Cocaine Use among High School Students in Six South American Countries

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Abstract

Objectives: To compare lifetime and past year prevalence estimates of cocaine use among secondary school students in six South American countries.

Methods: Data are from the 2009 Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) and United Nations Office on Drug Control Policy (UNODC)[1] collaborative study on drug use with national representative samples of over 170,286 secondary school students in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Peru, and Uruguay.

Results: Cocaine was the second most commonly reported illicit substance used following marijuana in Argentina and Uruguay, and was the most common illicit substance following marijuana and inhalants in the other four countries surveyed.\textsuperscript{1} Past year use ranged from a high of 3.5% in Uruguay to a low of 1.1% in Peru.

Conclusions: Cocaine prevalence shows a worrisome pattern among high school students in South America. Rates in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are close to the United States (Johnston, L. D., O’Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., & Schulenberg, J. E. (2009)) [2] and Canada [3]. This analysis provides evidence to support the notion that

\textsuperscript{1} SIDUC surveys do not permit disaggregation of the variety of substances that fall under the category of inhalants. Some substances such as toluene, or glue may be obtained legally, while others such as poppers, or other inhalants may have legal restrictions. For the purposes of this paper, inhalants are being considered among the illicit substances.
cocaine use is a problem in South American countries, particularly among those that have no known history of cocaine production. Implications for drug policy, health among teenagers and education in Latin America are discussed.

**Key words**: cocaine, drugs, use, adolescents, South America

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