

ABSTRACT

Objective: To determine the effects that perceived benefits and disadvantages along with subjective influences have on the prevalence of ganja use among teenagers 12 to 17 years in St. Thomas, Jamaica.

Method: A total of 210 students were randomly selected from three randomly selected high schools in the parish of St. Thomas. The Ministry of Health/National Council on Drug Abuse School Survey Questionnaire revised to cover the study objectives was self administered to these students in March 2004. SPSS version 11.0 was used for data analysis. Using a structured guide, 18 students also participated in 2 focus group discussions on ganja use.

Results: Of the 210 students (M/F ratio 1:1; mean age 14.3 ± 1.6 years), there was a 31.2% lifetime prevalence of smoking ganja (boys 37.5%; girls 24.8%) and for using ganja tea, 23.6%. Smoking and use of ganja tea were believed not to have any benefits by some students (45.6% and 17.2% respectively) while perception of health benefits and smoking ganja in the last year were correlated ($r = 0.448$; $p < 0.001$). Students' decisions to smoke ganja were correlated with friends' support and householders' support of ganja smoking ($r = 0.250$ and 0.152 respectively; $p < 0.05$). Focus groups revealed ganja being used largely to fit in and to test the truth about benefits.

Conclusion: As perception of health benefits and support increases, ganja smoking increases among teenagers. Subjective influences should be considered in programmes to prevent ganja use among teens.

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