

# **Adolescent substance use: Prevalence, pattern and correlates**

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## **Objective:**

Determine the prevalence and identify correlates of substance use by adolescents attending school in the Colombo district.

## **Scope of the problem:**

There is much concern about the increasing burden of substance-related deaths and disease rapidly shifting to developing nations, especially among their youth. Epidemiology of substance use by adolescents in Sri Lanka is scarce. Reliable and valid data on substance use by adolescents would guide the allocation of prevention and intervention resources in the country.

## **Methodology**

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 3454, 13 to 18 year old students in the Colombo district. The validated self-administrated Adolescent Substance Use Student Questionnaire, Adolescent Substance Use Correlates Questionnaire and the Sinhala Substance Use Risk Factor Profile Scale assessed the use of various substances and correlates. Descriptive and multivariate analyses were carried out to determine prevalence and pattern, and identify correlates of ever using substances.

## **Results**

Overall 16% have used at least one substance in their lifetime. Prevalence of ever use of cigarette, alcohol, marijuana and other drugs was 6.1%, 13.6%, 2%% and 1%, respectively. Boys were significantly more likely to report use than girls. Use increased with age of the adolescents. Age at first use varied with each substance. Nearly 70% have used only one substance. Ever use of cigarette, alcohol and other drugs is best explained by a unique combination of demographic and psychosocial risk and protective factors.

## **Conclusions**

Prevalence of substance use was 16%. Most frequently used substance was alcohol. Trends in ever use indicated that a majority users were experimenters. Identified correlates indicated areas for substance-specific interventions. This study contributes to the knowledge base of preventive professionals and forms a foundation for further research and national and cross-cultural comparison may be conducted.

## **Key words**

Adolescents; substance use; prevalence; correlates; Adolescent Substance Use Student Questionnaire; Adolescent Substance Use Correlates Questionnaire; Sinhala Substance Use Risk Profile Scale