

New research describes trends in substance use among high school athletes

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Newly published research from Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse (Routledge) reports on the current trends of substance use by high school student athletes and notes an increase in the use of prescription pain medications among football players. "High School Sports Participation and Substance Use: Differences by Sport, Race, and Gender," conducted by Bryan E. Denham of Clemson University, is now available online with Free Access.

In the United States, alcohol and marijuana use continue to threaten the collective health of American teenagers. At least half of the students enrolled in U.S. high schools consume alcohol. Furthermore, while the term "hard drug" often applies to illicit substances such as cocaine or LSD, it also now pertains to prescription pain relievers or analgesics (e.g. methadone, opium, morphine, and codeine). "The study seeks to account for multiple determinants of substance use before attempting to draw substantive conclusions about sport-specific patterns," wrote Denham.

For the research, Denham cross-tabulated quantitative data collected from the answers of 2273 high school seniors who participated in the 2009 Monitoring the Future survey, sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and conducted at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. This study divided the data based on gender and included two categorical factors—race and competitive sports participation. Male participants in these sports were interviewed: baseball, basketball, football, soccer, swimming and diving, and track and field. Female participants in these sports were interviewed:

softball, basketball, soccer, swimming and diving, track and field, and volleyball.

The results did find a few common trends, some of which included: student athletes generally partake in illicit substance use more frequently than non-competitors, potentially due to assimilation with their peer groups. Among all of the sports studied, [football players](#) use the most illegal substances. Males consume more illegal substances than females. White students use substances more than African American and Hispanic classmates. Most revealing, 12 percent of males and 8 percent of females reported using analgesics in the past year, an increase from previous surveys.

"I've studied the use of performance-enhancing substances in [sports](#) for about 15 years, and this study extended that line of research to mind-altering substances," said Denham. "Alcohol has always been available, as has marijuana, but young people also may look to stronger drugs for euphoric effects. If prescription pain relievers are over-prescribed in certain regions, their use may trickle down to adolescents. Use of narcotic [pain relievers](#) may become a habit with some adolescent athletes."

More information: "High School Sports Participation and Substance Use: Differences by Sport, Race, and Gender." Bryan E. Denham. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, Volume 23, Issue 3, 2014. [DOI: 10.1080/1067828X.2012.750974](https://doi.org/10.1080/1067828X.2012.750974)

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