

**Perceptions, Practices and Prevalence of Psychoactive Substances among Students in the Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of the West Indies St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago**

Raveed Khan, Matthew Camacho , Rashad Brahim, Alyssa Brathwaite, Radica Budha, Ranushka Burgess , Rico Carmino , Cherille Cave, Misty Gangar

Department of Para Clinical Sciences University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus

University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus

Accident and Emergency Department, North Central Regional Health Authority

**Abstract**

This paper highlights the attitudes and practices of university students enrolled in the faculty of medical sciences regarding substance abuse. The cross sectional study was conducted over six months in which 308 students responded to a questionnaire distributed via email and social media. The 1-month prevalence rate for alcohol and cigarette use was found to be 53% and 9.1% respectively. Binge drinking had a prevalence of 29.0%. Marijuana was the second most frequently used drug with a 1-month prevalence of 13.4%. In general, alcohol was the most frequently used substance followed by marijuana. The participants showed a positive attitude towards the use of marijuana. While the use of tranquilizers, stimulants and cocaine was present, it was relatively low compared to the other substances. These findings provide a basis for future research regarding the use of and attitudes towards the use of these substances as the implications for their use and misuse can pose threats to the quality of care provided by health care practitioners. Keywords: Cannabis; Ethanol; Tranquilizing agents; Binge drinking; Prevalence; Attitude; Students; Faculty.

**Introduction**

The World Health Organization defines a psychoactive substance as a substance that when taken in or administered into one's system, affects mental processes such as cognition or affect. It encompasses the whole class of licit and illicit substances and of note does not necessarily imply dependence producing and in common parlance, the term is often left unstated, as in 'drug use' or 'substance abuse'. Examples of psychoactive substances include nicotine, alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, tranquilizers and stimulants to name a few. Alcohol, tobacco and other psychoactive substances have well established health risks associated with their use/abuse and is of particular importance to students enrolled in clinical programmes as they represent the future medical professionals that will be engaged in the provision of health-related services.

General population statistics on alcohol abuse in the United States of America in 2015 was reported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. It was found that 70% of American citizens used alcohol in the preceding year. Comparatively, Maharaj RG reported 62% of households included alcohol users in Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) reported that 21% of the total population of Trinidad smoked cigarettes.

**Alcohol**

The prevalence of alcohol consumption within the preceding month was 53% and the lifetime prevalence was reported was 83.1%; however, only 15.4% of respondents indicated that they had consumed alcohol to the point of inebriation within that time with 29% of respondents engaging in binge drinking within the past month. For this study binge drinking was defined as having 5 or more drinks in one setting (Figures 6 and 7). The legal drinking age in Trinidad and Tobago is 18 years old. However, the mean age of first alcohol consumption was 16 years old and a total of 72.9%

of medical students having their first drink before the legal age limit.

### Statistically significant trends

Trends were found regarding the habits of medical students part taking in the use of psychoactive substances. Living arrangements were found to be associated with monthly prevalence of alcohol consumption ( $p < 0.001$ ).

### Biography

Raveed Khan, Lecturer, Department of Para Clinical Sciences, Public Health and Primary Care Unit, University of the West Indies, Building 13, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, Champ Fleurs, Trinidad and Tobago, Tel: +1(868) 740-6289; Fax: +1 (868) 645-3232; E-mail: [HYPERLINK "mailto:Raveed.Khan@sta.uwi.edu"](mailto:HYPERLINKmailto:Raveed.Khan@sta.uwi.edu) \h [Raveed.Khan@sta.uwi.edu](mailto:Raveed.Khan@sta.uwi.edu).

### Conclusion

The strengths of this study include its large sample size and absence of missing data as all questionnaires were completely filled. The ease of completing the questionnaire online and anonymously would have contributed to this finding. Limitations would include its cross-sectional design which does not allow for assessment of temporal trends but rather provides information at a point in time. This study would also be subject to responder and social desirability biases based on the sensitive nature of the questions asked. Generalizability of our findings would be limited based on the fact that majority of respondents were enrolled in the study of medicine thereby potentially skewing the findings towards medical students and not reflective of other students engaged in other career pursuits.

### References

1. González-Bautista E, Zavala-Arciniega L, Rivera-Rivera L, LeyvaLópez A, Natera-Rey G, Reynales-Shigematsu LM, et al. Social factors associated with tobacco and alcohol consumption in Mexican adolescents from populations under 100 000 inhabitants. *Salud publica de Mexico*. 2020;61:764-774.

2. Whitehorne-Smith P, Mitchell C, Abel WD, Harrison J. Psychoactive substance use among medical/health faculty undergraduate students. *WIMJ open*. 2015;2:11-14.

3. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol Facts and Statistics [Internet source]. United States of America; 2015 [updated 2018 August].

4. Maharaj RG, Motilal MS, Babwah T, Nunes P, Brathwaite R, Legall G, et al. National alcohol survey of households in Trinidad and Tobago (NASHTT): alcohol use in households. *BMC Public Health*. 2017;17:347.

5. Pan American Health Organisation. Report on Tobacco Control in the Region of the Americas. 2018. Available from:

6. Dhanookdhary AM, Gomez AM, Khan R, Lall A, Murray D, Prabhu D et al. Substance use among university Students at the St Augustine Campus of The University of the West Indies. *West Ind Med J*. 2010;59:641-649.

7. Soyibo K, Lee MG. Use of illicit drugs among high-school students in Jamaica. *Bull World Health Organ* 1999;77:258- 262.

8. Singh H, Maharaj HD, Shipp M. Pattern of substance abuse among secondary school students in Trinidad and Tobago. *Public Health* 1991;105:435-441.

9. Brandão YS, Correia DS, de Farias MS, Antunes TM, da Silva LA. The prevalence of alcohol consumption among the students newly enrolled at a public university. *J Pharm Bioallied Sci*. 2011;3:345.