

Harford County OPUS Methods

The OPUS intake project took place in Harford County over 8 days between October 30, 2002, and November 15, 2002. Twenty-eight parents and youths were approached to participate in the project. Of those 28 parents approached, 25 (89%) agreed to allow their child to participate. Of those 25 juveniles approached, 24 (96%) agreed to the interview, and 22 (92%) agreed to provide a urine specimen. Of the interviewed juveniles, 16 were male, 20 were Caucasian, 3 were African American, and 1 was Hispanic. Their ages spanned from 13 to 18 years old. Of the 22 juveniles who provided a urine specimen, 4 tested positive for marijuana, 1 tested positive for opiate metabolites, and 1 youth who was taking prescription medications tested positive for amphetamines.

Heroin

Most juveniles interviewed in Harford County were aware of heroin use by their peers. Many youths claimed that heroin was especially popular in the more affluent areas of Harford County, particularly Fallston. When juveniles were asked why they thought there was a lot of heroin in the Fallston area, one youth replied, "It's all preps." Another responded, "Probably because this area has a lot of money to spend on it." One juvenile stated, "The big time heroin heads are the jocks and rich white kids, not the freaky ravers and punks—they're anti-drug." When asked why heroin is popular among juveniles, one youth commented, "There's nothing to do up here, and parents don't watch their kids." The consensus was that juveniles obtained heroin in Baltimore City. A couple of juveniles indicated that if heroin were not available, users would try to obtain OxyContin or Percocet as a replacement.

Marijuana

Youths reported that marijuana is the most popular and most easily obtained drug in Harford County and that all types of people use marijuana. Although not many juveniles reported that marijuana was laced with other substances, some reported that crack or powder cocaine, cough syrup, ketamine, crystal meth, PCP, and embalming fluid are substances marijuana is sometimes laced with. Although many youths reported that marijuana could be obtained easily, one youth stated that the decreasing availability of marijuana has led to an increase in powder cocaine use, which, in turn, has led to an increase in heroin use.

Ecstasy

Several interviewed youths in Harford County reported that ecstasy, also known as 'E,' was a popular substance. A couple youths reported that ecstasy was considered a "love drug" and a "happy pill." Youths reported that users are difficult to put into a specific social group. One youth stated, "It could be anybody. I know straight-A kids who take it and broke people who take it." Another youth stated, "Youngest I've heard about using it was 12, and it just goes up past that."

Other Noteworthy Statements

When asked about whether they believed their neighborhood or community to have a drug problem, many responded negatively. However, some youths reported that marijuana, alcohol, crack, ecstasy, and even cigarettes continue to pose problems. A large number of respondents reported that some of these drugs pose problems in that they lead to greater levels of violence.

Youths offered several reasons for why juveniles use drugs, including experimentation, to fit in with others, and peer pressure. Others reported that drugs are used to “feel good,” to relax and relieve stress, or because some youths are depressed and want to forget about everything.