

News at IU Bloomington

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Annual survey gauges substance use, mental health issues among Indiana college students

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Of the students who had used electronic vaping devices, 81.8% reported using them with tobacco/nicotine, and 59.1% reported using them with marijuana/THC, according to the survey. *Photo by Getty Images*

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Indiana University researchers have released results from the 2021 Indiana College Substance Use Survey <<https://irab.indiana.edu/current-projects/college-survey/>> , an annual survey that gauges the use of substances such as vaping products, tobacco, marijuana and alcohol among college students across the state. The survey also investigated issues of mental health, finding that more than a third (38.7%) of the students reported experiencing periods of sadness or feeling depressed.

"Mental health and the drug use patterns of college students are extremely important aspects for maintaining well-being and academic success," said Maura Pereira-Leon, a research associate affiliated with the Institute for Research on Addictive Behavior <<https://irab.indiana.edu/index.html>> , part of Prevention Insights <<https://prevention.iu.edu/>> at the IU School of Public Health-Bloomington. "Colleges that monitor their students' consumption of alcohol, hallucinogens, inhalants, prescription stimulants and other illegal drugs are better equipped to proactively integrate prevention efforts that are appropriate for their campus."

The 12th annual survey found that:

- 74.5% of students age 21 or older consumed alcohol in the past month, compared to 40% of students under age 21.
- 81.8% of the students who had used electronic vaping devices reported using them with tobacco/nicotine, and 59.1% reported using them with marijuana/THC.
- Female students were least likely to use marijuana as compared to nicotine in vaping devices.

In addition to alcohol, tobacco and marijuana, the survey investigated students' consumption of prescription drugs not prescribed to them, hallucinogens, inhalants and other illegal drugs. Survey results show that 2.6% of the students took prescription stimulants not prescribed to them. The survey found that most students who reported using alcohol, tobacco and marijuana did so before entering college. However, 67.1% of the students who had used cocaine and 62.6% of the students who reported consumption of hallucinogens first did so after entering college.

When it comes to consuming alcohol, the study found:

- 66.5% of the students age 21 or older drank alcohol at off-campus houses or apartments in the past year, and 56.7% did so at bars or restaurants.
- For underage students, off-campus houses or apartments were the most common locations for drinking alcohol (46.6%), followed by residence halls (16.6%).
- The most common reasons to drink alcohol reported by all participating students were "to have a good time with friends" (83.5%) and "to relax" (54.6%).
- 59.9% of students ages 21 to 25 reported drinking "to relax" compared to 48.6% of underage students.
- 38.4% of the underage students reported drinking alcohol "to experiment."

"College student drinking has a negative effect on students' health and may impact their academic

performance," Pereira-Leon said. "Information and awareness programs can help students make educated decisions and reduce their alcohol consumption."

The survey also investigated the level of consequences experienced by students as a result of another student's consumption of alcohol. More than one-third (36.2%) of the students who participated in the survey reported that they had taken care of another student in the past year who had drunk too much alcohol. More than half (53.3%) of the students who drank alcohol in the past year reported having had a hangover, and 21.2% reported blacking out, or forgetting where they were or what they did. Students also reported feeling bad about their drinking (22.8%) and doing something they later regretted (20.9%).

In terms of the availability of alcohol, the survey found that 51.2% of the underage students who drink alcohol obtained it from friends who were 21 or older, 23.1% got it from parents or other adults, and 23.5% accessed alcohol at off-campus parties. Approximately two-thirds (68.6%) of the students who purchased alcohol from a retailer in the past year did so at a restaurant, while 62.9% bought it from a bar.

The survey also investigated mental health problems. College students were asked to share how many days in the past month their mental health was not good, including experiencing stress, depression or problems with emotions.

- On average, students reported 10.2 days of poor mental health in the past month.
- More than one-third of the students (38.7%) reported experiencing periods of significant sadness/hopelessness that lasted for two or more weeks.
- Thirteen percent of the students reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year.

"Mental health education programs are key in helping students identify some health challenges that may need professional intervention," Pereira-Leon said. "Colleges that provide resources to address mental health issues will help students manage symptoms of stress, depression or problems with emotions."

The 12th Indiana College Substance Use Survey was conducted in spring 2021. The findings are based on responses from 8,059 students age 18 to 25, from 23 Indiana colleges: 14 public and nine private schools.

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