



Monthly reports on the problems of children and adolescents growing up.

National Drug Use Statistics

Monitoring the Future survey reveals some positive trends for youth substance use

The most comprehensive survey for measuring youth drug use in America has found that use of most illicit drugs remains stable, while use of cigarettes continues to decline.

The annual Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey was released recently by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The survey found decreases in cigarette and heroin use, and most other substance use remained stable. The survey also found that the use of ecstasy (MDMA) was increasing at a slower rate, while inhalant use has gradually declined, with a significant drop among 12th graders.

However, there also were some troubling findings concerning the per-

ceived risk of smoking marijuana — down more than 2 percent — and disapproval ratings of heroin and steroids. Use of steroids increased by almost 1 percent and at the same time,

'Overall, drug use among America's teenagers has remained level or declined ... but we must remain vigilant to the threats that heroin, ecstasy, marijuana, alcohol and other dangerous drugs pose to our youth.'

disapproval of steroid use decreased among seniors.

Since 1975, the MTF has annually studied the extent of drug use among high school students. The 2001 study surveyed about 44,000 students in 424

schools across the country in three grades: 8th, 10th and 12th. The goal is to collect data on past month, past year and lifetime drug use among students in these grade levels. The survey is conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research and is funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).

Highlights of the survey

The reductions in teenage smoking come on the heels of increases from the early to mid-1990s and are excellent news in the nation's battle to reduce the toll exacted by this leading cause of preventable death and disease.

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The home schooling debate: Why some parents choose it, others oppose it

By Randal Rockney, M.D.

"My grandmother wanted me to have an education so she kept me out of school."

— Margaret Mead

I grew up in Los Angeles in the 1960s. I attended Los Angeles public schools from kindergarten through 12th grade and eventually attended professional school at a public university, the University of California at Irvine School of Medicine. When my wife told me she wanted to home school our children I resisted. Public school had been, for me, a mostly positive experience with good teachers in safe and stimulating environments. I also developed a lot of lifelong friendships with my public school classmates.

It never occurred to me not to enroll my children in public schools. Why, I would ask my wife, not put our children in the public schools? Why do any parents choose home schooling over public education?

Home schooling is an increasingly popular way to educate children in this country. On any given day, between 1 and 4 percent of school-aged children are home schooled. Popular

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approval, too, has increased: from 16 percent in a 1985 Gallup poll to 36 percent in 1998. The average home schooling family is larger, more religious and politically conservative than average. Parents who home school tend to have more education and higher incomes than parents who enroll their children in the public schools. Home schooling is legal in all 50 states, though states vary in terms of the specific regulations affecting families that home school.

Comparing performance

Numerous studies have documented that home schooled children perform as well or better on standard measures of academic achievement than do their peers attending public school. In Alaska, where for practical reasons home schooling is supported by the state, data indicate that the longer a child is in a home-based program, the more likely he or she is to perform better than those in the program for a shorter period of time.

Historically, compulsory public education is the more recent innovation. Through the end of the 19th century, a substantial percentage of children received their education at home from parents, tutors or teachers of specific skills. Compulsory formal public education in the United States originated in the early 20th century to meet the basic educational requirements demanded by society, help recent immigrants to acculturate, and promote certain public values while discouraging perceived ills, however defined by the community at the time. In the 1960s and 1970s, though, some parents became concerned that compulsory attendance had replaced compulsory education.

Who chooses homeschooling?

The majority of parents who choose to home school their children do so because of religious reasons. These

parents want their children to learn fundamentalist religious doctrine first and foremost. Their religious doctrine is often cited in support of a conservative political and social viewpoint that emphasizes the family as the center of society. These parents are often unhappy with the contemporary social order and seek to shield their children from influences they deem destructive, whether exposure to these influences comes from teachers, other students or popular media.

Ironically, these parents are more likely to structure their children's learning in a fashion that closely mimics traditional schools. In fact, they will often go so far as to create a classroom atmosphere in the home. They purchase curricular materials that mirror their own beliefs and monitor and assist their children to attain the goals defined by the suppliers of the curriculum. These parents are less interested in a divergent process of education than they are with teaching their children specific knowledge and values, though these parents do tend to become less reliant on outside curricula as they gain experience as home educators.

Other parents choose to home school their children because of dissatisfaction with the way children are taught in school rather than the content of the in-school education. These parents object to the tendency for schools to ignore the diversity of learning styles of children. They value spontaneity, creativity and adaptability more than adherence to a fixed timeline for educational achievement. These parents, too, are concerned that schools too readily sort and label children according to limited measures of ability.

Parents who home school for pedagogical rather than ideological reasons are more likely to experiment with alternative techniques or materials when they educate their children. Rather than instilling a fixed body of knowledge and attitudes, they are more concerned with teaching critical thinking skills.

Another, albeit much smaller group of home schooling parents combine

features of both groups though they most closely resemble the parents who home school for pedagogical reasons. These are the pagan or counterculture parents, who are sometimes given the label New Age. Christian Fundamentalist families choose home schooling to avoid exposure to ideas and values they don't support.

Other families may hesitate to enroll their children in public schools in communities where "Christian Values" are prominent and with policies, such as support for the teaching of Creationism, they find inimical to their sense of reality. The New Age group seeks to instill, first and foremost, a respect for nature and the earth. Like the parents who home school for pedagogical reasons, they are also very concerned that their children learn to think independently.

What do the critics say?

There are many critics of home schooling. Surveys of school superintendents and others associated with organized schooling indicate a lack of support for what is often perceived as a subversive activity. This should come as no surprise, as withdrawing children from school or not enrolling children in school is the most dramatic assertion of discontent with public education that a parent can make. It also removes the children from the educational and behavioral monitoring that is an important function of public schooling.

Some social critics view home schooling, at least in some instances, as fanaticism that should not be tolerated in the interests of a democratic state.

The argument is well expressed by one such critic, David Blacker, in an article from the *American Journal of Education*:

"... a democratic society, in order to remain and reproduce itself as such, has a compelling interest in securing at least a minimal set of civic virtues in its citizens. Foremost among these, particularly under conditions of pluralism such as those that obtain in the contemporary United States, is a minimal

level of tolerance for worldviews and cultural practices different from one's own. Tolerance, in turn, presupposes an ability to grasp that there may be (and in fact is) a heterogeneity of reasonable value commitments held by one's fellow citizens..." [Blacker D: Fanaticism and Schooling in the Democratic State. *American Journal of Education* 1998; 106:241-272]

Public education, that author asserts, is an important counter-force to fanaticism which he defines as a set of beliefs or an outlook which is comprehensive and single-minded to the extent that it informs or directs every sphere of activity within a family or a group. Adults should be free to order their lives according to such a comprehensive and single-minded worldview as long as it does not harm others and is in compliance with society's laws, but imposition of such a worldview on children is inimical to our society's most basic values.

Pediatricians, too, are not in general supportive of home schooling. The only citation for home schooling in the medical literature (Klugewicz SL, Carraccio CL: Home Schooled Children: A Pediatric Perspective. *Clinical Pediatrics* 1999; 38:407-411) presents a survey of pediatricians in two states (Wisconsin and Maryland) regarding knowledge and attitudes about home schooling. Only 18 percent supported home schooling.

Despite evidence in the educational literature that home schooled children do at least as well or better on standardized achievement tests than children educated in school, pediatricians express concern about the educational achievement and maturity of home schooled children.

Also of concern to pediatricians is the important public health role that schools perform, including scoliosis screening, sports physicals, tuberculosis screening, sex education and provision of information regarding birth control and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Schools also provide an opportunity for the community to discover evidence of abuse, neglect and other issues that pertain to the physical and mental health of children. The authors of that study wisely alert pediatricians to the necessity to provide these services to home schooled children.

Making time for socialization

The most common concern I hear when I mention that my children are home schooled is that home schooled children miss opportunities for socialization that presence in a conventional school would provide. This is the reason pediatricians express concern that home schooled children might be less mature than their peers. Based on my family's experience with home schooling, this is one concern I do not share with the pediatricians surveyed in the

previously mentioned study.

My children and most home schooled children spend a lot of time with other home schooled children in shared educational activities like field trips, group lessons, shared curricula or special projects. In one study, 90 percent of home schooled children spent more than 20 hours per month in organized community activities. One very attractive aspect of home schooling is that children tend to be less segregated by age when involved in home schooling activities as compared to what occurs in conventional schools. Socialization with other children and with children of varying ages is a near certainty within a home schooling community because the home schooled families tend to be larger.

Home schooled children often enroll part-time in conventional schools especially in the later grade levels when subjects, for example chemistry, require expertise or equipment that is difficult to reproduce at home. Also, especially in adolescence, home schooled children eagerly take advantage of sports or arts programs offered by the public schools. Home schooled children generally assimilate well into conventional school and have had good success in the most competitive colleges and universities.

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What's New in Research

Childhood eating problems may predict adult disorders

A study of more than 800 children over a 17-year period was conducted to examine the longitudinal course of eating problems in childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The investigators used structured psychiatric interviews of children and their mothers from 1975, 1983, 1985 and 1992 to answer two questions: 1) "How stable are eating disorder symptoms and diagnoses over a 17-year interval from childhood to adolescence to adulthood?" and 2) "Do early childhood eating problems or early or late ado-

lescent eating disorders predict eating disorders in adulthood?"

The study found that having bulimia nervosa in early adolescence was correlated with a nine-fold increase in risk for having the disorder in late adolescence and with a 20-fold increase for having the disorder as an adult. Bulimia nervosa in late adolescence was associated with a 35-fold increase in risk for having the disorder as an adult.

Additionally, anorexia nervosa in adolescence was associated with having the disorder in adulthood. Gender, as well as eating symptoms in adoles-

cence, was predictive of eating disorder symptoms in young adults for both bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. Eating conflicts, struggles with food and unpleasant meals in childhood were all found to be risk factors for the development of eating disorders. The authors state, however, that while eating problems in adolescence were found to be associated with the development of eating disorders in young adulthood, most adolescents with symptoms will not have an eating disorder as adults.

"The relatively high stability of eating disorder symptoms from ado-

