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EDITORS: Detailed information on the drug use study may be obtained from Dr. Lloyd Johnston, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109, telephone (313) 763-5043.

ANN ARBOR---A University of Michigan study indicates that marijuana use among American high school students may be leveling off for the first time in more than a decade.

At the same time, cocaine use among high school students is increasing at an accelerating rate, and the use of inhalants has also been rising.

Each year since 1975, scientists at the U-M's Institute for Social Research have surveyed a representative national sample of about 17,000 seniors enrolled in 130 public and private high schools around the country.

A number of important national trends revealed in the study appear in two new volumes available from the sponsoring agency, the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The titles are: "Drugs and the Class of '78" and "1979 Highlights: Drugs and the Nation's High School Students."

The authors---U-M social psychologists Lloyd Johnston, Jerald Bachman, and Patrick O'Malley---note that since 1975, daily or near-daily use of marijuana had been rising at an alarming rate, nearly doubling from 6 per cent in 1975 to 11 per cent in 1978. In 1979, however, this increase abruptly halted---a change which may be attributable to the increased attention given by the media and government officials to the potential hazards of regular use, the researchers say.

That interpretation is supported by the fact that significantly more high school seniors in 1979 than in 1978 believe that regular marijuana users run a "great risk" of harming themselves, the researchers say. Also the proportion of seniors saying they personally disapprove of regular use of the drug has been increasing gradually over the past two years.

"A change in the availability of marijuana definitely does not explain the leveling off," the researchers conclude, "since fully nine out of ten seniors in 1979 felt they could get marijuana fairly easily---a proportion which has remained stable since the middle of the decade."

The U-M researchers point out that while the rate of marijuana use may be level for this age group, it is level at a rather high rate. In the most recent 1979 survey, at least 60 per cent of the seniors had tried marijuana; half had used it in the previous 12 months and over one-third (37 per cent) had used it in the month prior to the survey. (more)

More important, say the authors, is the fact that one in every ten seniors is using it almost every day. Daily or near-daily use is substantially lower among females (7 per cent) than among males (13 per cent), and lower among those planning on four years of college (7 per cent) compared with those who are not (13 per cent).

The U-M researchers report that although marijuana use increased appreciably during the last half of the 1970s, the proportion of young people going beyond marijuana to other illicit drugs has not changed appreciably over the same interval---a fact which tends to refute the notion that marijuana involvement necessarily leads to the use of other drugs.

In the class of 1975, some 26 per cent reported illicitly using one or more other drugs during the year; in the class of 1979 that number was only two percentage points higher. But for specific illicit drugs, more dramatic changes have been taking place. There has been a substantial and accelerating increase in the use of cocaine, the authors found. The annual rate of use doubled from 6 per cent in 1975 to 12 per cent in 1979, while the proportion using cocaine in the previous month tripled from 2 per cent in 1975 to 6 per cent in 1979.

Other drugs showing evidence of increased popularity over the last several years are inhalants and amphetamines. Nearly one-fifth of the seniors have used an inhalant at some time. Amyl and butyl nitrites--- inhalants known on the street by such names as "snappers" and "poppers"--- have been tried by one in every nine seniors.

Several classes of drugs have been showing a gradual decline: these are the sedatives, tranquilizers, and heroin. The proportion of seniors reporting any experience with heroin has dropped by one-half, from 2.2 per cent in 1975 to 1.1 per cent in 1979. The use of opiates other than heroin has remained relatively unchanged since 1975, and the use of hallucinogens has stabilized after a period of decline. The hallucinogenic drug PCP, also known as "angel dust," has been used by about one out of every eight seniors.

The increase in cocaine use has been paralleled by an increase in the perceived availability of cocaine and an increase in the proportion of the age group who are being exposed to the use of the drug.

Somewhat fewer students today think cocaine use is risky or personally disapprove of its use than was true in 1975, the researchers conclude. Fully three-quarters of all seniors, however, still disapprove of experimenting with cocaine, and only one in six or seven has ever tried it.

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