

Taking drugs still acceptable as we get older

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A long-term study has found that as we progress into our thirties illegal drug use is, with some caveats, still acceptable to many of us.

The research published in a book by criminologists at the Universities of Manchester and Lancaster is a follow up to a study that began in 1991, which tracked a cohort of almost 800 young people starting at the age of 14 up to the age of 18.

The story of how the then teenagers used drug and alcohol was published in 1998 in the book *Illegal Leisure: the Normalisation of Adolescent Recreational Drug Use*.

Thirteen years later, the research team have published *Illegal Leisure Revisited*, which updates the progress into adulthood of many in the original cohort when they were 22 and again at 28 years of age.

Many of these young adults, they found, continued to take drugs despite being conventional adults in full-time employment and [long term relationships](#).

A wide range of drugs appeared to be available to the cohort, whose levels of use was found to be close to historically high levels, in spite of reductions in drug taking over the past 10 years.

Senior Lecturer Judith Aldridge from The University of Manchester's School of Law, was one of the researchers on the study.

She said: “Contrary to received wisdom, it seems that not all recreational drug users mature out of their adolescent drug taking and experimentation.

“But far from being out-of-control, the majority of drug-taking adults appear to be pretty similar to those who seek evening and weekend time-out, relaxation and fun through alcohol consumption.

“These adults do not reject the mainstream – their lives, outside their drug use, sit comfortably amongst these values.

“However we see them, they appear to accept drug taking as a fairly ordinary, normal activity that is ‘okay’.

“The fact that most people in our cohort are able to accommodate their drug taking into home, work and family life demonstrates something of their ‘commitment’ to drug use.”

Dr Lisa Williams from The University of Manchester said: “This is not to deny that, as you would expect, we are seeing a ‘settling down’ with lower levels of drug use as the cohort progresses towards their 30s.

“But the fact remains drug use is still acceptable among users - whether absolute numbers rise or fall.”

In the cohort, past year use of any drug fell from around five or six in ten respondents from age 18 to 22, to around one third at the age of 28, and past month use from about one third to one fifth.

Some respondents described how they no longer had easy access to drugs, or how drug use was no longer socially accommodated by their friends.

But others explained how their drug use must be fitted in around other life responsibilities such as parenthood, jobs or even mundane house cleaning.

And others expressed concerns about long-term health effects, though according to the team, this is a normal feature of adulthood at this age, for both drug users and non-users.

Dr Fiona Measham from The University of Lancaster said: “Nowhere is the evidence for normalisation stronger than among what we have referred to as the ‘opportunistic users’ in the cohort.

“A significant minority of adults are happy to partake when the opportunity arises, but do not vigorously or regularly seek out those opportunities and think little of it whether partaking or not.”

Provided by University of Manchester

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