



▶ Drugs & Crime Data

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Fact Sheet: Drug Use Trends

The ONDCP Drugs & Crime Clearinghouse has prepared this fact sheet to summarize drug use trends in the United States. Populations covered in this fact sheet include the general population, students, active military personnel, and criminal offenders, as surveyed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. Department of Justice. Some individuals, such as homeless people, are difficult to reach using standard survey techniques; thus, little is known about their drug use. For information on survey methodologies, please refer to the document sources listed on page 5. The data used to prepare figures are presented at the end of the report.

General population

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have sponsored several national surveys to track drug

use trends. One of the most widely known is the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, which interviews persons age 12 and older living in households. In 1991, the survey was expanded to include civilians living on military installations and persons living in college dormitories and homeless shelters. Since October 1, 1992, the survey has been sponsored by SAMHSA. Earlier surveys were sponsored by NIDA. According to the Household Survey, the significant declines in the prevalence of illicit drug use that occurred throughout the 1980's did not occur in 1993 (table 1). This may be a reflection of an interruption in the downward trend, a leveling off of drug use, or the start of an upturn in drug use. In 1993, 11.7 million persons (5.6% of the population age 12 and older) reported using an illicit drug during the past month, down from 24.3 million persons (13.7% of the population age 12 and older) in 1979.

In 1993, an estimated 4,530,000 persons (2.2% of the population age 12 and older) reported using cocaine, including crack,

Table 1. Trends in the percentage of persons reporting any illicit drug use: 1979 to 1993

Age of respondent and recency of drug use	Year							
	1979	1982	1985	1988	1990	1991	1992	1993
12-17								
Ever	34.4%	28.0%	29.7%	24.7%	22.7%	20.1%	16.5%	17.9%
Past year	27.3	22.0	23.3	16.8	15.9	14.8	11.7	13.6
Past 30 days	18.5	13.2	14.9	9.2	8.1	6.8	6.1	6.6
18-25								
Ever	69.8%	64.5%	63.7%	58.9%	55.8%	54.7%	51.7%	50.9
Past year	49.7	43.4	41.0	32.0	28.7	29.1	26.4	26.6
Past 30 days	37.4	30.8	25.1	17.8	14.9	15.4	13.0	13.5
26 and older								
Ever	23.2%	24.8%	31.7%	33.7%	35.3%	36.0%	36.0%	37.3%
Past year	10.3	12.1	12.7	10.2	10.0	9.4	8.3	8.9
Past 30 days	6.6	7.8	8.0	4.9	4.6	4.6	4.1	4.1
All ages 12 and older								
Ever	33.3	32.3	36.7	36.6	37.0	37.0	36.2	37.2
Past year	19.5	18.7	18.6	14.1	13.3	12.7	11.1	11.8
Past 30 days	13.7	12.2	11.6	7.3	6.4	6.3	5.5	5.6

Note: Any illicit drug use includes use of marijuana, cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants (except 1982), heroin, or nonmedical use of sedatives, tranquilizers, stimulants, or analgesics. The exclusion of inhalants in 1982 is believed to have resulted in underestimates of any illicit use for that year, especially for 12-17 year olds. Prior to 1979, data were not totaled for overall drug use and instead were published by specific drug type only.

Source: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse

at least once in the previous year. Such use peaked in—

- 1979 for 12- to 17-year-olds
- 1985 for persons age 26 and older (figure 1).

The number of Americans reporting use of marijuana at least once in the past year was 18,573,000 (9.0% of the population

age 12 and older). Reported use of marijuana in the past year peaked in 1979 for 12- to 17-year-olds and 18- to 25-year-olds. Past year marijuana use by persons age 26 and older peaked in 1982 (figure 2). Past year use by 12- to 17-year-olds increased from 8.1% in 1992 to 10.1% in 1993.

Youth

Another major study tracing illicit drug use trends is Monitoring the Future (also known as the High School Senior Survey). When this annual NIDA-sponsored survey began in 1975, 45% of high school seniors surveyed reported that they had used some type of illicit drug in the previous year. This figure climbed gradually to 54.2% in 1979, declined gradually to 27.1% in 1992, but has increased since then to 35.8% in 1994 (figure 3). Similarly, past year drug use increased from 12.9% in 1992 to 18.5% in 1994 for 8th graders and from 20.4% in 1992 to 30% for 10th graders.

The increase in the use of marijuana has been especially pronounced. Between 1992 and 1994, past year use of marijuana increased from:

- 21.9% to 30.7% among high school seniors
- 15.2% to 25.2% among 10th graders
- 7.2% to 13% among 8th graders.

Reported use of marijuana by high school seniors during the past year peaked in 1979 at 50.8% and had declined steadily until 1992 (figure 4).

Reported use of cocaine by high school seniors within the past year increased from 5.6% to 12.4% between 1975 and 1981. The highest level of cocaine use was reported in 1985 at 13.1% and declined to a low of 3.1% in 1992. In 1994, past year cocaine use rose slightly to 3.6% of high school seniors.

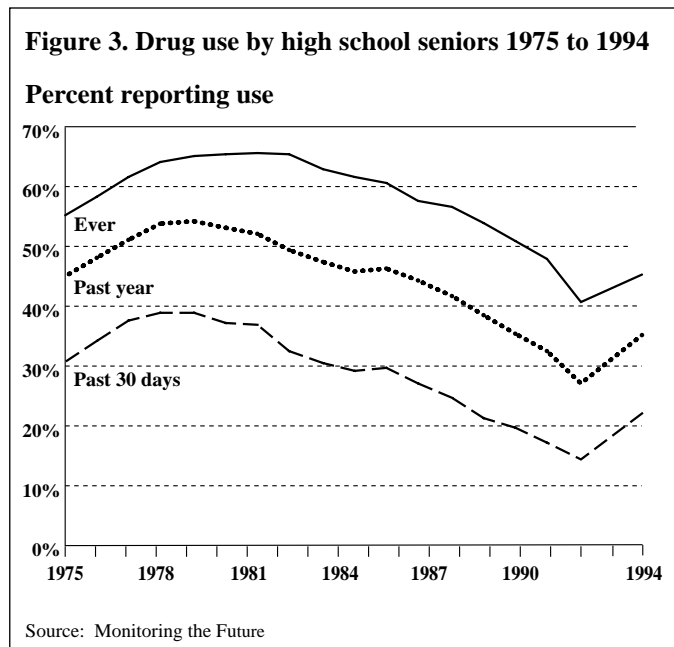
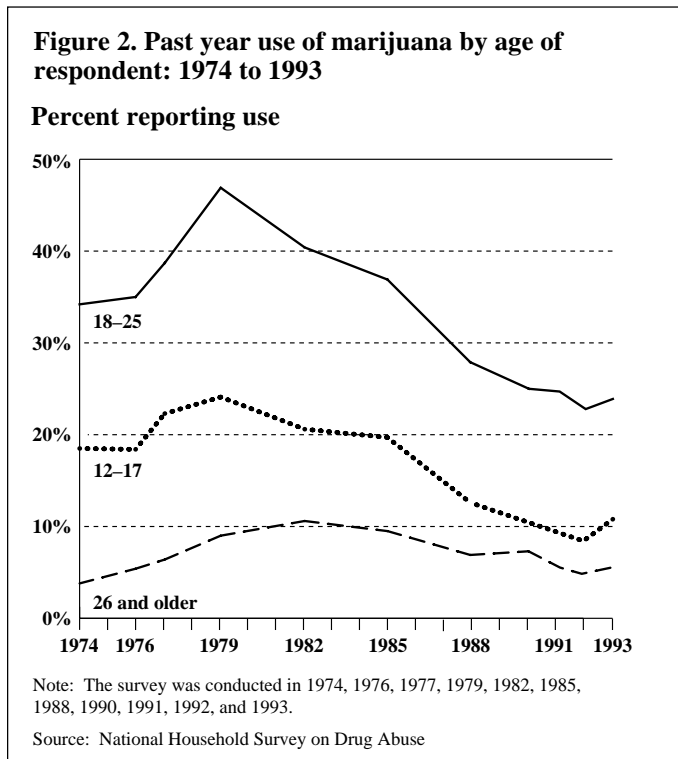
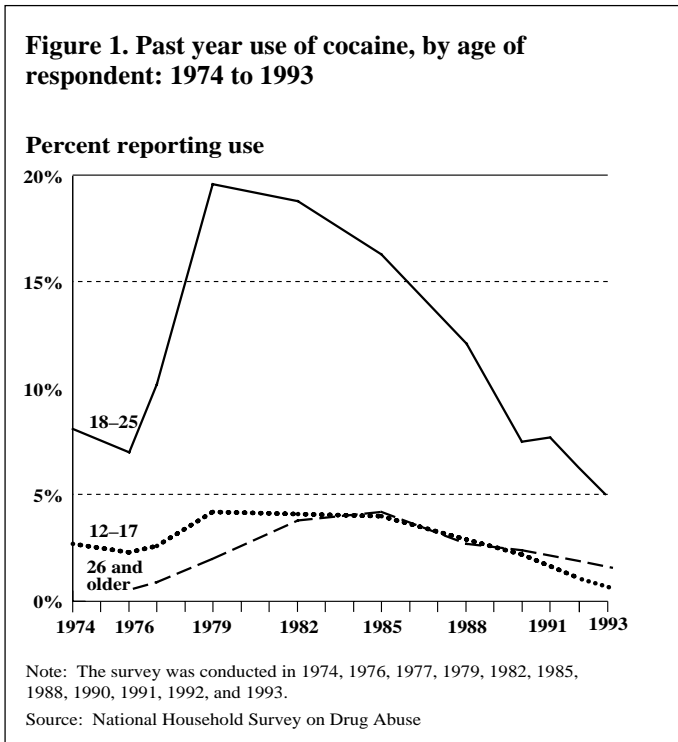
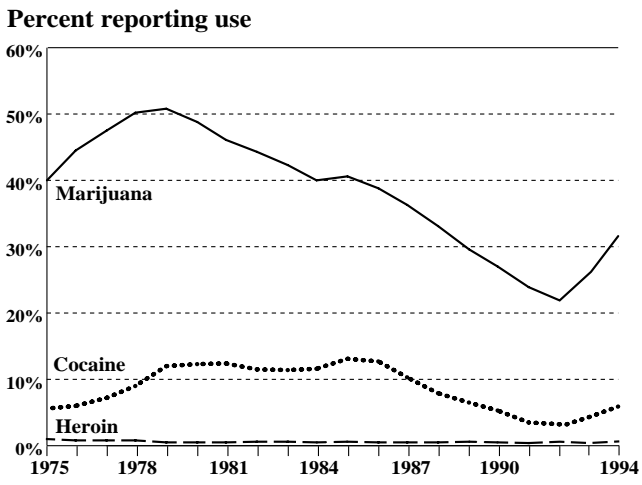


Figure 4. Past year drug use by high school seniors, by drug type: 1975 to 1994



Source: Monitoring the Future

Researchers, noting the emergence of crack, included it in the survey in 1986 as a separate question. In that year, 4.1% of students reported using crack at least once within the past year. In 1994, 1.9% reported using crack at least once during the past year.

In 1991, the Monitoring the Future study began surveying 8th and 10th graders. While drug use by high school seniors continued to decline between 1991 and 1992, use of marijuana, cocaine, LSD, and other hallucinogens by eighth graders increased during the same time period (table 2). Between 1992 and 1994, use of all major drug types continued to increase for 8th and 10th graders.

Inhalants were the most widely abused substance among eighth graders in 1994, after alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana. Twelve percent of 8th graders reported past year use of inhalants, a rate higher than the 9.1% reported by 10th graders and 7.7% by 12th graders.

Military

The Worldwide Survey of Substance Abuse and Health Behaviors Among Military Personnel, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense, examines the drug use rates among those in the armed forces. In 1980, 27.6% of military respondents polled answered that they used an illegal drug within the past month. This proportion fell to 3.4% in 1992 (figure 5).

Criminal offender populations

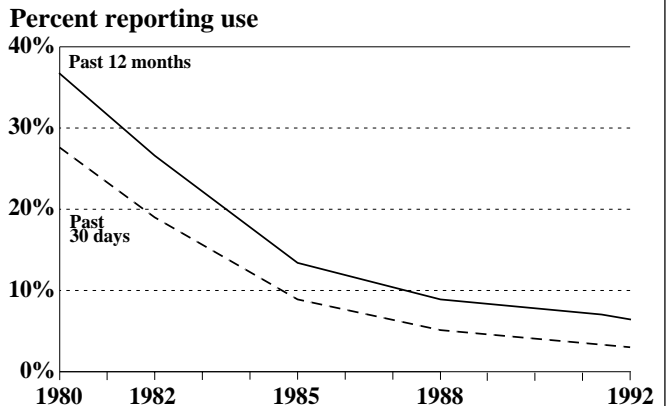
Drug use by prison inmates prior to incarceration declined between 1986 and 1991, according to findings from the 1991 Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities. The percentage of inmates reporting any drug use in the month before the offense declined from

Table 2. Past year drug use by 8th and 10th graders: 1991 to 1994

Drug type	Percent reporting use in past year							
	8th graders				10th graders			
	1991	1992	1993	1994	1991	1992	1993	1994
Marijuana/hashish	6.2%	7.2%	9.2%	13.0%	16.5%	15.2%	19.2%	25.2%
Inhalants	9.0	9.5	11.0	11.7	7.1	7.5	8.4	9.1
LSD	1.7	2.1	2.3	2.4	3.7	4.0	4.2	5.2
Other hallucinogens	0.7	1.1	1.0	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.9	2.4
Cocaine	1.1	1.5	1.7	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.1	2.8
Crack	0.7	0.9	1.0	1.3	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.4
Other cocaine	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.7	2.1	1.7	1.8	2.4
Heroin	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.2	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.9
Stimulants	6.2	6.5	7.2	7.9	8.2	8.2	9.6	10.2
Steroids	1.0	1.1	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.1

Source: Monitoring the Future

Figure 5. Drug use by armed forces enlisted personnel: 1980 to 1992



Note: The survey was conducted in 1980, 1982, 1985, 1988, and 1992.
Source: Worldwide Survey of Substance Abuse and Health Behaviors Among Military Personnel

56% in 1986 to 50% in 1991 (table 3). However, the percentage of inmates using cocaine or crack in the month before the offense increased from 20% in 1986 to 25% in 1991, while the percentage using marijuana declined from 46% in 1986 to 32% in 1991.

Results from the 1989 BJS Survey of Inmates in Local Jails indicate that the percentage of jail inmates who used any drug in the month before their current offense remained virtually unchanged since 1983, when the survey was last conducted (table 4). Cocaine and crack were the only drugs showing an increase between 1983 and 1989, while declines in use were reported for LSD, PCP, marijuana, amphetamines, barbiturates, and methaqualone.

Table 3. Prior drug use by State prison inmates: 1986 and 1991

Type of drug	Percent of State prison inmates who used drugs in the month before the offense	
	1986	1991
Any drug	56%	50%
Marijuana	46	32
Cocaine/crack	20	25
Heroin/opiates	11	10
Barbiturates	9	4
Stimulants	10	8
Hallucinogens	7	4

Source: Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities

An additional indicator of drug use is the Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) program of the U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice. The DUF program measures drug use by arrestees through urinalysis of samples collected voluntarily and anonymously from arrestees in booking facilities. In 1993, the program tested persons arrested for serious offenses for drug use in 23 cities.

Table 4. Prior drug use by convicted jail inmates: 1983 and 1989

Type of drug	Percent of convicted jail inmates who used drugs in the month before the offense	
	1983	1989
Any drug	46.1%	43.9%
Major drug	18.6%	27.7%
Cocaine or crack	11.8	23.6
Heroin	7.9	7.0
LSD	3.0	1.6
PCP	3.0	1.7
Methadone	0.8	0.6
Other drug	41.8%	31.3%
Marijuana	38.6	28.1
Amphetamines	9.4	5.4
Barbiturates	5.9	3.3
Methaqualone	3.8	0.8
Other drugs	3.0	2.4

Source: Survey of Inmates in Local Jails

In 1993, the percentage of male arrestees testing positive for any drug at the time of arrest ranged from 54% in Omaha and San Jose to 81% in Chicago. In 1988, the percentage of males testing positive for any drug ranged from 54% in Indianapolis and Kansas City to 83% in New York.

Trends in drug use by arrestees varied by drug type. Between 1988 and 1991, marijuana use declined in most DUF sites, but increased between 1992 and 1993. Cocaine use declined slightly or stabilized in most sites between 1988 and 1993. Cocaine remains the most frequently used drug among male arrestees.

Emergency room data

Since October 1, 1992, SAMHSA has sponsored the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN). Earlier surveys were sponsored first by the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Department of Justice, and then by NIDA. Although this measure of drug use began in the early 1970's, nationally representative data are currently available only for 1988 through 1992, with preliminary estimates available for 1993.

The number of drug-related emergency room episodes increased from 371,208 in 1990 to 466,897 in 1993 (table 5).

Table 5. Emergency room drug mentions for selected drug groups, total drug mentions, and total drug abuse episodes: 1988 to 1993

Drug type	Year					
	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	Preliminary 1993
Total drug mentions	668,153	713,392	635,460	674,861	751,731	808,233
Total drug abuse episodes	403,578	425,904	371,208	393,968	433,493	466,897
Cocaine	101,578	110,013	80,355	101,189	119,843	123,317
Heroin/morphine	38,063	41,656	33,884	35,898	48,003	62,965
Marijuana/hashish	19,962	20,703	15,706	16,251	23,997	29,166
Methamphetamine/speed	8,992	8,722	5,236	4,887	6,563	10,052
PCP/PCP combinations	12,346	8,042	4,408	3,470	5,282	6,528
LSD	3,835	3,421	3,869	3,846	3,499	3,369
Methadone	2,486	3,150	2,617	2,632	2,812	2,915

Note: Totals include other drugs not specified above. Up to four substances may be mentioned for each emergency room episode; therefore, the total number of drug mentions exceeds the total number of drug abuse episodes.

Source: Drug Abuse Warning Network

Sources

U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Justice Statistics:

Drugs and jail inmates, 1989 (BJS Special Report), NCJ-130836, August 1991

Survey of State prison inmates, 1991, NCJ-136949, March 1993

National Institute of Justice:

Drug Use Forecasting 1988 annual report, NCJ-122225, March 1990

Drug Use Forecasting 1993 annual report on adult arrestees, NCJ-147411, November 1994

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

National Institute on Drug Abuse:

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main findings, 1979; 1982; 1985; 1988; 1990; 1992

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Population estimates, 1991, revised November 20, 1992

National Survey Results on Drug Use from the Monitoring the Future Study, 1975-1992, 1993

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:

Drug Abuse Warning Network: Annual emergency room data, 1992

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main findings, 1991 and 1992

National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Population estimates, 1992 and 1993

Preliminary estimates from the Drug Abuse Warning Network: Advance Report No. 8, December 1994

Other sources

Bray, R.M., et al., *1992 Worldwide Survey of Substance Abuse and Health Behaviors Among Military Personnel*. Research Triangle Institute, December 1992

University of Michigan, Press release on *Monitoring the Future*, December 12, 1994

Source data

Data for figure 1. Past year use of cocaine, by age of respondent: 1974 to 1993

	Percent reporting use		
	12-17	18-25	26 and older
1974	2.7%	8.1%	*
1976	2.3	7.0	0.6%
1977	2.6	10.2	0.9
1979	4.2	19.5	2.0
1982	4.2	18.2	3.8
1985	3.9	15.6	4.0
1988	2.9	12.1	2.7
1990	2.2	7.5	2.4
1991	1.5	7.7	2.3
1992	1.1	6.3	1.9
1993	0.8	5.0	1.9

* Estimate not reported

Source: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse

Data for figure 2. Past year use of marijuana, by age of respondent: 1974 to 1993

	Percent reporting use		
	12-17	18-25	26 and older
1974	18.5%	34.2%	3.8%
1976	18.4	35.0	5.4
1977	22.3	38.7	6.4
1979	24.8	46.9	9.2
1982	20.7	40.1	10.8
1985	19.4	36.3	9.3
1988	12.6	27.9	6.9
1990	11.3	24.6	7.3
1991	10.1	24.5	6.6
1992	8.1	22.7	6.0
1993	10.1	22.9	6.3

Source: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse

Data for figure 3. Drug use by high school seniors: 1975 to 1994

Senior Class	Ever	Past year	Past 30 days
1975	55.2%	45.0%	30.7%
1976	58.3	48.1	34.2
1977	61.6	51.1	37.6
1978	64.1	53.8	38.9
1979	65.1	54.2	38.9
1980	65.4	53.1	37.2
1981	65.6	52.1	36.9
1982	64.4	49.4	32.5
1983	62.9	47.4	30.5
1984	61.6	45.8	29.2
1985	60.6	46.3	29.7
1986	57.6	44.3	27.1
1987	56.6	41.7	24.7
1988	53.9	38.5	21.3
1989	50.9	35.4	19.7
1990	47.9	32.5	17.2
1991	44.1	29.4	16.4
1992	40.7	27.1	14.4
1993	42.9	31.0	18.3
1994	45.6	35.8	21.9

Source: Monitoring the Future

Data for figure 4. Past year drug use by high school seniors, by drug type: 1975 to 1994

Year	Percent reporting use		
	Marijuana	Cocaine	Heroin
1975	40.0%	5.6%	1.0%
1976	44.5	6.0	0.8
1977	47.6	7.2	0.8
1978	50.2	9.0	0.8
1979	50.8	12.0	0.5
1980	48.8	12.3	0.5
1981	46.1	12.4	0.5
1982	44.3	11.5	0.6
1983	42.3	11.4	0.6
1984	40.0	11.6	0.5
1985	40.6	13.1	0.6
1986	38.8	12.7	0.5
1987	36.3	10.3	0.5
1988	33.1	7.9	0.5
1989	29.6	6.5	0.6
1990	27.0	5.3	0.5
1991	23.9	3.5	0.4
1992	21.9	3.1	0.6
1993	26.0	3.3	0.5
1994	30.7	3.6	0.6

Source: Monitoring the Future

Data for figure 5. Drug use by armed forces enlisted personnel: 1980 to 1992

	Percent reporting use	
	Past 30 days	Past 12 months
1980	27.6%	36.7%
1982	19.0	26.6
1985	8.9	13.4
1988	4.8	8.9
1992	3.4	6.2

Source: 1992 Worldwide Survey of Substance Abuse and Health Behaviors Among Military Personnel

This fact sheet was written by Anita Timrots and Candice Byrne of the ONDCP Drugs & Crime Clearinghouse. Technical review was provided by Janet Greenblatt at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The data presented in this fact sheet are as accurate as the sources from which they were drawn. Responsibility for their selection and presentation rests with the Clearinghouse staff. This clearinghouse is funded by the Office of National Drug Control Policy to support drug control policy research. The Clearinghouse is managed by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics and is a component of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. For further information concerning the content of this fact sheet, survey methodology, or other drugs and crime issues, call:

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