

SUBSTANCE USE ON ADVENTIST COLLEGE CAMPUSES

A Summary From Two Surveys in North America

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A drug-free campus is the goal of all Adventist schools, in harmony with the standard of abstinence from alcohol, tobacco, and addictive drugs held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. That goal has become increasingly elusive as societal pressures and availability of drugs have increased, especially legal drugs such as alcohol, which are heavily advertised to college students. Adventist students, like others their age, watch television, see videos and movies, and read magazines targeted to young adults. They are thus vulnerable to cultural influences. A survey of Adventist adult members in 1988 showed that 27 percent of college-age members (ages 18-29) were currently drinking alcohol.

Denial mechanisms, however, tend to obscure reality, especially in institutions that seek to be safe havens from the influences of the world. Just how bad is the problem on Adventist campuses today?

Picture
Removed

*Students who attended
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During 1989-1992, both Andrews University (AU) and Walla Walla College (WWC) were recipients of Institution-wide Drug-Free Schools grants from the U.S. Department of Education. These grants required pre- and post-grant surveys of needs assessments and evaluations. The key findings from the post-grant results obtained in 1991 and 1992 are presented here. A complete report may be obtained by contacting the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency.¹

The campus-wide surveys used standardized questionnaires developed for grantee use, with some data coming from a random sample of classrooms at AU using an Environmental Assessment Instrument (EAI). This tool uses sophisticated word association to produce cognitive maps that show whether students are disposed to be users or non-users. The return rates were 51 percent and 39 percent on the AU and WWC surveys respectively. The samples resembled enrollment patterns for high schools and sim-

ilar proportions of Adventist students. These results are found in Table 1.

Alcohol Use

The level of drinking reported by students enrolled on Adventist college campuses (24-27 percent) is about the same as that (27 percent) reported in 1988 by young adult Adventists, ages 18-29, who were not students on an Adventist college campus.² While the idea that about a quarter of the young adults within the church drink is disquieting, this level is considerably below that reported for college students nationally (87 percent) by the U.S. Department of Education.³ Compared to any public community college or university, Adventist schools are indeed low-use campuses.

The survey revealed some interesting demographic factors. Freshmen at the SDA schools seemed to be the heaviest consumers of alcohol, in contrast to national data that showed seniors becoming the heaviest drinkers. Does the Adventist data represent a “breaking loose” phenomenon that surfaces upon leaving home and secondary school restrictions?

As would be expected, alcohol prevalence was higher among non-Adventist students. Ethnically, Caucasian and Asian students had higher prevalence rates than African-American or Hispanic students on the SDA campuses. Students who attended religious services regularly were

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much less likely to use alcohol or other drugs.

Certain subgroups have higher risks. Socially active students are more apt to drink (43-53 percent), as are those with academic problems. Community students drink more frequently than do dormitory students. When students do use, they are more apt to do so off-campus.

Family members in trouble with alcohol or drugs are a problem for many students. From 12 to 16 percent have grown up in violent homes; 8 to 9 percent report being physically or sexually abused as children. Such students tend to be emotionally fragile and at high risk for academic or

social problems. This high level of students with serious childhood trauma will strain or even exceed the counseling capacity of most Adventist campuses.

Tobacco is the second most popular drug (10-12 percent) on Adventist campuses (compared to 40 percent nationally), and appears to be an increasing problem. Marijuana is used by 2 to 5 percent of the students and other illicit drugs were reported as being used by 1 percent or less of the students. Use of all illicit substances on Adventist campuses is considerably below that reported in the national database.

While most Adventist students know that drug and alcohol policies exist, only about 60 percent think they are enforced. More than 80 percent think the school should provide assistance programs for students with substance problems. At the Andrews and Walla Walla campuses, where such services have existed for at least five years, students exhibited a high degree of trust in the confidentiality of the counseling program.

The most frequent reasons students gave for using substances were to feel good, out of curiosity, and to enjoy a good time socially. Students reported quitting use most frequently when they either realized that doing drugs just doesn't make sense, or they had a conversion experience. The top reasons given for deciding to abstain from drugs were (a) concern for

Table 1

**Any Use of Drugs Within the Past Year
Percent of Respondents Reporting**

| | AU'91 CORE | AU'91 EAI | WWC'92 CORE | NAD* 1988 | U.S. CORE |
|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Tobacco | 7.6 | 13.2 | 12.2 | NA | 40.0 |
| Alcohol | 23.8 | 28.6 | 25.7 | 27.0 | 87.0 |
| Marijuana | 2.1 | 3.0 | 5.3 | NA | 27.3 |
| Other | 0.3 | NA | 0.8 | NA | 2.6 |

*Data on use of substances by Adventist young adults, ages 18-29 years, North American Division Adult survey, 1988.

my health, (b) I want to be in control of my life, (c) commitment to Christ, and (d) concern for my future occupation or profession. These reasons parallel closely the top reasons given by Adventist youth in 1985.⁴

Findings on cognitive maps from the EAI survey showed that non-users at Andrews were less negative about use than non-users on other campuses nationally. Their conservative upbringing was revealed by the high value they placed on family, "wholesome" entertainment, and friendship, but they seemed more naive about drugs and alcohol. Although only 7 percent of the student body matched the EAI "heavy user" definition⁵ in their actual behavior (compared to 26 percent in the reference college), 20 percent of Andrews students appeared psychologically disposed to be heavy users. These findings imply that Adventist students may be more susceptible than we realize.

Conclusion

Positive change occurred in both schools through the FIPSE grants. Drinking levels were stabilized or actually decreased.

These findings document the reality of substance use on two Adventist college campuses. They provide good news as well as the disquieting data. First, Adventist campuses are far safer than public college campuses in terms of exposure to addictive substances. Second, they also offer hope that change can occur through

comprehensive and proactive prevention programming.

The U.S. Department of Education has funded a new grant for Adventist colleges for 1994-1996. This Prevention Consortium grant to Walla Walla College will fund individual campus needs assessments and establish a network for training and sharing prevention techniques. As of late 1994, all Adventist institutions in North America had signed up to participate in this consortium. ✍

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Patricia B. Mutch and Wendy Hernandez, "Substance Use on Adventist College Campuses: Survey Results From Two Institutions in North America," Technical Report 94-1. A Briefing for the Board of Higher Education, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Berrien Springs, Michigan: Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, Andrews University (January 1994).
2. Duane C. McBride, Patricia B. Mutch, Roger E. Dudley, and A. G. Julian, "Substance Use and Correlates Among Adult Seventh-day Adventists in North America," Technical Report 1989-1992. Berrien Springs, Michigan: Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, Andrews University.
3. C. A. Presley, P. W. Meilman, and R. Lyorla, *Alcohol and Drugs on American College Campuses: Use, Consequences, and Perceptions of the Campus Environment. Volume 1: 1989-1991.* The CORE Institute, Student Health Program, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Carbondale, Illinois, 1993.
4. Patricia B. Mutch, Roger L. Dudley, and R. J. Cruise, "A Study of Drug Usage Among Seventh-day Adventist Youth in North America," Technical Report 86-3. Berrien Springs, Michigan: Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency, Andrews University, 1986.
5. EAI definition of heavy user: drinks daily or nearly daily or drinks one to three times a week and has any use of illicit drugs.

