
STUDY CONCLUDES: NEARLY 90 PERCENT OF COCAINE USERS HAD SMOKED, DRANK AND USED MARIJUANA FIRST.

Comprehensive National Analysis Finds Consistent and Powerful Connection Between “Gateway” Drug Use and Cocaine and Other Illicit Drug Use.

Washington, D.C., The Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASAI) released a study today showing that children (12 to 17 years old) who used gateway drugs – tobacco, alcohol and marijuana – are up to 266 times – and adults who use such drugs are up to 323 times - more likely to use cocaine than those who don’t use any gateway drugs. Compared with people who used only one gateway drug, children who used all three are 77 times – and adults are 104 times – more likely to use cocaine.

“This study – the most comprehensive national assessment ever undertaken – reveals a consistent and powerful connection between the use of cigarettes and alcohol and the subsequent use of marijuana, and between the use of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana and the subsequent use of cocaine and other illicit drugs,” said Joseph A. Califano, Jr., CASA’s president and former HEW secretary. “An increasing number of American children and teens believe there is little risk in chugging a beer or smoking a tobacco or marijuana cigarette. With the recently reported rise in smoking, drinking and using marijuana by children and teenagers, this report is a wake up call for parents to discourage their children from smoking and drinking and for governors and mayors to **enforce laws prohibiting the sale of cigarettes**, beer, wine coolers and other alcoholic beverages to minors.”

The CASA study establishes a clear progression that begins with gateway drugs and leads to cocaine use: nearly 90 percent of people who have ever tried cocaine used all three gateway substances first. More than half followed a progression from cigarettes to alcohol to marijuana and then on to cocaine.

The CASA study also concludes the earlier a child starts to use these gateway drugs, and the more

frequently, the greater the likelihood of using hard drugs. For example, **children who smoke daily are 13 times more likely to use heroin** than children who smoke less often.

The study is the most comprehensive to date using national data that looks at both children and adults and all gateway substances. The research is based on the 1991 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

“No matter how we looked at the numbers, whether the user was white, black, male or female, the statistical connection between smoking, drinking or using marijuana and subsequent illicit drug use is clear,” said Califano.

CASA’s analysis² reveals:

- Children who use marijuana are 85 times more likely to use cocaine than non-marijuana users. (Ninety percent of children who used marijuana, smoked and drank first.)
- Children who drink are 50 times more likely to use cocaine than non-drinkers.
- Children who smoke are 19 times more likely to use cocaine than non-smokers.

The CASA study also links the use of gateway drugs by children with subsequent regular use of illicit substances as adults:

- Adults who used marijuana as children are 17 times more likely to be regular cocaine users. (Ninety-one percent of adults who used marijuana as children smoked and drank first.)
- Adults who drank as children are six times more likely to be regular cocaine users. (See Attachment B for additional findings.)

Califano noted that the study finds a far more compelling relationship between the use of gateway drugs and subsequent use of cocaine and other illicit drugs than the 1964 Surgeon General's report found between smoking and lung cancer, the 1968 Framingham study found between cholesterol and heart disease, and the 1981 Selikoff study found between asbestos and lung cancer. "Each of these studies led not only to major investments in biomedical research, but no major changes in personal conduct among millions of Americans," said Califano.

Despite the illegal status of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana for children, use of these gateway drugs by under-age youth is widespread. It has been estimated that 3,000 young people in the U.S. become regular smokers every day. In 1998, 22.4 percent of seniors, 15.8 percent of 10th-graders, and 8.8 percent of 8th-graders smoked cigarettes daily, up from 17.2 percent, 12.3 percent and 7.0 percent respectively in 1992. Marijuana use increased from 11.2 percent in 1992 to 12.6 percent in 1998 among eighth graders; from 21.4 percent to 33.4 percent among 10th-graders; and from 32.6 percent to 38.6 percent among seniors. Recent studies show that 52 percent of eighth graders, 70 percent of 10th-graders and 81 percent of twelfth graders have tried alcohol (without parental consent).

"Ultimately, prevention is our only hope for stemming the tide of new addicts. If we can keep our children and teens from smoking, drinking and using marijuana, then we can go a long way towards preventing the use of all dangerous drugs," said Califano.

The study was conducted under the direction of Jeffrey C. Merrill, vice president for policy and research. The Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University is the only national organization to bring together under one roof all professional disciplines needed to study and combat all types of substance abuse – illegal drugs, pills, alcohol and tobacco – as they affect all aspects of society. The Center's goals are: to explain to the American people the social and economic cost of substance abuse and its impact on their lives; to identify what prevention and treatment programs work, for whom and under what circumstances; and to encourage individuals and institutions to take responsibility to prevent and combat substance abuse.

Attachment B

Gateway drug use at younger ages increase the risk for regular drug use as adults:

- Adults who started to drink before the age of 15 are over five times more likely to be regular drug users and nearly eight times more likely to be regular cocaine users as adults than those who started drinking at 18 or older.
- Adults who started to smoke before the age of 15 are three times as likely to be regular drug users and more than twice as likely to be regular cocaine users than those who started smoking at 18 or older.

Frequent tobacco, alcohol and marijuana use among children increases the risk of heroin and cocaine use:

- Children who smoke at least daily are 13 times more likely to use heroin than children who smoke less often.
- Children who drink at least weekly are 8 times more likely to use cocaine than children who drink less than once a month.
- Children who have used marijuana 50 or more times are three times more likely to use another illicit drug than others who have used marijuana only once or twice.

The number of gateway substances used also increase the risk of using other drugs. Compared to adults who don't use any gateway substance, an adult who uses:

- any one gateway substance is 3.1 times more likely to use cocaine;
- any two gateway substances is 19.3 times more likely to use cocaine;
- all three gateway substances is 322.7 times more likely to use cocaine.

Compared to children who don't use any gateway substances, a child who uses:

- any one gateway substance is 3.5 times more likely to use cocaine;
- any two gateway substances is 17.2 times more likely to use cocaine.
- all three gateway substances is 266.3 times more likely to use cocaine.