

It's Easy to Get Drugs

A growing number of teenagers say that it's easier to illegally obtain prescription drugs than to buy beer, according to a survey published today.

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (USA) at Columbia University asked: "Which is easiest for someone your age to buy: cigarettes, beer, marijuana, or prescription drugs such as OxyContin, Percocet, Vicodin or Ritalin without a prescription?" 19% of teenagers found it easier to purchase prescription drugs than cigarettes, beer or marijuana, compared with 13% a year ago. One-quarter of the teens said that it is easiest to buy marijuana, with 43% of 17-year-olds saying that they could buy the drug in less than an hour.

The study also found that a large group of parents do not know where their children are in the evening and identified a group of "problem parents," whose actions increased the abuse of illegal and prescription drugs among 12- to 17-year-olds.

The statistics showed that 34% of teenagers abusing prescription drugs, such as OxyContin and Vicodin, obtained them at home or from their parents.

Elizabeth Planet, the centre's director of special projects, who co-ordinated the study of 1,002 12- to 17-year-olds from April to June, highlighted the difference in behaviour reported by parents and their children. "Half of the teenagers were saying they were out on school nights, but only 14% of the parents knew that they were out," she said. "There are lots of factors at play here. Parents are not paying attention. There are parents who are out in the evening themselves. There are parents out at work."

The abuse of prescription medicine is a serious concern. Stephen Pasierb, president of Partnership for a Drug-Free America, cited a lack of understanding between the generations, with parents not understanding the risks surrounding prescription drugs, in particular. "This is a very different generation of children," he said. "Prescription drugs are entrenched, and they have not moved for five years, and this generation of parents simply do not understand the problem."

Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, said that drug abuse has declined over the last six years, but that the abuse of prescription medicine is a serious concern.

"Kids think that because these are medicines that are prescribed, they are safe," Volkow said. "The problem is that there is very little difference between the amount they take for a high and the amount that causes an overdose."

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