

# Research on substance use among transgender students in California

15 August 2017, by Sheri Ledbetter

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Chapman University has published research on substance abuse among transgender students in California. The research looked at students in middle and high schools in nearly every school district in California. Results showed transgender adolescents were more than two times more likely to engage in substance use in their lifetimes. The paper appears in the *Journal of School Health*.

"Transgender adolescents face tremendous social stress in families and schools, which often leads to behavioral health disparities," said Kris De Pedro, Ph.D., assistant professor at Chapman University and lead author on the study. "We wanted to assess whether rates of substance use were higher among transgender adolescents when compared with nontransgender adolescents."

The study showed transgender students were two and half times more likely than nontransgender students to use cocaine/methamphetamine in their lifetime, and about 2.8 times more likely to report using an inhalant in the past 30 days. Transgender students were also more than twice as likely to report past 30-day prescription pain medication use, and more than three times as likely to use cigarettes in school.

"While California is a very progressive state in terms of social policies, our study's findings indicate a need for community- and school-based interventions that reduce [substance abuse](#) among transgender youth," said Dr. De Pedro. "Drug use in youth has long-reaching effects into adulthood."

While we have policies in place in California, we need a big conversation about transgender youth and we need teachers to be a part of that."

Participants included nearly 5,000 transgender students and 630,000 nontransgender students in middle and high schools in nearly all school districts in California. The study looked at recent, in-school use, lifetime use of cigarettes, tobacco,

alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, and ecstasy, in addition to nonmedical use of prescription painkillers, diet pills, Ritalin or Adderall, and cold medicine. The ethnic makeup of the students mirror that of the state.

Transgender individuals identify with a gender that is different from the biological sex that they were assigned to at birth; and transgender individuals are not always included in the LGBTQ community and educational and health policies aimed to support LGBTQ individuals. Previous studies have shown an array of health and well-being issues among transgender adolescents including elevated rates of depression, suicidal ideation, [sexual risk behaviors](#), and self-mutilation. When compared with their peers in school, [transgender](#) students have reported higher rates of physical victimization, verbal harassment and cyberbullying; as well as lower support from peers and [school](#) staff.

**More information:** *Journal of School Health*, [DOI: 10.1111/joss.12499](#)

Provided by Chapman University

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