



# **YOUTH RESEARCH SLAM 2019**

## **A YOUTH-LED RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT SUBSTANCE USE**



McCreary  
Centre Society



YOUTH  
RESEARCH  
ACADEMY





# Youth Research Slam 2019

A youth-led research project about substance use

This report was created as part of a project to better understand youth substance use and substance-related harms in the context of the current opioid crisis. The project is a joint initiative of McCreary Centre Society and Vancouver Aboriginal Child & Family Services Society (VACFSS) which aims to answer the research question, *'How do social determinants of health impact underage substance use among BC youth, and how might these be addressed from a youth perspective?'*

YOUTH HEALTH • YOUTH RESEARCH • YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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# Introduction



**McCreary Centre Society's Youth Research Academy (YRA) is a group of youth aged 16–24 with government care experience who are involved in research projects which**

**aim to improve the lives of youth in and from care. YRA members learn community-based research skills and carry out research projects of interest to youth in care and the organizations that serve them.**

**The final project of each cohort of the YRA is a six-day Research Slam, which is a fast-paced project that involves carrying out peer-to-peer training with other young people who are interested in learning about community-based research and who want to be involved in a research project.**

Over Spring Break 2019, 14 youth aged 15–24 took part in the third annual Research Slam. We decided to look at substance use and its effect on youth health, as well as how to support youth to make healthier choices when it comes to substance use. Given the current opioid crisis that BC is experiencing, we wanted to see if there were any specific protective factors that could help youth who had lost someone to a fentanyl overdose. We were also particularly interested in looking at the misuse of prescription medication and at cannabis use.

For our project, we used SPSS Complex Samples to analyze data from the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS). The BC AHS was completed by just over 38,000 youth aged 12–19 who were attending mainstream public schools in BC. This means older youth (aged 20–24) and those not in mainstream school were not included in the results, but the survey is representative of over 95% of youth in mainstream schools in the province.

In the first part of the report we describe the profile of youth who used substances. We then move on to talk about the risks and the reasons that youth are using, and conclude with some protective factors. We have also included our reflections on our findings throughout this report. At the end of the report, we offer some of our recommendations for how best to support youth when it comes to substance use.

We hope you enjoy the report and that the findings can be used to support young people in BC.

**—Research Slam Youth Researchers**

# Key findings



Most youth who completed the 2018 BC AHS had not used substances. In total 44% had tried alcohol, 25% had tried marijuana, and 18% had used tobacco. Also, 9% had used prescription pills without a doctor's consent, and 5% had used more of their own medication than prescribed.



Older youth were more likely than younger ones to use marijuana, but the age difference for misusing prescription medication was not as pronounced.



Some youth were more likely than others to have used substances. These included youth with a mental health condition, those with any sort of debilitating health condition, youth who had been abused, and those who experienced deprivation.



Youth who had smoked tobacco or drank alcohol were more likely than those who had not used these substances to have also used marijuana. For example, 54% who drank alcohol had tried marijuana, compared to 3% of youth who never drank alcohol.



Youth who reported that someone close to them had died of a fentanyl overdose were more likely than those who had not experienced this type of loss to have used substances. For example, they were more likely to have used prescription pills without a doctor's consent (29% vs. 8%) and to have used more of their own medication than prescribed (16% vs. 5%).



Among youth who used substances, half reported experiencing negative consequences from their substance use in the past year. The most common were doing something they did not remember and passing out.



Youth who misused prescription medication were more likely than those who used other substances to have experienced negative consequences from their substance use in the past year. For example, 44% of those who misused prescription medication had passed out, compared to 22% of those who had used other substances.



Misusing substances was also associated with poorer nutrition, a greater risk of injuries, and housing instability (e.g., being kicked out or running away from home). For example, among youth who had tried marijuana, those who had used it on 20 or more days in the past month were more likely to never eat breakfast compared to those who had used marijuana on fewer days (43% vs 27%).



Among youth who used substances, most reported doing so to have fun (67%). However, 1 in 5 used them because they were feeling sad, and 24% because they were stressed.



Youth who misused prescription medication were at least twice as likely as youth who used other substances to report using substances because they were stressed (42% vs. 20%), because they felt down or sad (39% vs. 16%), and to help them focus (10% vs. 2%). They were also more likely to report using substances because of an addiction (9% vs. 1%).



Having support from family, school, community, and peers was associated with reduced substance use and improved well-being. For example, the more youth who had used marijuana felt their family understood them, the less likely they were to have used marijuana the previous Saturday, and the more likely they were to rate their mental health as good or excellent.



Among youth who lost someone to a fentanyl overdose, those who felt their teachers cared about them were less likely to have misused prescription medication. They were also more likely to feel hopeful for their future and to expect to go on to post-secondary education.



Youth (including those who had lost someone to a fentanyl overdose) who felt that an adult in their community really cared about them were less likely to have misused prescription medication than those who did not feel this way.



Keeping busy by taking part in extracurricular activities was associated with reduced substance use, including lower rates of recent marijuana use among youth who used marijuana. Also, youth who found these activities meaningful were less likely to use substances than those who did not feel this way about their activities. For example, among youth who lost someone to a fentanyl overdose, those who felt their activities were meaningful were less likely to have misused prescription medication and were more likely to feel hopeful for their future.



If youth have friends with healthy attitudes about substance use, they might experience healthy peer pressure. For example, among youth who had tried marijuana, those who had friends who would be upset with them for using marijuana were less likely to have used it the previous Saturday (16% vs 34% of those who did not have friends who would be upset with them for using marijuana).



# Substance use overview

Using data from the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, we looked at the different substances used by BC youth (aged 12-19). We were particularly interested in youth who used marijuana and in those who might be misusing prescription medication.

## Marijuana

A quarter (25%) of BC youth had tried marijuana. If youth were to use marijuana, they most commonly first tried it at the age of 14 or 15.

Fewer than 1% of youth had been prescribed medical marijuana, including 0.3% who currently had a prescription and 0.3% who had previously had a prescription.

## Tobacco

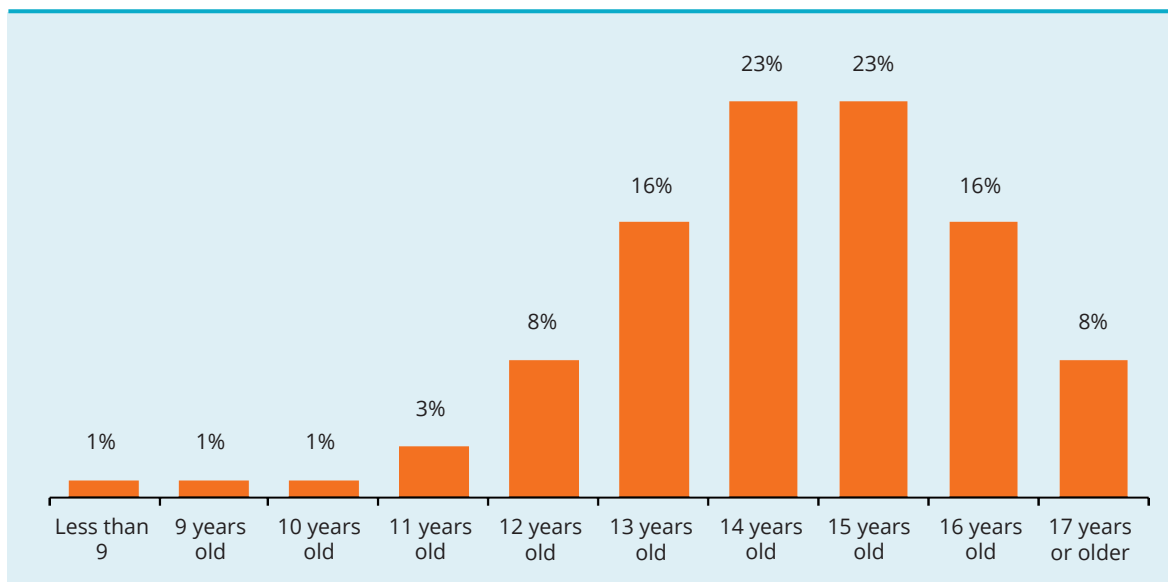
A total of 18% of youth had smoked tobacco. Most youth who had smoked tobacco had also used marijuana (81%), whereas 13% of youth who had not smoked tobacco had used marijuana.

As was the case with marijuana, if youth were to smoke tobacco, the most common age to first do so was 14 or 15 years old.

## Alcohol

Forty-four percent of youth had tried alcohol. Among these youth, 54% had also tried marijuana. In comparison, 3% of youth who never drank alcohol had tried marijuana.

AGE YOUTH TRIED MARIJUANA, AMONG THOSE WHO TRIED IT

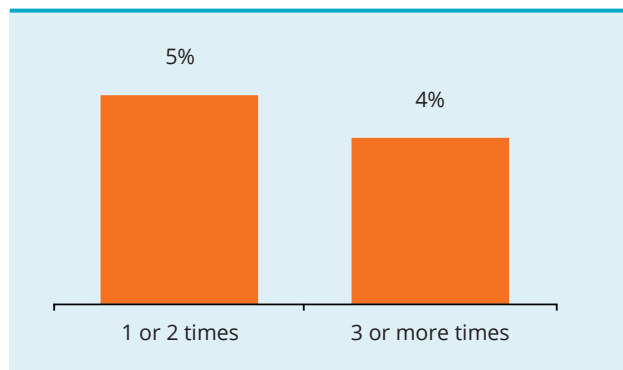


## Prescription medication

In this report, “misuse of prescription medication” refers to youth who used prescription pills without a doctor’s consent or/and more of their own medication than prescribed.

Nine percent of youth had used prescription pills without a doctor’s consent and 5% had used more of their own medication than prescribed. Overall, 12% had misused prescription medication.

### YOUTH WHO USED PRESCRIPTION PILLS WITHOUT A DOCTOR’S CONSENT



### Our reflections

*“The misuse of prescription pills is more common than I initially thought.”*

*“With the abundance of social media influencers and musicians who use substances—particularly prescription pills—I’m not overly surprised high school aged youth are experimenting with them. Considering the fentanyl/carfentanyl crisis, it’s worrisome. Where are they getting their substances?”*

*“The survey should also ask about misusing over-the-counter medication, such as cough syrup and cold and flu medicine.”*



# Profile of youth who use substances

Some youth were more likely than others to have used substances. We looked at some of the characteristics and experiences that might mean youth were more likely to use substances, and particularly to use marijuana and misuse prescription medication.

## Age and gender

Older youth were more likely than younger ones to have tried marijuana, while the age differences for misusing prescription medication were not as large.

There were no gender differences in ever using marijuana. However, females were slightly more likely than males to have misused prescription medication (13% vs. 11%), and non-binary youth were the most likely to have done so (21%).

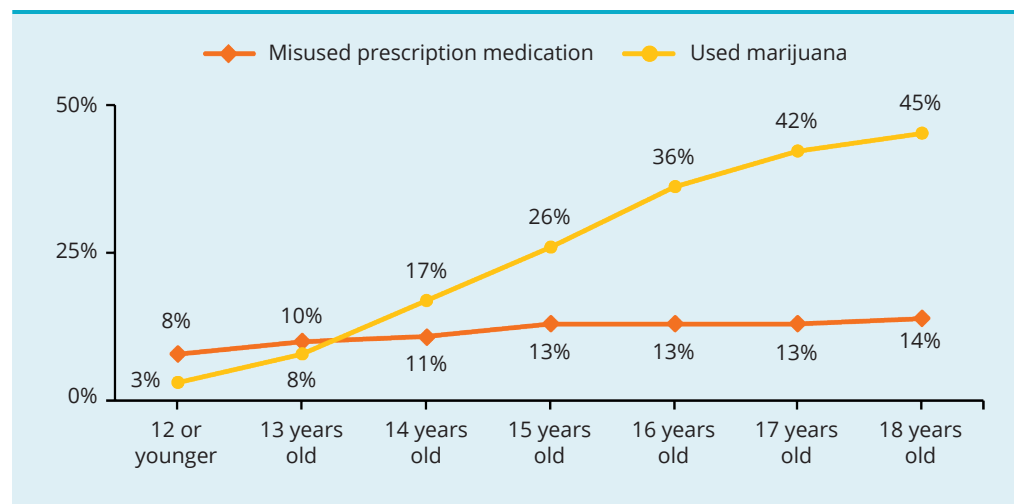


## Our reflections

*"Stigma around different drugs might affect the age at which youth use them. Marijuana is thought to be more harmful than misusing prescription pills, and so younger youth (12 or younger) might be more likely to try pills than marijuana. Misusing prescription pills might not have the same stigma attached to it."*

*"Prescription pills are more accessible than marijuana for younger youth, because pills are often in their parents' medicine cabinets."*

## YOUTH WHO MISUSED PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION OR TRIED MARIJUANA



## Deprivation

Youth who felt deprived of certain items were more likely than their peers who had those items to have tried marijuana. These included money to spend on themselves, clothes to fit in, lunch for school/money to buy lunch, clothes/equipment for extracurricular activities, money for school supplies/school trips, and a quiet place to sleep.

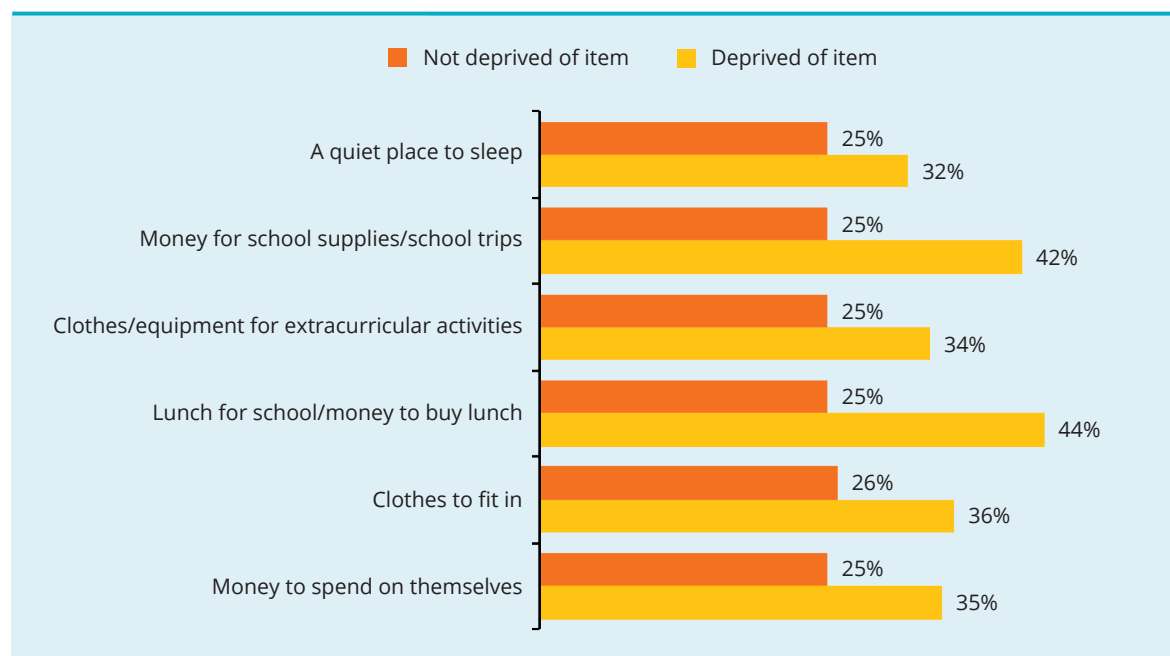


### Our reflections

*"As a youth who grew up below the poverty line and felt personally deprived of some of these things (lunch money, access to funds for school trips, etc.), these findings make a lot of sense. As I aged, I saw the youth who had similar home lives begin to experiment with substances—those who similarly felt there was little point in trying to get ahead in life because of how far behind our peers we started. A bus pass, hot lunch program, and feeling as though my teachers understood me and supported my goals were a few protective factors that worked in my case—though youth are all unique and what works for one may not work for another."*

*"Feeling deprived of necessary things might be linked to mental health challenges, which is connected to substance use."*

## YOUTH WHO USED MARIJUANA



## Mental health challenges

Youth with a mental health condition (such as depression, anxiety, etc.) were more likely than those without a mental health condition to have used marijuana (45% vs. 22%) and alcohol (64% vs. 40%). They were also more likely to have smoked tobacco (17% vs. 6%), vaped with nicotine (33% vs. 19%), and vaped without nicotine in the past month (28% vs. 17%).

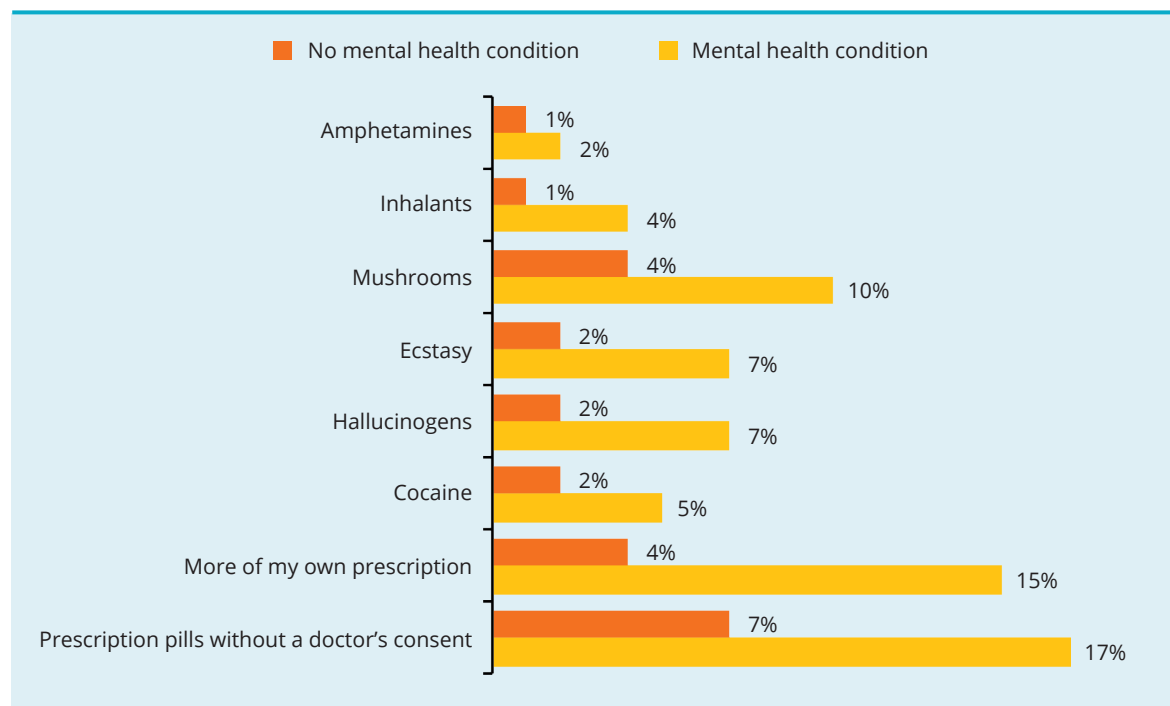
In addition, youth with a mental health condition were more likely to have used other substances, such as prescription pills without a doctor's consent, more of their own prescription medication than prescribed, cocaine, hallucinogens, ecstasy, mushrooms, inhalants, amphetamines, crystal meth (1% vs. <1%), and heroin (1% vs. <1%).



### Our reflections

*"If youth are depressed or anxious, they might use substances as a way to cope, such as to feel relaxed and comfortable."*

## YOUTH WHO USED SUBSTANCES



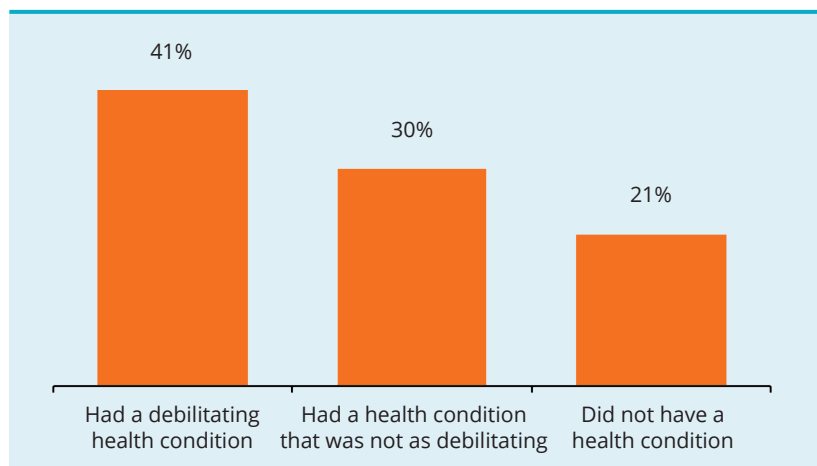
## Suicide ideation

Youth who had seriously considered killing themselves in the past year were more likely to use substances than those who had not seriously contemplated suicide. For example, they were more likely to have ever used alcohol (63% vs. 40%) and marijuana (42% vs. 22%), and to have used these substances regularly in the past month.

## Debilitating health condition

Youth with a debilitating health condition or disability were also at greater risk of using substances. For example, those with a health condition that prevented them from doing things their peers could do were more likely to have tried marijuana than those with a health condition that was not so debilitating. Youth without a health condition were the least likely to have used marijuana.

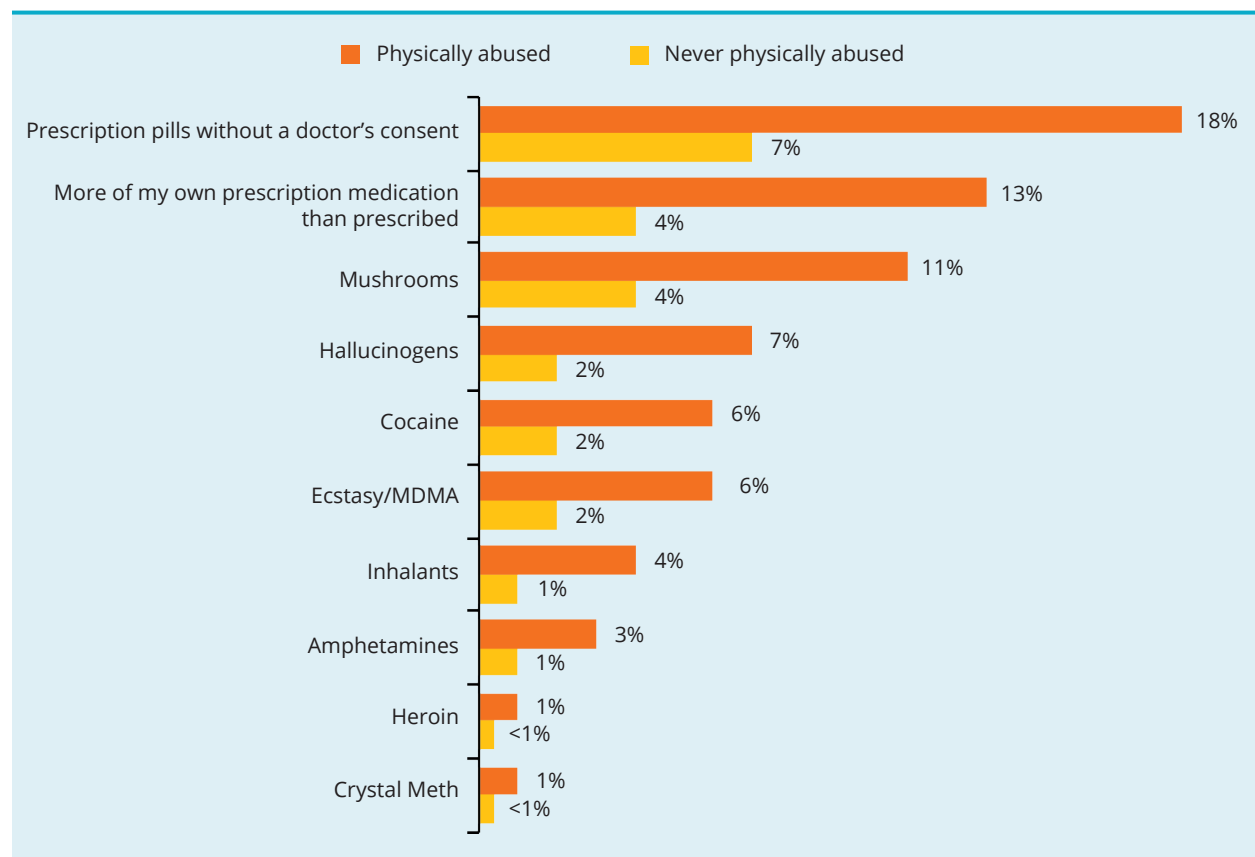
YOUTH WHO USED MARIJUANA



## Experienced abuse

Youth who had been abused were more likely to have used substances than those who had not been abused. For example, those who had been physically abused were over twice as likely as those who had not been physically abused to have used prescription pills without a doctor's consent, and were around three times as likely to have used more of their own prescription medication than prescribed.

### PHYSICAL ABUSE IN RELATION TO SUBSTANCE USE



## Lost someone to a fentanyl overdose

Two percent of students reported that someone close to them had died of a fentanyl overdose. Those who had experienced this type of loss were more likely to have used substances than those who had not experienced this type of loss. For example, they were over three times as likely to have used prescription pills without a doctor's consent.

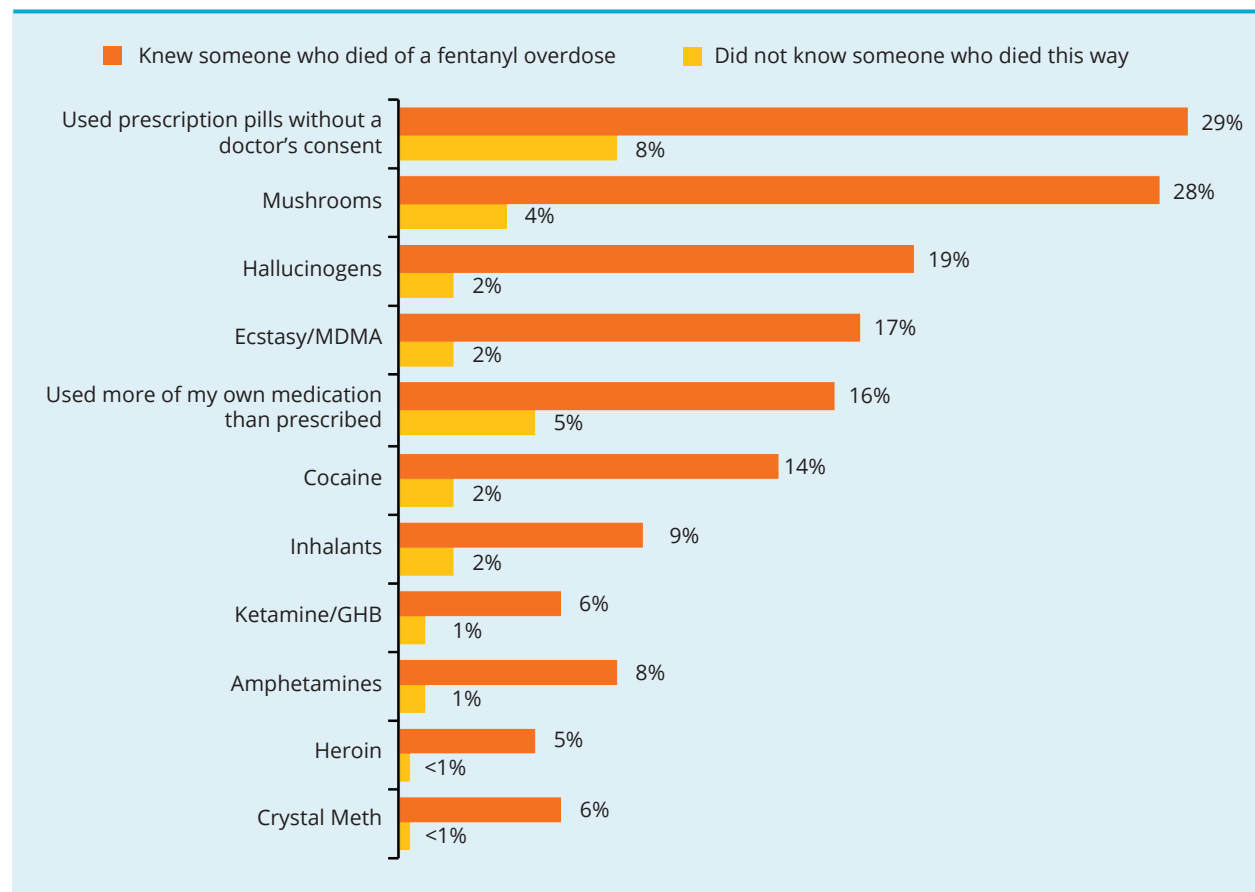


### Our reflections

*"If you know someone who died of a fentanyl overdose, you're more likely to use substances yourself, maybe because of peer influence. Also, maybe when youth lose someone to a fentanyl overdose, they feel sad and start using drugs to cope."*

*"Youth might think that prescription pills are safer to use than other substances, because of the fentanyl crisis. That might explain why such a large percentage of those who knew someone who died from a fentanyl overdose reported using prescription pills without a doctor's consent."*

## KNOWING SOMEONE WHO DIED OF A FENTANYL OVERDOSE IN RELATION TO YOUTH'S OWN SUBSTANCE USE

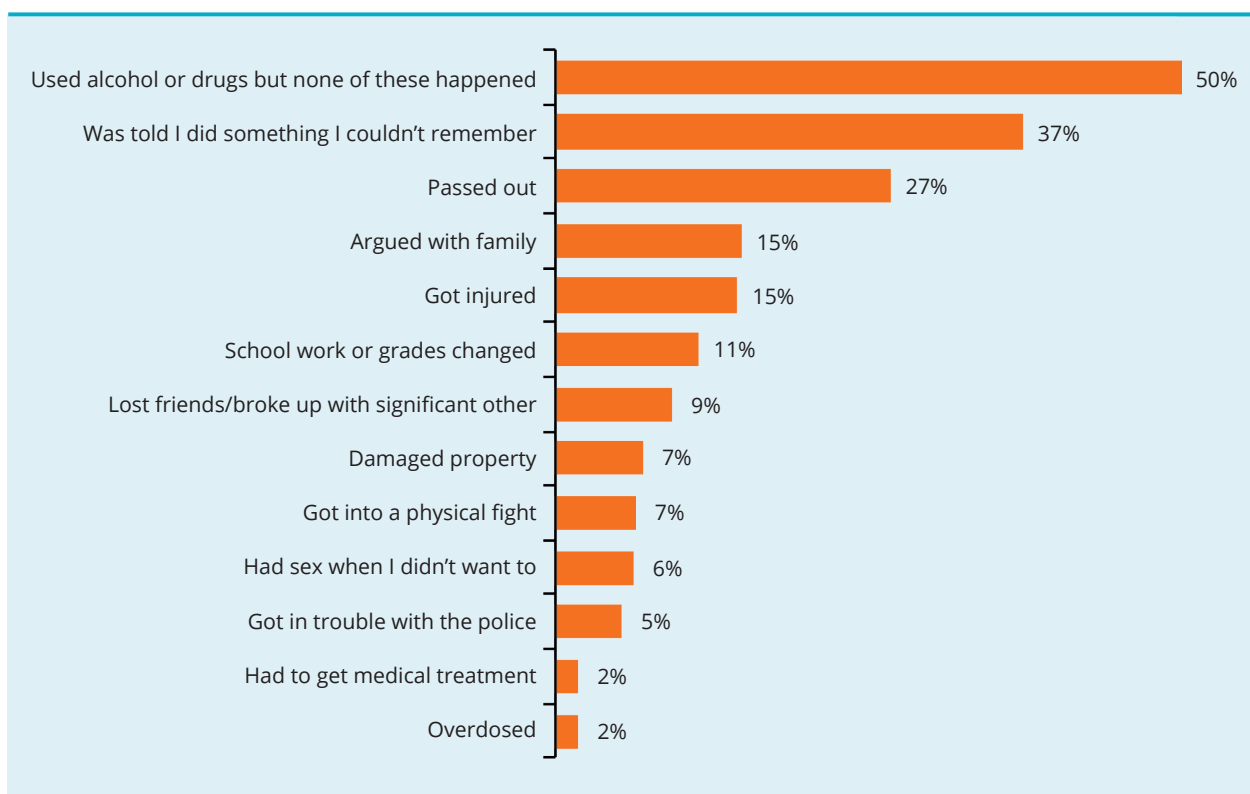




# Risks associated with substance use

Youth were asked what (if anything) happened to them in the past year because they were drinking alcohol or using other substances. Half reported experiencing negative consequences, and the most common were doing something they did not remember, and passing out.

## THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED IN THE PAST YEAR DUE TO DRINKING ALCOHOL OR USING OTHER SUBSTANCES, AMONG THOSE WHO USED SUBSTANCES



Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

Among students who misused prescription medication, most reported experiencing negative consequences from their substance use in the past year. The most common consequences were the same as those among youth who used other substances, but the percentages were higher for those who misused prescription medication. For example, 44% of those who misused prescription medication had passed out, compared to 22% of those who had used other substances (but not prescription medication).

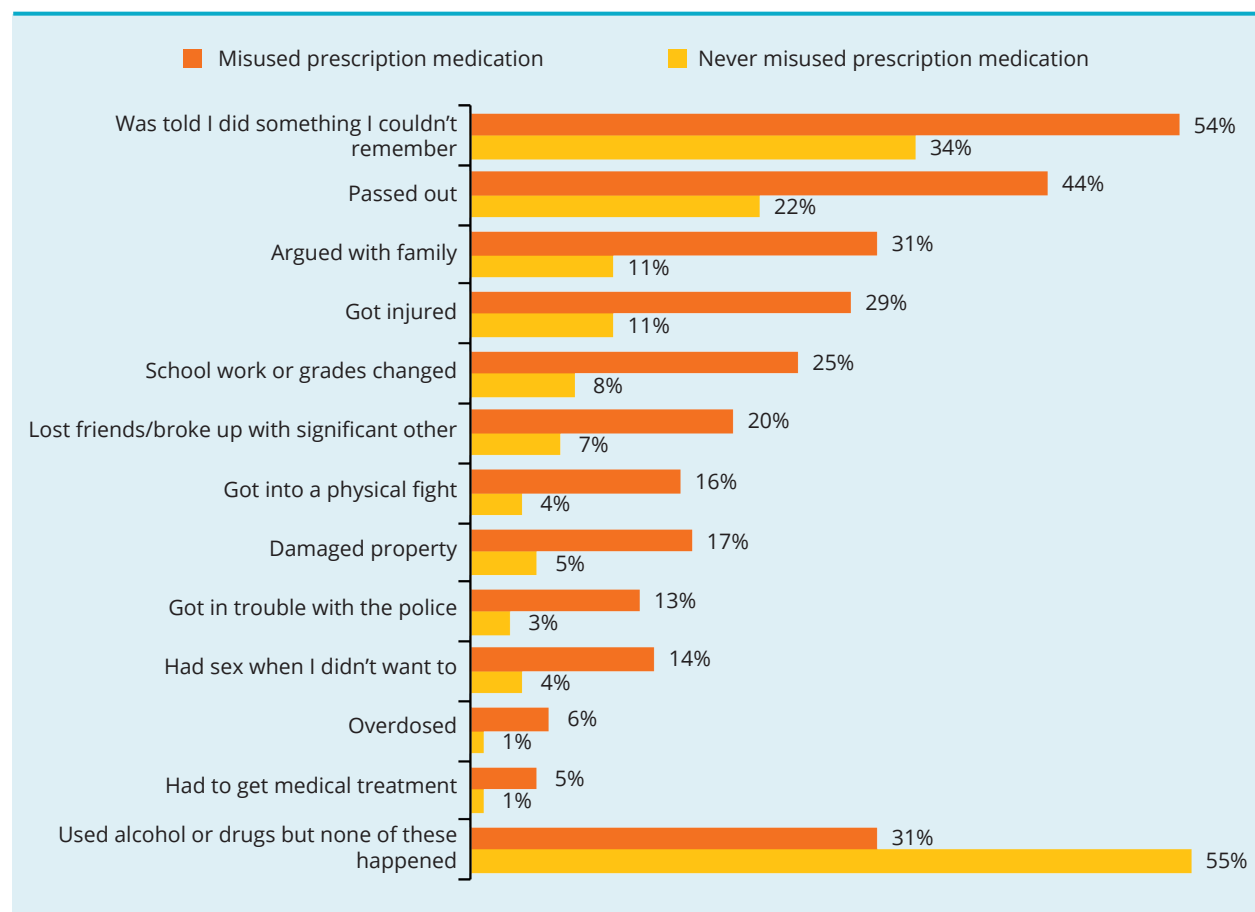


## Our reflections

*"It's surprising that youth who misused prescription pills were more likely to report negative consequences of substance use compared to youth who used other substances. I don't think a lot of youth realize the negative effects that misusing prescription pills can have on them."*

*"People don't understand the consequences of misusing prescription pills. There isn't the same messaging around it as there is for other substances. More education is needed about prescription pill misuse."*

## CONSEQUENCES OF SUBSTANCE USE, AMONG YOUTH WHO USED SUBSTANCES



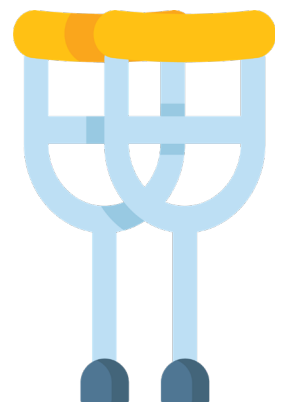
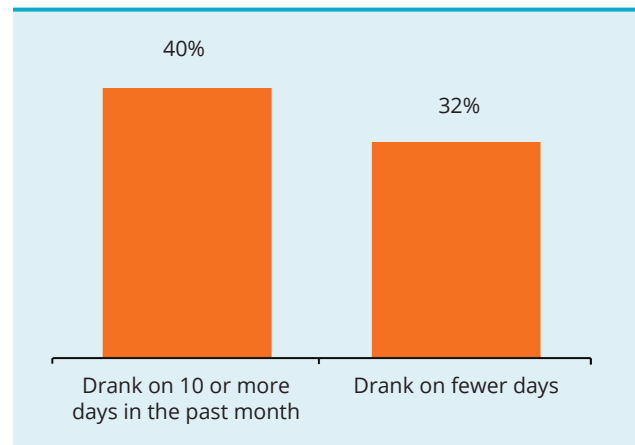
Note: Youth could mark all that applied.

We also looked at substance use in relation to other risky behaviours and experiences, which are described next.

## Injuries

Youth who used substances were more likely to have been injured seriously enough to need medical attention in the past year. This included youth who used marijuana (33% were injured vs. 23% who had never used it) and prescription pills without a doctor's consent (35% vs. 25%). Also, those who drank on 10 or more days in the past month were more likely to have been seriously injured than those who drank on fewer days.

**YOUTH WHO WERE INJURED SERIOUSLY ENOUGH TO NEED MEDICAL ATTENTION IN THE PAST YEAR, AMONG THOSE WHO HAD TRIED ALCOHOL**



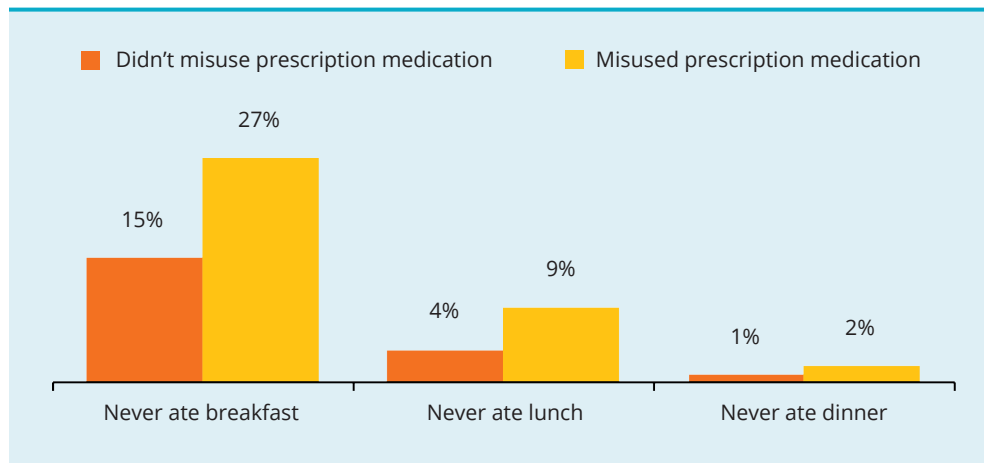
## Poor nutrition

Among youth who had tried marijuana, those who used it in the past month were more likely than those who had not used it recently to have eaten fast food the day before taking the survey (54% vs. 49%), and to have eaten fast food three or more times that day (9% vs. 7%). They were also more likely to have drunk pop or soda (44% vs. 39%) and energy drinks (15% vs. 10%) the previous day.

Also, youth who used marijuana on 20 or more days in the past month were more likely to never eat breakfast compared to those who used marijuana on fewer days (43% vs. 27%; among those who had tried marijuana).

Similarly, youth who misused prescription medication were more likely to skip meals on school days compared to those who never misused prescription medication.

### YOUTH WHO NEVER ATE MEALS ON SCHOOL DAYS



## Housing instability

Youth who used marijuana in the past 30 days were more likely to have been kicked out of their home in the past year compared to those who had not used marijuana this recently (16% vs 4%), and they were more likely to have been kicked out three or more times (3% vs. 1%).

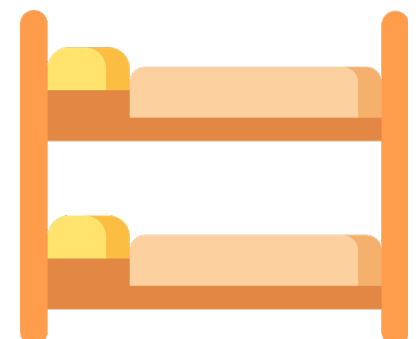
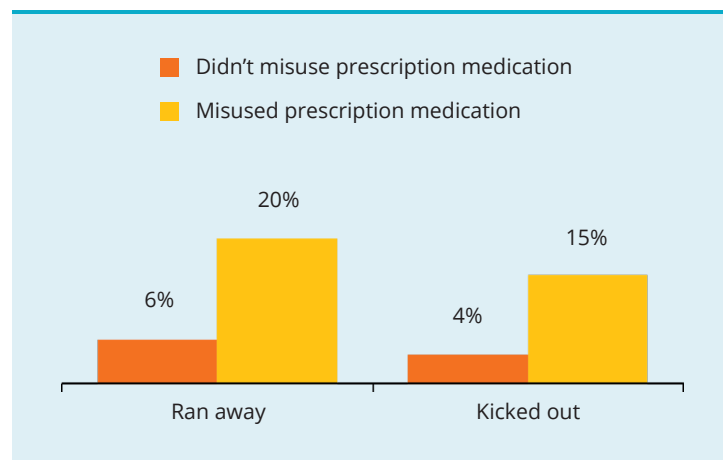
Also, youth who used marijuana in the past month were more likely to have run away from home in the past year (19% vs. 6%), and to have done so three or more times (4% vs. 1%). Similar patterns were found for youth who misused prescription medication.



### Our reflections

*"I think it's important to keep in mind that correlation doesn't equal causation. For example, smoking marijuana doesn't necessarily cause youth to be kicked out. They may have been kicked out for other reasons and might be using marijuana as a way to cope with their situation and other challenges in their lives."*

### YOUTH WHO RAN AWAY FROM HOME OR WERE KICKED OUT IN THE PAST YEAR



# Reasons for using substances

Among youth who used substances, they most commonly reported doing so to have fun. However, some used substances for other reasons, such as because they were feeling sad or because of stress.



## Our reflections

*"It might be that youth are using substances and misusing pills because they're struggling with stress management and self-care. Maybe they're missing a network of support, structure, and caring connections, which might be contributing to their misuse of substances."*

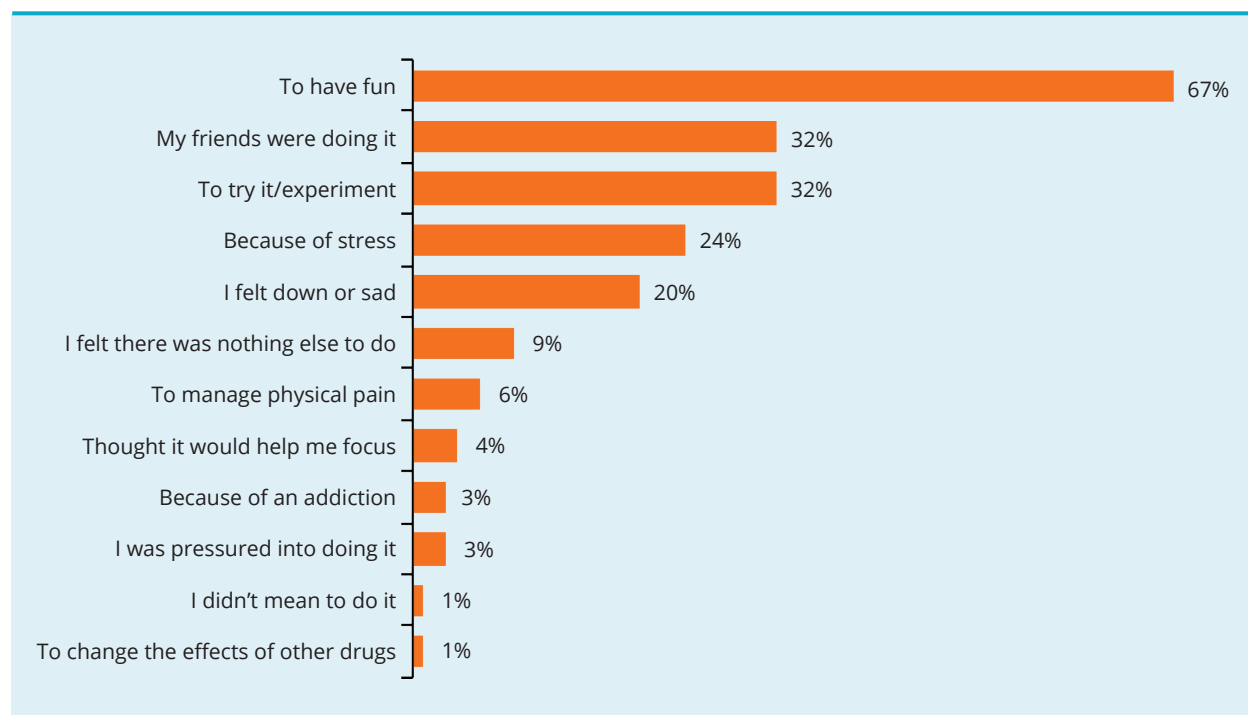
*"Youth use substances for a variety of reasons, including mental health challenges. It's important to find ways to support youth with the challenges in their lives, which could help to lower their substance use."*

*"I'm surprised that the percentage who used substances because of stress wasn't higher."*

*"I thought that being peer pressured into using substances would have been higher because a lot of people talk about how using substances starts from someone pressuring you to do it, but only 3% were pressured."*



## REASONS FOR USING SUBSTANCES THE LAST TIME, AMONG YOUTH WHO USED SUBSTANCES



Note: Youth could mark all that applied.



### Our reflections

Youth who misused prescription medication were at least twice as likely as youth who used other substances (but not prescription medication) to report using substances because they were stressed (42% vs. 20%), because they felt down or sad (39% vs. 16%), and to help them focus (10% vs. 2%). They were also more likely to report using substances because of an addiction (9% vs. 1%).

*"Different drugs are perceived in different ways—for example, misusing prescription pills might be seen as helping to alleviate stress and to cope, while other substances (e.g., alcohol) might be seen as party drugs and are used to have fun."*

*"Pills are accessible and can be used in secret. It's common to misuse them for stress reasons."*

*"There's not much awareness that misusing prescription pills can cause an addiction."*

# Protective factors

This section looks at protective factors and supports that are associated with reduced substance use and improved well-being.

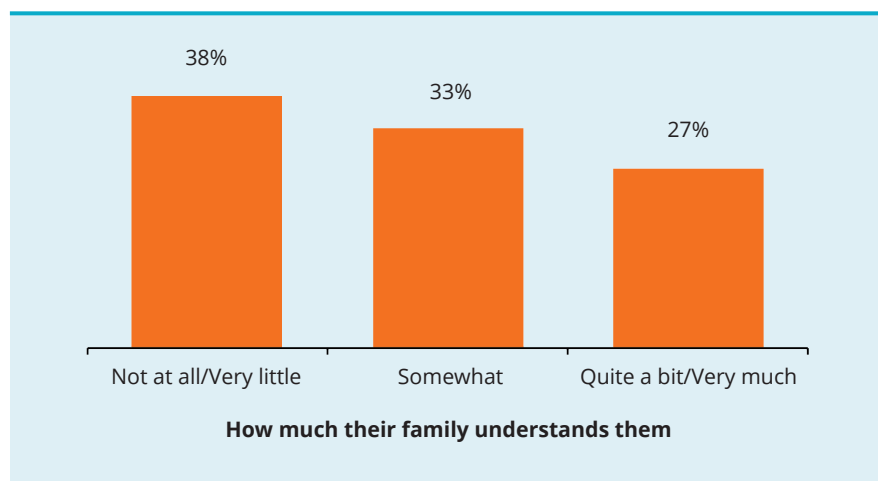
Results in an earlier section showed that youth who reported that someone close to them had died of a fentanyl overdose were more likely to have used substances themselves. In this section, we included analyses of protective factors among these youth to see how they can be supported.

## Family supports

Youth who had tried marijuana were less likely than those who had never tried it to feel that their family understood them. However, among youth who had tried marijuana, those who did feel that their family understood them were less likely to have used marijuana on 20 or more days in the past month, compared to those who felt their family did not understand them (8% vs. 14%). Also, the more they felt their family understood them, the less likely they were to have used marijuana last Saturday, and the more likely they were to rate their mental health as good or excellent.

Youth who had a trusted adult inside their family were less likely than those who did not have a trusted adult in their family to have tried alcohol (40% vs. 55%), tobacco (15% vs. 26%), and marijuana (21% vs. 35%). They were also less likely to have used prescription pills without a doctor's consent (7% vs. 13%), and less likely to have done so three or more times (3% vs. 6%). In addition, they were less likely to have used more of their own medication than prescribed (4% vs. 9%), and to have done so three or more times (2% vs. 4%).

USED MARIJUANA LAST SATURDAY, AMONG YOUTH WHO TRIED MARIJUANA





Use of other substances, such as cocaine, amphetamines, inhalants, and hallucinogens were also lower if youth had an adult in their family they felt comfortable talking to if they had a serious problem.

Also, among youth who had used marijuana, those who had an adult in their family they could turn to if they had a serious problem were less likely to have used marijuana the previous Saturday (30% vs. 35%). In addition, those who approached a family member for help in the past year and found them helpful were less likely to have experienced negative consequences of their substance use in the past year compared to those who did not find a family member helpful (59% vs. 70%; among youth who used marijuana).

Among youth who had lost someone to a fentanyl overdose and turned to a family member for support, those who found their relative helpful were less likely than those who did not find their relative helpful to have used more of their own prescription medication than prescribed. They were also more likely to feel happy in the past month.

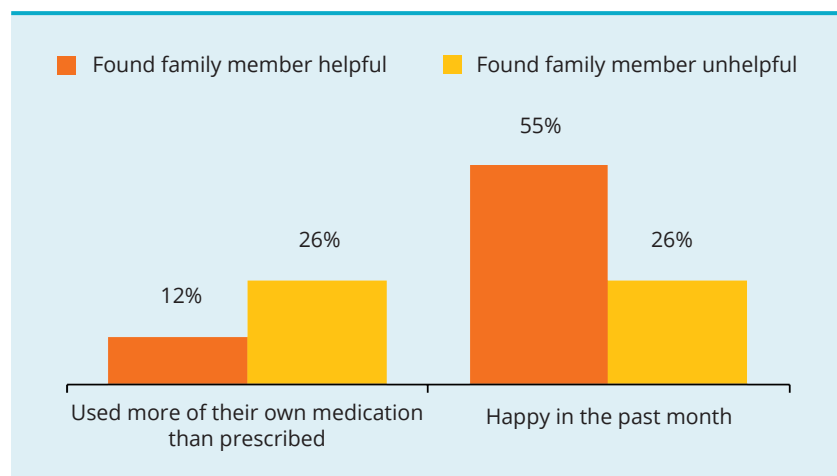


## Our reflections

*"Not every youth has a supportive family to lean on. Schools/communities need to start picking up the slack more. 'It takes a village.'"*

*"Family members can be unhelpful when they force their children to listen to them without trying to understand them. Parents should listen to what children say, and try to find the reasons that they act the way they do. They can find the way to help their kids once they know why."*

### HELPFULNESS OF FAMILY MEMBERS, AMONG THOSE WHO ASKED A FAMILY MEMBER FOR HELP IN THE PAST YEAR AND HAD LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE



## Schools supports & connectedness

Among youth who tried marijuana, those who approached a teacher for help in the past year and found their teacher helpful were less likely to have used marijuana on six or more days in the past month (21% vs. 29% who found a teacher unhelpful).

Youth who used marijuana had lower rates of feeling like part of their school, compared to those who did not use it. However, those who smoked marijuana and felt like a part of their school were less likely to have used marijuana on most days in the past month and to have used it on the Saturday before taking the survey, compared to those who did not feel like a part of their school.

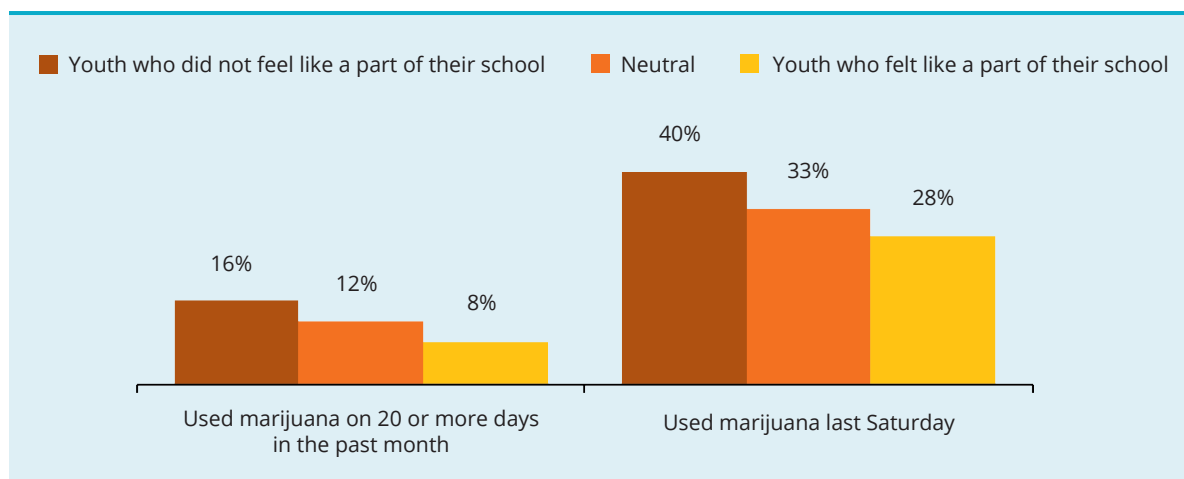


### Our reflections

*"People who feel like a part of their school are often involved in school activities. This can help to keep them busy and to lower their substance use. If they're not engaged in school activities, they're less likely to feel connected to school and might have a peer group outside of school who use substances, which can influence their own use."*

*"Lack of permanency is a real issue for both youth in/from care and those in poverty (having to move due to struggles with rent). This gets worse when youth have to switch schools along with moving. So when possible, youth should be encouraged to stay at their original school unless they specifically ask to be transferred. This would help them feel more connected to school, and they might be less inclined to use substances."*

### SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS AND MARIJUANA USE, AMONG THOSE WHO USED MARIJUANA



Among youth who lost someone to a fentanyl overdose, those who felt their teachers cared about them were less likely to have misused prescription medication. They were also more likely to feel hopeful for their future (63% vs. 35% who felt their teachers did not care about them), and to expect to go on to post-secondary education (81% vs. 67%).



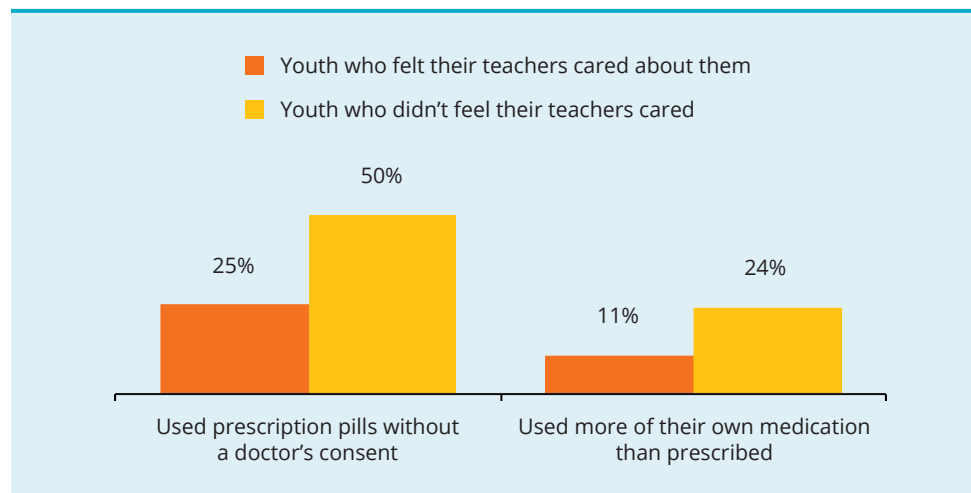
## Our reflections

*"Teachers who care are those who are understanding without being judgmental. They don't give up on you, and they strive to help you succeed no matter what."*

*"Homework gets stressful, and when youth don't have help available at home or at school it's easy to feel stranded and to give up. But if they have a caring teacher, it helps them know they're not alone."*

*"With the number of students that one teacher is responsible for, it's understandable that they aren't able to take on further responsibility, but schools need to find a way to be non-judgmental and confidential so that youth feel safe and comfortable disclosing personal information that enables harm-reduction strategies."*

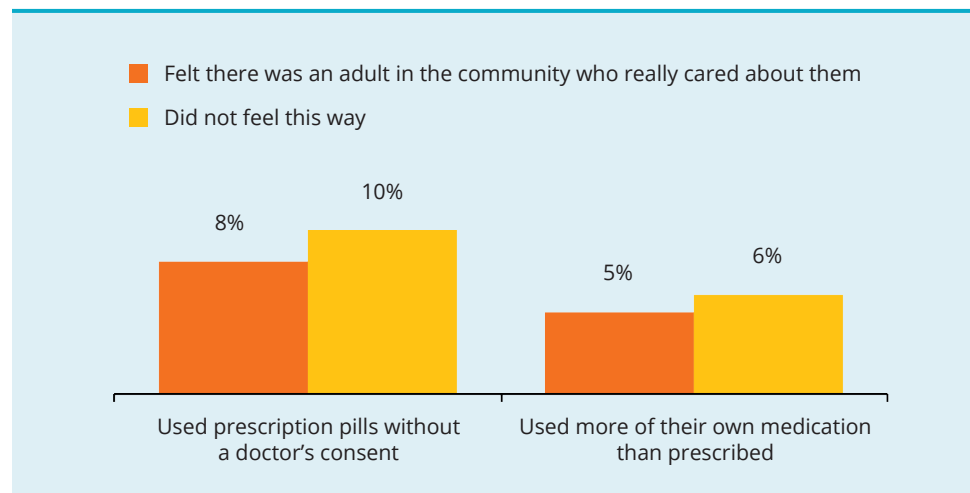
### FEELING TEACHERS CARED IN RELATION TO MISUSE OF PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION, AMONG YOUTH WHO LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE



## Caring adults in the community

Youth who felt someone in their community really cared about them were less likely to have used marijuana on 20 or more days in the past month than those who did not feel this way (10% vs. 12%; among those who used marijuana). Youth with a caring adult in the community were also less likely to have misused prescription medication.

### SUPPORTIVE ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY AND PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION MISUSE



Similar results were found among youth who lost someone to a fentanyl overdose. Those who reported having an adult in their community who really cared about them were less likely to have misused prescription medication and other substances, such as hallucinogens (17% vs. 23%), and were more likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent.



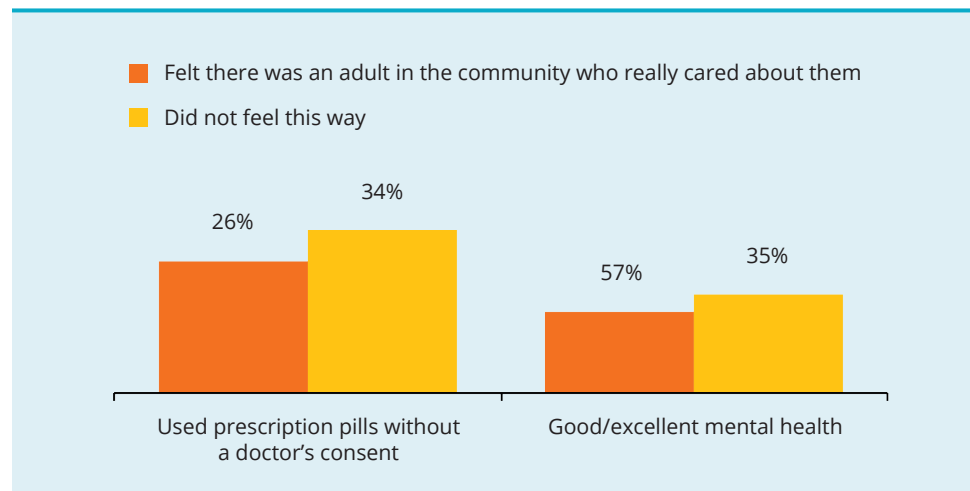
## Our reflections

*"There's a need for more youth workers to be available in the community—in rec centres, etc. They can help distract youth from using substances by getting them involved in other activities."*

*"When you have more supports surrounding you, you are less likely to use or abuse substances."*

*"Having a caring adult in the community, outside of school, might encourage youth to talk about deeper things because there's less concern that what youth say will be shared with the school."*

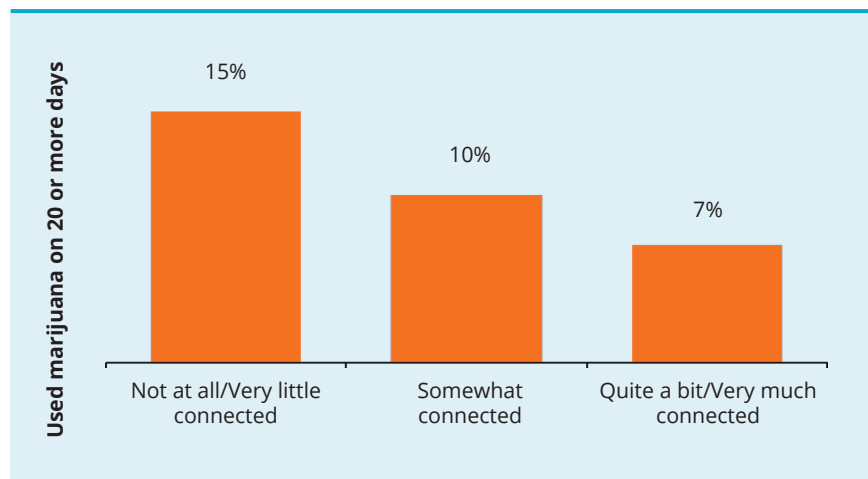
## SUPPORTIVE ADULTS IN THE COMMUNITY, AMONG YOUTH WHO LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE



## Community connectedness

Among youth who used marijuana, those who felt more connected to their community reported using it on fewer days in the past month than those who felt less connected to their community.

YOUTH WHO USED MARIJUANA ON 20 OR MORE DAYS IN THE PAST MONTH IN RELATION TO HOW CONNECTED THEY FELT TO THEIR COMMUNITY



Note: Percentages are among youth who had tried marijuana.





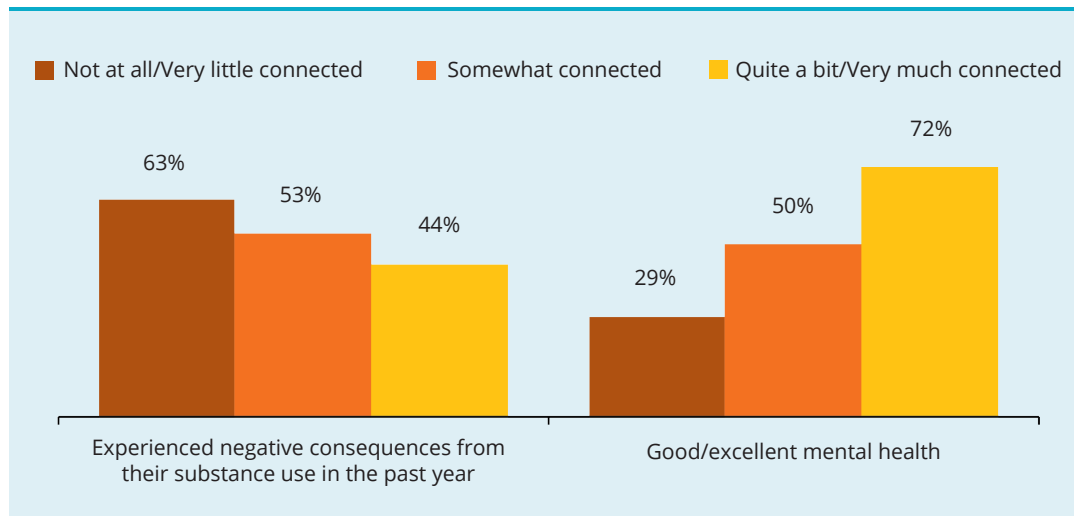
## Our reflections

Among youth who lost someone to a fentanyl overdose, those who felt connected to their community were less likely to experience negative consequences from their substance use in the past year, and were more likely to report good or excellent mental health.

*"As a youth, I feel that connection between you and those in your life is really important and can help you feel a sense of belonging within your community. Those connections tie bonds that allow youth to feel comfortable enough to share important things with each other, where there is no sense of feeling alone. With that it allows youth to feel safe and heard, and connected within community."*

*"Taking part in community activities can help youth feel connected to their community, and gives them something to do other than using substances."*

### HOW CONNECTED YOUTH FELT TO THEIR COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO OUTCOMES, AMONG THOSE WHO LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE

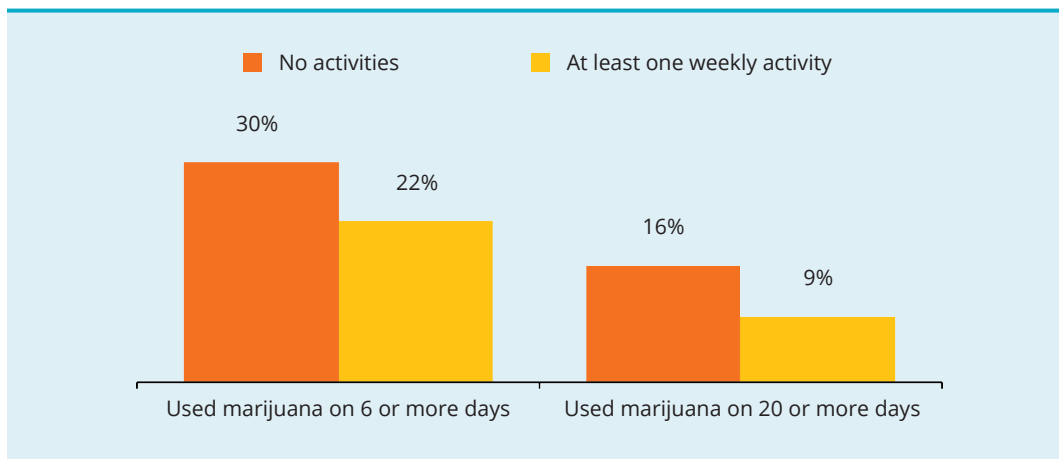


## Involvement in activities

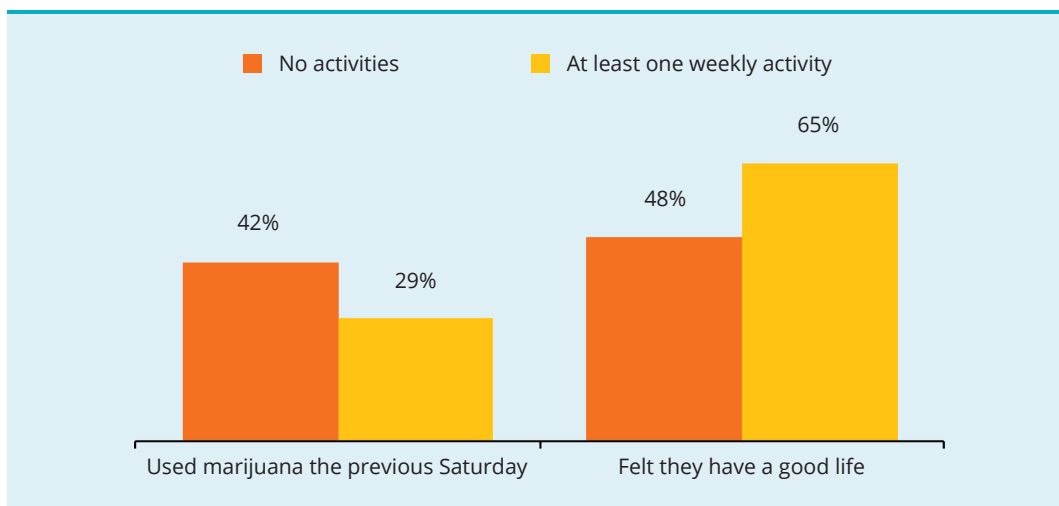
Among youth who used marijuana, those who took part in at least one extracurricular activity on a weekly basis were less likely to have used marijuana regularly in the past month.

Among youth who reported that someone close to them had died of a fentanyl overdose, those who took part in at least one weekly activity were less likely to have used marijuana the Saturday before completing the survey, and were more likely to feel satisfied with their life.

MARIJUANA USE IN THE PAST MONTH AND INVOLVEMENT IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, AMONG YOUTH WHO USED MARIJUANA



PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, AMONG YOUTH WHO LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE





Further, those who felt the activities they took part in were meaningful to them were less likely to have misused prescription medication and were more likely to feel hopeful for their future.



## Our reflections

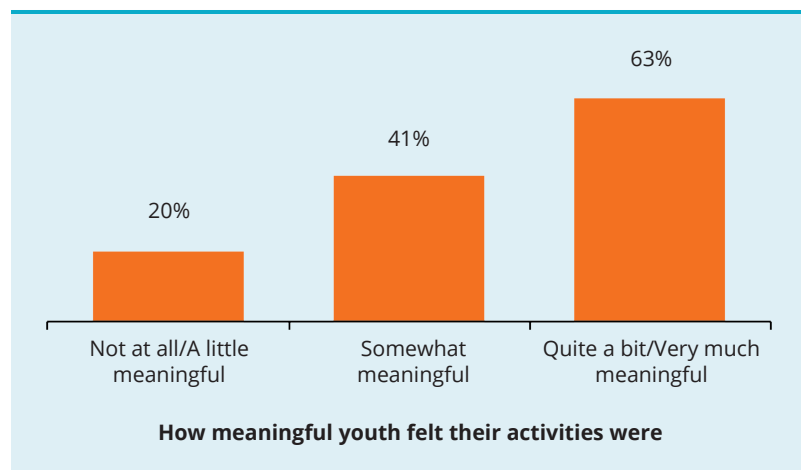
*"When youth have something to do and are kept busy—such as by taking part in this Research Slam—they're less likely to use substances. If they have nothing to do, they're more likely to smoke weed, for example."*

*"It's good if youth are active or exercising their mind. It helps them avoid using drugs."*

*"Youth promoting community activities to other youth can be more effective than adults promoting the activities. The adult vibe can close them off."*

*"When youth have barrier-free access to extracurricular activities, it encourages them to lead a substance-free life because they're exposed to the positives of being substance free. If they're able to have fun without drugs, maybe the number of youth who reported they did drugs to have fun would be lower."*

### YOUTH WHO FELT HOPEFUL FOR THEIR FUTURE, AMONG THOSE WHO LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE



## Supportive peers

Having friends with healthy attitudes about substance use is a protective factor. Among youth who had tried alcohol, those who had friends who would be upset with them for getting drunk were less likely to have drunk last Saturday than those whose friends would not be upset with them if they got drunk (19% vs 39%).

Also, among youth who had tried marijuana, those who had friends who would be upset with them if they used marijuana were less likely to use it the previous Saturday than those who did not have friends who would be upset with them for this reason (16% vs 34%).

Among youth who reported that someone close to them had died of a fentanyl overdose, those who had friends who would be upset with them for getting drunk or using marijuana were less likely to have misused prescription medication.



## Our reflections

*"Peer support work is important work!"*

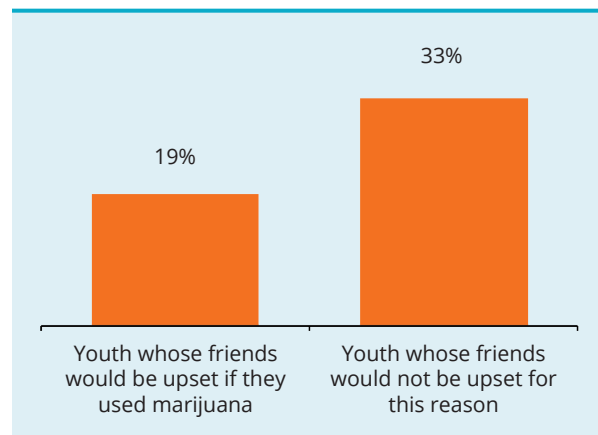
*"Peers of the same culture can be helpful if a youth is looking for knowledge on their heritage. And sometimes friends end up becoming family, which is important when a youth's own family is broken down/dysfunctional."*

*"Friends can influence you a lot. Friends can be so emotionally supportive yet so toxic at the same time if they're into substances."*

*"The move from elementary school to high school can lead to youth losing their friend group. It can be difficult to find a new group of friends who aren't into using substances."*

*"These findings show that peer pressure can have positive effects, if your friends disapprove of your use of substances."*

### USED PRESCRIPTION PILLS WITHOUT A DOCTOR'S CONSENT, AMONG THOSE WHO LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE



## Refusal skills

Youth who used marijuana were less likely than those who never used it to feel they could say no to activities they did not want to participate in (e.g., having sex with a new partner). However, among youth who used marijuana those who were able to say no in these situations were less likely to have used marijuana on 20 or more days in the past month (10% vs. 21%), and to have driven a vehicle under the influence of marijuana (14% vs. 28%).

Among youth who lost someone to a fentanyl overdose, those who reported good refusal skills were less likely to have misused prescription medication and to have mixed different types of alcohol the previous Saturday.

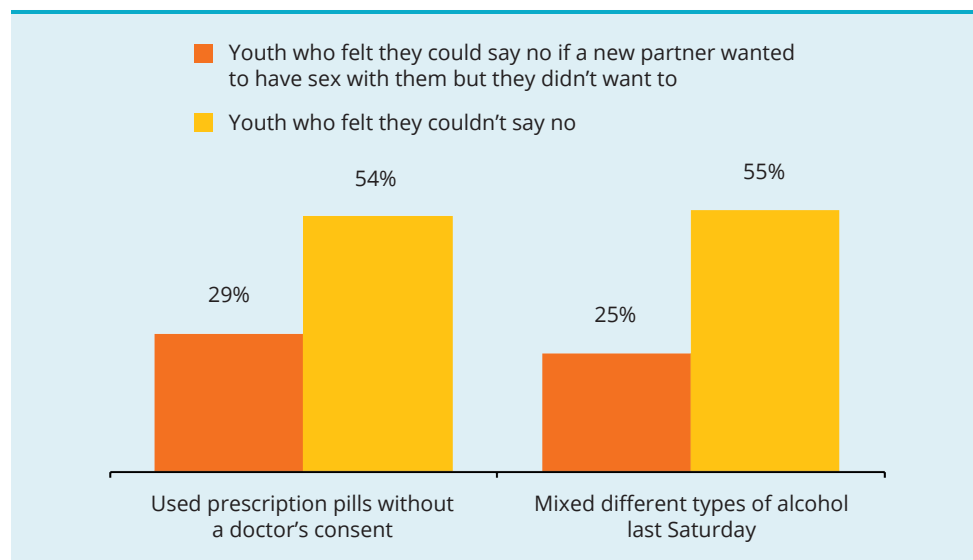


### Our reflections

*"These findings suggest that if youth can say no to sexual activity that they don't want to take part in, they can also say no to using substances. However, the findings might also go the other way: If you're under the influence of substances, your ability to consent is inhibited."*

*"The 2018 AHS does not cover refusal skills beyond sex. Maybe in the next survey, there could be a question asking if youth would feel comfortable saying no to using a substance that they were unsure about or did not want to use."*

### REFUSAL SKILLS AMONG YOUTH WHO LOST SOMEONE TO A FENTANYL OVERDOSE



# Recommendations

Based on our research findings and our own experiences, we would like to make the following recommendations:



There should be more education for adults—including school staff—on the reasons youth might use substances. A greater understanding of the reasons can help adults support youth with the challenges in their lives (mental health, etc.) and get to the root causes of their substance use.



There should be de-stigmatization around substance use. Adults should take a non-judgmental approach when talking with youth about substance use, and there should be an emphasis on harm-reduction as opposed to abstinence.



There should be more counsellors available in schools. There should also be more mental health and substance use counsellors available in the community, for youth who don't feel comfortable confiding in school staff.



There could be a wider range of clubs at school that students can participate in. This could encourage students to join school activities and can lead to them feeling connected to their school, which in turn can contribute to lower substance use.



Youth in care should be supported to stay at their current school even if they have to change foster placements. A sense of permanency can help them feel connected to their school, which can contribute to lower substance use.



It's important for school staff to recognize every student's unique strengths, so that all students feel acknowledged and appreciated.



Youth need more education around prescription medication misuse and its possible consequences. Many don't seem to understand that its misuse can lead to addiction.



Youth could be taught refusal skills when it comes to substance use, such as through role playing.

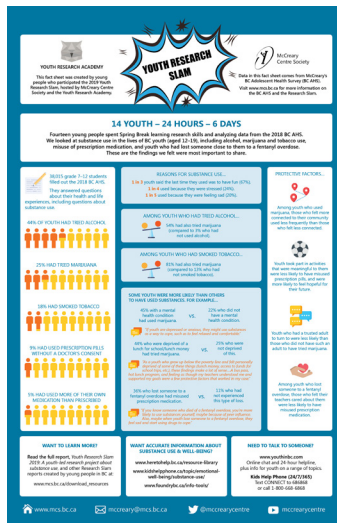


Youth should have barrier-free access to extracurricular activities, as a healthy alternative to using substances.



We have created an interactive workshop about our findings and would be happy to come and share the results with groups of youth or adults.

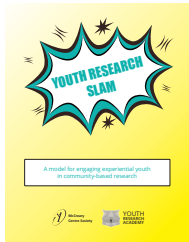
For more details, please contact [yra@mcs.bc.ca](mailto:yra@mcs.bc.ca).



We also created an infographic poster to share key findings from this report, as well as resources for youth who want to learn more about substance use and how to access support.

The poster can be downloaded alongside the report on McCreary's website: [www.mcs.bc.ca/download\\_reports](http://www.mcs.bc.ca/download_reports).

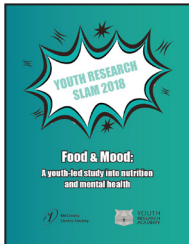
# Youth Research Slam reports



*Youth Research Slam: A model for engaging experiential youth in community-based research* shares findings from the first annual Research Slam, which explored how young people manage the stress in their lives stress.

As part of the project, Research Slam participants created an online survey about how youth manage stress, which was distributed to 586 young people world wide over one weekend. The report highlights the results of that survey and details the Research Slam process.

The report is available to download at [www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/youth\\_research\\_slam\\_1.pdf](http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/youth_research_slam_1.pdf).



*Food and Mood: A youth-led study into nutrition and mental health* shares findings from the 2018 Research Slam which explored nutrition and mental health.

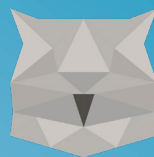
Research Slam Participants analyzed data from the 2013 BC Adolescent Health Survey (BC AHS) relating to nutrition and mental health, and created their own survey to answer questions not addressed in the BC AHS. The report shares the results of that survey as well as recommendations to improve nutrition and mental health among young people.

The report is available to download at [www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/yrs\\_food\\_and\\_mood.pdf](http://www.mcs.bc.ca/pdf/yrs_food_and_mood.pdf).





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