

# Teen contraband smokers more likely to use illicit drugs

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A University of Alberta economics professor has discovered a link between contraband cigarette use and illicit drug use among Canadian teens.

Professor Mesbah Sharaf, a health economics lecturer at the University of Alberta in Canada, recently published a joint study with the University of Waterloo titled "Association Between Contraband Tobacco and Illicit Drug Use Among High School Students in Canada" in *The Journal of Primary Prevention*.

The study shows that 31 per cent of adolescent smokers in Canada between grades 9 and 12 use [contraband tobacco](#) and indicates that teens who smoke contraband tobacco are more likely to use illicit drugs.

"The rate of illicit drug use among the contraband smokers is higher than that among teenagers who smoke non-[contraband cigarettes](#)—sometimes double or triple the rate," says Sharaf.

According to the study, 22 per cent of all adolescent smokers in Canada used cocaine. Among those who smoked contraband cigarettes, 31 per cent reported using cocaine, whereas only 18 per cent of non-contraband smokers reported using cocaine. Use of MDMA (ecstasy) was also more prevalent among contraband smokers (45 per cent) than among non-contraband [smokers](#) (33 per cent). The rate of ketamine and amphetamine use among the contraband-smoking teens was almost three times as high as the rate among non-contraband-using teens—and more

than six times as high for heroin.

This is the first published research to specifically examine the potential connection between contraband cigarette smoking and drug use among adolescents.

"If, as we believe this study shows, contraband cigarette use is associated with [illicit drug](#) use, then intensive effort needs to be made to avoid this—by both government and tobacco companies," says Sharaf.

"Adolescence is a critical period, and most unhealthy habits are developed at an early age."

Sharaf is calling on the federal government to strengthen contraband enforcement and enhance public education efforts to combat this trend.

"This is an important insight, and we encourage the government to come up with measures to tackle this problem," he says.

In producing this study, three researchers—Sharaf, along with Sunday Azagba and David Hammond of the University of Waterloo—used a national sample of 2,136 current smoker students in grades 9 to 12 from the 2010-2011 Youth Smoking Survey conducted by Statistics Canada.

The survey assessed students' past-year use of the following drugs (including some street names for each type of drug): amphetamines, cocaine, hallucinogens, heroin, MDMA and ketamine. The study also showed a significant relationship between truancy and drug use, as well as binge drinking and drug use.

Provided by University of Alberta

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