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Analyzing Local Youth Substance Use Data

How can we learn if the youth in our community use substances at the same rates and in the same combinations as reported in national youth surveys?

How can we learn if youth in our community make One Choice?

Identify Available Data Sources

Many schools administer self-report student surveys on substance use and other health behaviors. The surveys conducted may be part of larger national studies such as the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) and Pride Surveys, or state-based surveys such as the California Healthy Kids Survey, Tennessee Together Student Survey, and Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey, etc.

Evaluators who work with prevention organizations may be able to assist in locating and analyzing youth substance use data collected in your community or state. They will need datasets that contain individual-level data.

Identify Data Elements

Demographics

Essential demographics include:

- grade/age
- sex
- race/ethnicity

Grade or Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Grade X						
Grade Y						
Grade Z						

Race / Ethnicity	Grade X		Grade Y		Grade Z		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
American Indian or Alaska Native								
Asian								
Black								
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander								
White								
Mixed (two or more) races								
Hispanic								
Non-Hispanic								

Substances

Determine whether youth (however “youth” is defined) have either used or not used (yes/no) the following substances in the past month and/or in the past year:

- alcohol
- cannabis/marijuana
- cigarettes/tobacco
- vaped
- other illicit drugs

If available, consider adding other substance use variables (e.g., binge drinking, nonmedical use of prescription drugs) and frequency of use.

Analyses

Substance Use

By coding past month (or past year) use of a particular substance as Yes=1 and No=0, an evaluator can calculate the number and percentage of students who used each substance.

Table - Past Month Substance Use

Past Month Substance Use	Grade X		Grade Y		Grade Z		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Alcohol								
Cannabis								
Cigarettes								
Vape								
Other Illicit Drugs								

A series of cross tabulations could identify the percentage of students who used each one of the substances and who also used each of the other substances. These could be further broken down by grade, age, sex, etc.

Table - Co-Occurring Substance Use Among Students Reporting Past 30-Day Use of Alcohol

	Past Month Substance Use	Grade X		Grade Y		Grade Z		Total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
No Alcohol Past 30 Days	Cannabis								
	Cigarettes								
	Vape								
	Other Illicit Drugs								
Yes Alcohol Use Past 30 Days	Cannabis								
	Cigarettes								
	Vape								
	Other Illicit Drugs								

Other tables to follow would include:

- Co-Occurring Substance Use Among Students Reporting Past 30-Day Use of Cannabis
- Co-Occurring Substance Use Among Students Reporting Past 30-Day Use of Cigarettes
- Co-Occurring Substance Use Among Students Reporting Past 30-Day Use of Vaping
- Co-Occurring Substance Use Among Students Reporting Past 30-Day Use of Other Illicit Drugs

Substance Non-Use (One Choice)

Calculate and report the **overall percentage** of students who did **NOT** use any substances: By summing the 1s and 0s across the 5 substance categories for each student, an evaluator can identify those who have made the One Choice of non-use (sum=0). Break this group down by the relevant demographic subgroups.

Table - Past Month Substance Use/Non-Use by Grade and Sex

Grade or Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Grade X Used any substance Did not use any						
Grade Y Used any substance Did not use any						
Grade Z Used any substance Did not use any						

The evaluator can use the same method to identify youths who used a single substance (sum=1) and polysubstance users (substance use total is >1).

Table - Past Month Degree of Substance Use by Grade and Sex

Grade or Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Grade X None Single substance Polysubstance						
Grade Y None Single substance Polysubstance						
Grade Z None Single substance Polysubstance						

Tips for Reporting

- When generating tables and graphs, make sure the overall sample sizes are listed.
- Be clear what the denominator is in each table.

Comparing Local Data to State Data

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) provides data for the nation and state-by-state that can be used to compare to local community data.

NSDUH provides an [interactive map](#) with state and substate substance use levels for alcohol, cigarettes/tobacco, and marijuana (cannabis). Although the map and graphs that can be generated on the site only show use for “individuals aged 12 or older,” evaluators can click on the CSV icon to download an Excel file that has the data for various age groups, including ages 12-17. Such data can assist with checking the validity of findings for these three drugs.