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Violence Prevention News

Iowa State University Researchers Publish National Study on Cyberbullying of LGBT and Allied Youths

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Substance Abuse Prevention News

Study Shows 90 Percent of Teens Admit Stronger Likelihood of Drinking and Driving on Prom Night, Yet Less Than One-Third See Dangers

According to a national survey of more than 2,500 eleventh and twelfth graders, 90 percent of teens believe their counterparts are more likely to drink and drive on prom night and 79 percent believe the same is true for graduation night. Yet, that belief does not translate to concern, as only 29 percent and 25 percent of teens say that driving on prom night and graduation night, respectively, comes with a high degree of danger.

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National Study Shows Reverse in Decade-Long Declines in Teen Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol

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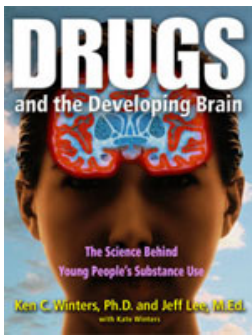
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Iowa State University Researchers Publish National Study on Cyberbullying of LGBT and Allied Youths

Schools are typically on guard against students who bully by inflicting repeated violence on other students. But technology has given rise to a relatively new form of bullying that inflicts emotional harm in a stealth manner, working through Web sites, chat rooms, e-mail, cell phones and instant messaging.

And according to a new national study by Iowa State University researchers, one out of every two lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and allied youths are regular victims of "cyberbullying," which causes psychological and emotional distress to victims--producing thoughts of suicide in some who are repeatedly victimized.

In the online survey of 444 junior high, high school and college students between the ages of 11 and 22--including 350 self-identified non-heterosexual subjects--54 percent of the LGBT and allied youth reported being victims of cyberbullying in the 30 days prior to the survey. Cyberbullying includes attacks such as electronic distribution of humiliating photos, dissemination of false

or private information, or targeting victims in cruel online polls.

Cyberbullying stimulates suicidal thoughts

Among the non-heterosexual respondents, 45 percent reported feeling depressed as a result of being cyberbullied, 38 percent felt embarrassed, and 28 percent felt anxious about attending school. More than a quarter (26 percent) had suicidal thoughts.

"There's a saying that we've now changed to read, 'Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can kill,'" said Warren Blumenfeld, an Iowa State assistant professor of curriculum and instruction and the study's lead author. "And especially at this age--pre-adolescence through adolescence--this is a time when peer influences are paramount in a young person's life. If one is ostracized and attacked, that can have devastating consequences--not only physically, but on their emotional health for the rest of their lives."

Co-authored by Robyn Cooper, a research and evaluation scientist at ISU's Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE), the study . . . [was] published in . . . [last] month's special LGBT-themed issue of the International Journal of Critical Pedagogy, which . . . [was] released on Monday, March 15.

The results underscore the helplessness felt by victims of cyberbullying. Forty percent of the non-heterosexual respondents indicated that their parents wouldn't believe them if they were being bullied online, while 55 percent reported that their parents couldn't do anything to stop it. Fifty-seven percent also indicated that they didn't think a school official could do anything to stop it.

"They feared that there might be more retribution by 'tattling,'" said Blumenfeld, who was bullied as a teen for being gay.

"One of the things we found is that the LGBT students really want to make a difference," said Cooper, who authored her doctoral dissertation on minority stress and the well-being of sexual minority college students. "They want their stories told. They want people to know what they're going through, but they don't want the repercussions of being bullied. So being able to respond to this survey was very helpful."

One in four of the LGBT and allied students responded that they needed to learn how to deal with cyberbullying by themselves. More than half also feared telling their parents about the cyberbullying because they might restrict their use of technology, which Blumenfeld says is often the "lifeline to the outside world" for many young LGBT students who have been ostracized by their peers at school.

A need for greater peer support

The ISU study also proposes strategies for cyberbullying prevention. Eighty percent of the survey's respondents indicated that their peers should do more to stop it.

"One of the strategies coming out of this study--since respondents expect and want their peers to step in more--is that we should find ways on our campuses to empower young people to speak up and act as allies," Blumenfeld said. "In bullying circles, it's empowering the bystander to become the upstander to help eliminate the problem."

Blumenfeld and Cooper recommend developing social norms programming at schools that focus on peer influences that correct misperceived societal norms.

The ISU researchers plan to author additional papers on their analysis from this survey. They also have submitted a new grant proposal to extend their research to a larger national sample that would include face-to-face interviews and focus groups.

SOURCE: Iowa State University.

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Study Shows 90 Percent of Teens Admit Stronger Likelihood of Drinking and Driving on Prom Night, Yet Less Than One-Third See Dangers

Each year, spring school rituals--prom and graduation--begin with so much excitement and promise yet end in tragedy for hundreds of teen drivers and their passengers. New research from Liberty Mutual Insurance and SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) suggests this season could be no different. According to a national survey of more than 2,500 eleventh and twelfth graders, 90 percent of teens believe their counterparts are more likely to drink and drive on prom night and 79 percent believe the same is true for graduation night. Yet, that belief does not translate to concern, as only 29 percent and 25 percent of teens say that driving on prom night and graduation night, respectively, comes with a high degree of danger.

"Newspapers, television, YouTube and Facebook are rife with tales of tragedy from reckless driving on prom and graduation nights, yet an 'it won't happen to me' attitude continues to be so pervasive among our teens," said Dave Melton, a driving safety expert with the Liberty Mutual Research Institute for Safety. "Add to the alcohol factor distractions like texting or talking on the cell phone while driving, or the greater likelihood of multiple people in the car, and the crash potential is very real."

Real it is: there were 380 teen alcohol-related traffic deaths during prom and graduation season (April, May and June) in 2007, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. And the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports 1,009 total teen fatalities (alcohol and non-alcohol-related) in motor vehicle crashes during those same months in 2008.

Alarmingly, parents may be unwitting enablers of drinking and driving: more than one in three teens (36 percent) say their parents have allowed them to attend parties where it is known that alcohol will be served, and 14 percent say their parents have, in fact, hosted such teen gatherings.

Parents play a key role

The Liberty Mutual/SADD study suggests that parents have a tremendous opportunity to enhance their role in deterring unsafe driving behaviors among teens. More than one in five teens (22 percent) say their parents have either not spoken with them about driving safety at all or have only talked with them once. Past Liberty Mutual/SADD research strongly indicates that teens who have regular conversations with their parents about driving safety are less likely to drink and drive, less likely to speed, and are more likely to wear their seat belts.

Further, more than half (52 percent) of teens admit they are not responsible for abiding by any formal or informal family driving safety rules. Yet, the opportunity certainly exists: 64 percent of teens who have not entered into any written agreement with their parents about safe driving rules say they would be willing to do so.

"When parents and teens build their safe driving plans together, it prompts effective, face-to-face communication, which we know leads to safer driving behaviors," says SADD Chairman Stephen Wallace. "Teens want freedom, trust and respect from their parents--exactly what teens themselves tell us a safe driving agreement would provide."

Indeed, 71 percent of teens say a formal safe driving agreement will increase their parents' trust in them and more than half (55 percent) believe it would afford them more freedom. Importantly, those who do have formal driving safety rules established with their parents are significantly more likely than teens who have no family driving safety rules to say such an agreement would encourage them to change their driving habits (44 percent vs. 26 percent) and would make it easier for them to resist peer pressure when it comes to making a decision between safe and unsafe driving behaviors (58 percent vs. 42 percent).

Liberty Mutual and SADD offer a customizable Family Ground Rules driving agreement at www.libertymutualteendriving.com that provides a framework for parents and teens to set and agree to specific rules around key safe driving issues such as speeding, the number of passengers in the car, cell phone usage, texting while driving and curfews. Upon acceptance, these ground rules--with mutually agreed upon rewards and consequences--can be printed and posted on the refrigerator so parents and teens can refer back to them throughout the year.

Other distractions

While drinking and driving is a dangerous behavior unto itself, many teens are introducing other distractions into the mix when they are behind the wheel. More than one in three teens say they often change songs on their MP3 players, speed or text; while more than one in four confess that they regularly drive with multiple passengers or talk on the cell phone while driving.

They do this despite significant percentages who admit the behavior is very distracting. For example, 33 percent of teens report texting while driving "often" or "very often," even though 40 percent find the behavior "very" or "extremely" distracting.

About the Liberty Mutual/SADD Teen Driving Partnership

Since 1991, Liberty Mutual and SADD have collaborated on research and responsible solutions to keep families safe behind the wheel. In addition to the Family Driving Ground Rules agreement, www.LibertyMutualTeenDriving.com also features helpful resources, such as tips on how to talk to teens about driving distractions and dangers such as cell phones, text messaging, speeding, and alcohol and drug use; video demonstrations of safe driving techniques; state-by-state teen driving laws; individual car safety scores; tips on buying and caring for a car; and an exclusive 50 percent discount for teens to take the National Safety Council's online Defensive Driving Course.

Teens also can use the website to remind their parents about driving safety by taking a 10-question driving quiz and then challenging Mom and Dad to match or beat their score.

SOURCE: STUDENTS AGAINST DESTRUCTIVE DECISIONS

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National Study Shows Reverse in Decade-Long Declines in Teen Abuse of Drugs and Alcohol

After a decade of consistent declines in teen drug abuse, a new national study released by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America® and MetLife Foundation points to marked upswings in use of drugs that teens are likely to encounter at parties and in other social situations.

According to the 2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation, the number of teens in grades 9 - 12 who used alcohol in the past month has grown by 11 percent (from 35 percent in 2008 to 39 percent in 2009), past year Ecstasy use shows a 67 percent increase (from 6 percent in 2008 to 10 percent in 2009) and past year marijuana use shows a 19 percent increase (from 32 percent in 2008 to 38 percent in 2009). The PATS data mark a reverse in the remarkable, sustained declines in several drugs of abuse among teens: methamphetamine (meth) was down by over 60 percent and past month alcohol and marijuana use had decreased a full 30 percent over the past decade from 1998 - 2008.

Underlying these increases are negative shifts in teen attitudes, particularly a growing belief in the benefits and acceptability of drug use and drinking. The percentage of teens agreeing that "being high feels good" increased significantly from 45 percent in 2008 to 51 percent in 2009, while those saying that "friends usually get high at parties" increased from 69 percent to 75 percent over the same time period. The Partnership/MetLife Foundation Attitude Tracking Study (PATS) also found a significant drop in the number of teens agreeing strongly that they "don't want to hang around drug users"--from 35 percent in 2008 to 30 percent in 2009.

"These new PATS data should put all parents on notice that they have to pay closer attention to their kids' behavior--especially their social interactions--and they must take action just as soon as they think their child may be using drugs or drinking," said Steve Pasierb, president and CEO of the Partnership.

Dennis White, president and CEO of MetLife Foundation added that "the earlier parents take steps to address a child's drug or alcohol use, the greater the chance they'll be effective in preventing a serious problem. We need to be sure parents know when it's time to act, and how to act when confronted with a substance abuse situation."

Parents not acting early enough, need to take immediate action

The resurgence in teen drug and alcohol use comes at a time when pro-drug cues in popular culture--in film, television and online--abound, and when funding for federal prevention programs has been declining for several years.

This places an even greater burden on parents. Among the parents surveyed for the PATS study, 20 percent say their child (ages 10 - 19) has already used drugs or alcohol beyond an "experimental" level. Among parents of teens ages 14 - 19, that percentage jumps to 31 percent, nearly one third.

Disturbingly, among those parents of teens who have used, nearly half (47 percent) either waited to take action or took no action at all--which studies show put those children at greater risk of continued use and negative consequences.

"We're very troubled by this upswing that has implications not just for parents, who are the main focus of the Partnership's efforts, but for the country as a whole," said Partnership Chairman Patricia Russo. "The United States simply can't afford to let millions of kids struggle through their academic and professional lives hindered by substance abuse. Parents and caregivers need to play a more active role in protecting their families, trust their instincts and take immediate action as soon as they sense a problem."

Discovering that a teen is using drugs or drinking is often a frightening experience for parents--many feel alone, ashamed, and confused about what to do next. The Partnership encourages parents of children who are using drugs or alcohol to take action as soon as they suspect or know their child is using and provides parents with free, anonymous access to the most current, research-based information on how to help their child and their family take the next steps. Developed in collaboration with scientists from the Treatment Research Institute, Time To Act offers step-by-step advice and compassionate guidance from substance abuse experts, family therapists, scientists and fellow parents to help guide families through the process of understanding drug and alcohol use, confronting a child, setting boundaries, and seeking outside help.

Because research tells us that kids in grades 7 - 12 who learn a lot about the dangers of drugs from their parents are up to 50 percent less likely to ever use, parents are encouraged to have frequent ongoing conversations with their children about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and take early action if they suspect their child is using or might have a problem. Parent visitors to drugfree.org can learn to talk with their kids about drugs and alcohol and take charge of the conversation with their kids.

No improvement in teen abuse of Rx and OTC medicines, cigarettes, inhalants, steroids, heroin

According to the PATS survey, teen abuse of prescription (Rx) and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines has remained stable with about 1 in 5 teens in grades 9 - 12 (20 percent) or 3.2 million reporting abuse of a prescription medication at least once in their lives, and 1 in 7 teens (15 percent) or 2.4 million teens reporting abuse of a prescription pain reliever in the past year. Eight percent or 1.3 million teens have reported OTC cough medicine abuse in the past year.

PATS shows more than half or 56 percent of teens in grades 9 - 12 believe Rx drugs are easier to get than illegal drugs. Also, 62 percent believe most teens get Rx drugs from their own family's medicine cabinets and 63 percent believe Rx drugs are easy to get from their parent's medicine cabinet, up significantly from 56 percent just last year.

Teen smoking rates have remained stable with 25 percent of teens reporting smoking cigarettes in the past month. Teen inhalant use remains steady at 10 percent for past year use, yet only 66 percent of teens report that "sniffing or huffing things to get high can kill you," significantly less than the 70 percent of teens who agreed just last year. Inhalant abuse merits careful monitoring--as attitudes towards inhalant abuse weaken, abuse is more likely to increase. Steroid and heroin use among teens remains low at 5 percent for lifetime use.

The 21st annual national study of 3,287 teens in grades 9 - 12 and 804 parents is nationally projectable with a +/- 2.3 percent margin of error for the teen sample and +/- 3.5 percent for the parent sample. Conducted for the Partnership and MetLife Foundation by the Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research, the 2009 PATS teen study was administered in private, public and parochial schools, while the parents study was conducted through in-home interviews by deKadt Marketing and Research, Inc. For more information or to view the full PATS Report, please visit drugfree.org.

SOURCE: The Partnership for a Drug-Free America

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