

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2001-07-19-child-survey.htm>

Kids in single-dad homes more likely to use drugs

By The Associated Press

Sixth to 12th graders who live in single-dad homes are more likely than others to use drugs, according to a survey released Thursday.

The survey, done by a division of an Atlanta-based anti-drug organization, also found that high schoolers' use of such drugs as heroin, Ecstasy and marijuana increased — reversing a three-year decline in overall drug use. Meanwhile, cigarette and alcohol use dropped to a 13-year low.

The survey was conducted at schools that contracted with PRIDE Surveys — an arm of the Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education — to question students during the 2000-2001 academic year. More than 75,000 students nationwide answered questionnaires anonymously, using pencils to fill in circles on a double-sided answer sheet.

This was the 14th annual survey but officials said it was the first time their group broke down the numbers to look at children who live with their mothers only, fathers only and stepparents.

The survey found that 38.4% of students who lived with their fathers only said they used drugs. The percentages for other family structures were: father and stepmother, 31.9%; mother and stepfather, 29.8%; mother only, 28.3%; and both parents, 20.4%.

Thomas Gleaton, who headed the study, said the results aren't meant to bash fathers. "I don't want people to think, 'Oh that means these are bad fathers,'" said Gleaton, president of PRIDE Surveys.

Rather, Gleaton believes the results are a comment on the importance of a mother's role. "The farther the mother gets away, the more difficult it becomes for the child," Gleaton said.

A spokesman for a group that lobbies for fathers' rights said he had no problem with the survey's findings.

"This is just one more argument why — absent of abuse, neglect or abandonment — there should be mandatory joint custody. Children need both parents," said Stuart Miller, senior legislative analyst for the American Fathers Coalition.

A survey of teens released in February by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that the risk of drug abuse was slightly higher for children living with single moms than with single dads. It also found drug use was greatly reduced in both types of homes when the parents were "hands on," or supervised their teen-agers and imposed rules.

In terms of drug use, the new survey found that 35.3% of ninth- to 12th-graders said they had used any illicit drug in the last year, compared with 34.3% in 1999-2000.

Gleaton said the increase was statistically significant but added that he was not alarmed because a one-year increase does not necessarily point to a trend.

He did, however, note that drug use among junior high students increased only slightly from 13.6% to 13.7% — something he credited to focusing anti-drug campaigns on that age group.

Calling for stepped-up anti-drug campaigns at the high school level, Gleaton noted that similar efforts against drinking and cigarettes also have been successful. The survey found that 52.1% of all students said they had used alcohol in the last year, a low not seen since 1987-88. Cigarette use dropped to 30.5%, continuing a downward trend that began in 1997-98.

"When we as a nation decide to make a change and improve the health, I think we can do that," Gleaton said.

Officials at the White House's Office on National Drug Control Policy say they use the survey as a supplement to such national questionnaires as the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, set for release in late August." The PRIDE findings reinforce what we already know: youth with strong parental influences and access to local support networks are much less likely to use illegal drugs," Edward Jurith, acting director of the ONDCP, said in a statement.

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