Past Month Used Tobacco and Marijuana More Frequently Than Alcohol

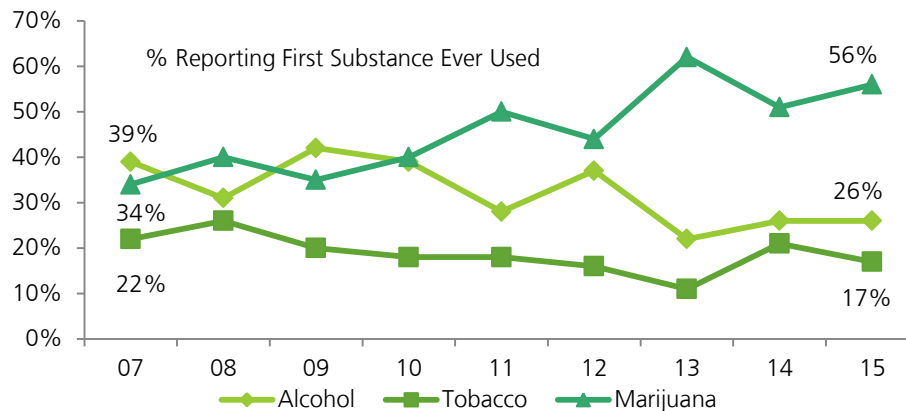
In 2015, tobacco users used it a median of 20 days out of the past 30, compared to 15 days for marijuana users and only 4 days for alcohol users.

What Has Changed...

#1: More Youth Are Reporting Marijuana is the First Drug They Ever Tried

As Figure 1 shows, since 2007 when the question was first asked, the percent of juveniles who reported marijuana was the first drug they ever tried increased, from 34 percent that year to 56 percent in 2015. During the same time period, those reporting alcohol was the first drug they tried decreased from 39 percent to 26 percent.

Figure 1: OVER HALF OF JUVENILES INTERVIEWED IN 2015 SAID MARIJUANA WAS THE FIRST DRUG THEY EVER TRIED

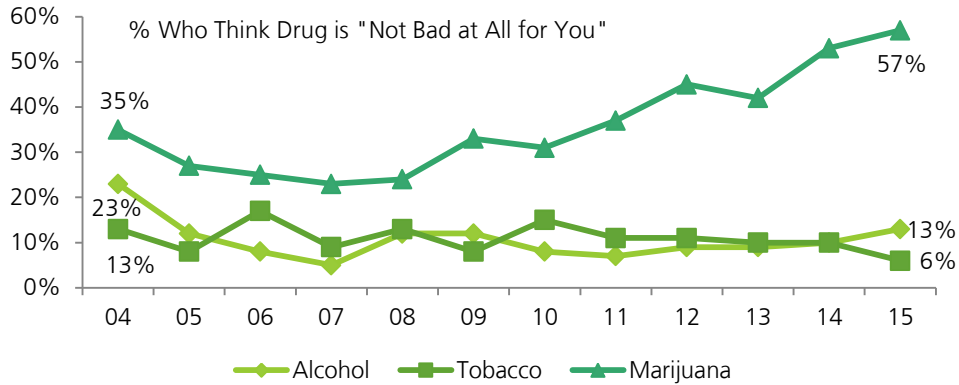


¹ Johnston, L.D., O'Malley, P.M., Miech, R.A., Bachman, J.G., & Schulenberg, J.E. (2016). Monitoring the Future National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2015: Overview, Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, The University of Michigan.

#2: A Greater Proportion of Youth Feel That Marijuana is Not Harmful at All to the User

While the proportion of youth who expressed that alcohol and tobacco use was “not bad at all for you” declined over time, the proportion that thought the same for marijuana increased, from 35 percent in 2004 to 57 percent in 2015.

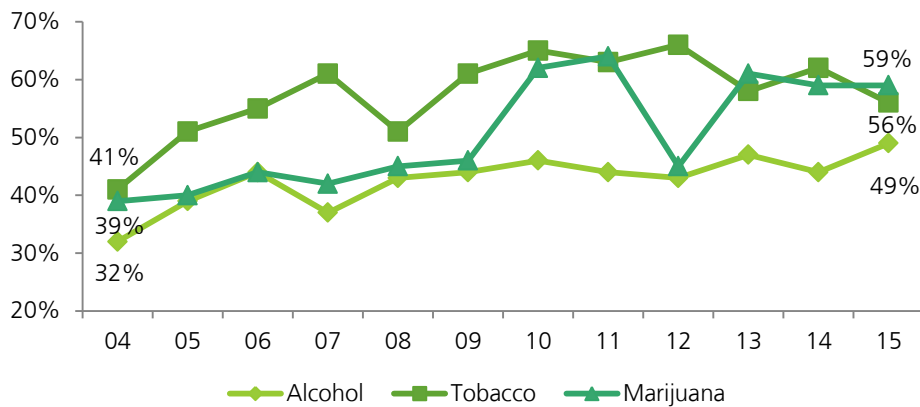
Figure 2: YOUTH MUCH LESS LIKELY TO PERCEIVE ANY NEGATIVE HEALTH EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA USE IN 2015



#3: A Greater Proportion of Youth Reported All Three Drugs are Very Easy to Get in 2015, Compared to 2004

While the relative proportions have stayed relatively the same, over time, a greater percentage of youth have reported each of the substances was “very easy” to obtain, with almost three in five each expressing this for marijuana and tobacco and one in two for alcohol.

Figure 3: AROUND HALF OR MORE OF YOUTH REPORT THAT ALL THREE DRUGS WERE “VERY EASY” TO OBTAIN IN 2015



While it is important to remember that these data are not compiled from interviews with the general population, they do provide insights not available from other sources regarding the use of and changing perceptions about drugs among at-risk and vulnerable populations that could transfer to other youth groups over time. As such, and with an ever-evolving justice system, it is more important than ever to provide a continuum of prevention, treatment, and intervention opportunities when available to all youth in a variety of settings, as well as education and support for those who work with youth. Additional statistics from this study are available in the most recently released [CJSAM Bulletin](#).