



## Youth Involvement in Substance Use and Drug Sales Related to Increased Unemployment

Results from longitudinal survey data<sup>1</sup> indicated that youth involvement in the use of alcohol and drugs as well as the sale of illicit drugs correlated with state unemployment rates. Analyses of 9,084 respondents surveyed in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth between 1996 and 2004 showed that use of alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine or other heavy drugs, as well as the sale of illicit substances tended to vary inversely with state employment rates. Specifically, for every 1 percent increase in the unemployment rate, youth were 4.1 percent more likely to report use of marijuana since their last survey date, and their frequency of use increased by an average of 0.3 days per month. Youth were also 1.2 percent more likely to report use of cocaine or hard drugs since the last interview and reported an average of 0.16 more days of use of alcohol in the previous 30 days (Table I).

Similarly, youth reported that they were more likely to sell and profit from the sale of drugs as unemployment increased, although the impact was slight (Table II). The author suggests that state unemployment rates can be used to predict changes in substance use, and that increases in marijuana use among youth in the 1990s were tempered by the strong economy at the end of the decade.

**(Table I) Increase in Substance Use per 1 Percent Increase in Unemployment**

	Alcohol	Marijuana	Cocaine/Hard Drugs
Use since last interview	0.9%	4.1%*	1.2%*
Use in past 30 days	1.4%	1.9%*	NA**
Increase in number of days used	0.16 days	0.28 days	NA**
Heavy use in past 30 days <sup>2</sup>	0.3%	0.9%*	.6%*

\* Statistically significant increase.

\*\* Survey did not collect data on use in past 30 days for cocaine and other hard drugs.

**(Table II) Increase in Reported Sales of Substances per 1 Percent Increase in Unemployment**

	% Increase
Reported sale of any drug	0.7%*
Reported sale of marijuana	0.4%
Reported sale of cocaine or other hard drugs	0.5%*
Report of positive income from sale of drugs	0.6%*

**Source:** Arkes, J. (2007). Does the economy affect teenage substance use? *Health Economics*, 16, 19-36.

<sup>1</sup> Data were taken from National Longitudinal Survey of Youth of 1997 (NLSY-97) from youth between 16 and 18 years of age surveyed annually between 1996 and 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Heavy use was defined as 20 days of use in the past 30 days for marijuana, 5 days of use since the last interview for cocaine and heavy drugs, and the ingestion of 5 or more drinks in the past 30 days for alcohol.

Prepared by the Center for Health and Justice (CHJ) at TASC. CHJ works to build, enhance and sustain strong and vibrant communities by promoting policies and practices that stop the cycle of drugs and crime. We conduct research and evaluations, offer trainings, technical assistance, and organizational development in the fields of health and justice. For more information visit us online at: [www.centerforhealthandjustice.org](http://www.centerforhealthandjustice.org)

To receive *Facts on Youth* from CHJ, please send an email to [research@tasc-il.org](mailto:research@tasc-il.org) with "Join Facts on Youth" typed in the subject line, and your name, title, organization, and email address in the body of the message.

©2007, CHJ Chicago, Illinois.