

# **TEENAGERS AND THE WORLD AROUND THEM**

From a teen point of view

**Ana Stojanovic**

## TEENAGERS AND THE WORLD AROUND THEM

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### ABSTRACT

This paper will deal with the most important facts about teenagers and their life nowadays. Teenagers can be easily influenced by their environment especially by their friends – a phenomenon that is called peer pressure - the strong influence of a group of children or young people on members of that group to behave as everyone else does, even if that behaviour is not good. The fact is that there are more and more teenagers who become addicted. They use alcohol, cigarettes and drugs so much that they start losing control. This kind of behaviour often leads to bad illnesses. Unfortunately, teenagers are usually not aware of the consequences until it is too late.

I chose this topic because I wanted to explore the world of teenagers, find out what their interests are, what they themselves think about the world around them, how they see the world around them and what we can do to change the present situation.

I want to try to make teenagers think about their life and the consequences of their deeds. Teenagers should think more about their lifestyle, they should be more careful, because their bad habits can manifest later and take their life in different directions.

**Key words:** teenagers, peers, peer pressure, world, vices.

### REZIME

Ovaj rad će se baviti najbitnijim činjenicama o tinejdžerima i njihovom životu danas. Tinejdžeri mogu lako biti pod uticajem svoje sredine, posebno pod uticajem svojim prijatelja-fenomen koji se naziva pritisak vršnjaka - jak uticaj grupe dece ili mladih ljudi na pripadnike te grupe da se ponašaju kao i svi ostali, čak i ako to ponašanje nije dobro. Činjenica je da postoji sve više i više tinejdžera koji postaju zavisni. Oni koriste alkohol, cigarete i drogu toliko da počnu da gube kontrolu. Ovakva vrsta ponašanja često dovodi do teških bolesti. Nažalost, tinejdžeri obično nisu svesni posledica dok ne bude prekasno.

Izabrala sam ovu temu jer sam želela da istražim svet tinejdžera, da saznam koja su njihova interesovanja, šta oni sami misle o svetu koji ih okružuje, kako vide svet oko sebe i šta možemo učiniti da promenimo trenutnu situaciju.

Zelim da pokušam da nateram tinejdžere da misle o svom životu i o posledicama svojih dela. Tinejdžeri bi trebalo više da misle o svom načinu života, trebalo bi da budu oprezniji zato što njihove loše navike mogu da se odraze kasnije i da odvedu njihov život u različitim smerovima.

**Ključne reci:** tinejdžeri, vrsnjaci, pritisak vrsnjaka, svet, poroci.

## TEENAGERS GENERALLY SPEAKING

Being a teenager is a uniquely human phenomenon. Everyone has been one, is one, or will be one. They are adventurous and silly. They try to be grown-ups as soon as possible, but it never seems to work. Teenagers are those in the early stage of body and psychological growth. During this phase, the body changes rapidly and the mind just cannot control the impact. Professionals, like behavioral psychologists, agree that close supervision and constant communication should be given to them by their family to address their questions and emotional imbalance. Failure to provide guidance would mean trusting their friends for their support and make experiments which can pave the way to alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. Prolonging these vices can affect mind, body, and family resources.

Adolescence (from Latin: *adolescere* meaning "to grow up") is a transitional stage of physical and mental human development generally occurring between puberty and legal adulthood (age of majority), but largely characterized as beginning and ending with the teenage stage. This transition involves biological, social, and psychological changes, though the biological or physiological ones are the easiest to measure objectively. It is related to being of the age 13 through 19, that period is called "teenage mothers" or "the teen years". The teen years have always been the most dreaded period of anybody's life with all that pressure in school and from peers, miscommunication with parents and physical changes. Adolescents are known to be moody, insecure, argumentative, impulsive, impressionable, reckless and rebellious.



For the first time in their lives, adolescents may start to view their friends, their peer group, as more important and influential than their parents or guardians. However, home, environment and parents are still important for the behavior and choices of teenagers. Teenagers who have a good relationship with their parents are less likely to engage in various risk behaviors.

Teenagers are at a point in their lives where they figure out who they are, their relationships with people, and how they fit into this world. They are not kids anymore, but they are also not adults. They want to be in charge of their lives.

### **Why do many teenagers involve themselves in different vices?**

Nobody really knows what the real reason for drinking, smoking and taking drugs is. There are many things that can cause bad behavior of teenagers.

One of them is peer pressure. That is a strong influence of a group of people who want everybody else to behave the way they do. People who choose to conform to their pressure are weak. They do not have enough self-confidence, so instead of believing in themselves, they start believing someone else. The pain that is caused by the loss of a friendship or the loss of recognition among peers is just too much for the majority of teens to endure. In addition to this, many teenagers choose to submit to the authority of their peers in order to feel safe.

Curiosity is another factor that affects the life of young people. Curiosity makes teens experiment with different vices to see how they will affect them. However, once they do this, they get addicted. It is very hard, almost impossible to get out of vices like alcohol, cigarettes, especially drugs. They start with a single step, but that usually ends up like a journey of misery and they cannot find the way out.

Family stability is another factor that can lead to drug abuse. Those from broken homes have a greater tendency to dabble in drugs, as they do not have strong parent figures to guide them and teach them the difference between right and wrong. They start using drugs to forget their personal problems, calm their tension, but that definitely is not the way out.

I have conducted a survey in my school and interviewed 132 teenagers between 15 and 18 years of age. This is what the survey showed as far as this question is concerned:

- \* 42% of the teenagers interviewed think that teenagers want to escape from different problems doing that. They do not want to face their problems, or just do not know how. Usually these teens are depressed. They try alcohol and drugs as a way to escape it, but vices just make things worse.

- \* 25% of the teenagers interviewed think that they feel pressure of their friends. When they are alone or unhappy, they just need someone to be with. Therefore, they are trying to find the way to be "cool" in that persons' eyes.

- \* 23% of the teenagers interviewed see curiosity as the main culprit. They want to know what it feels like, but when you first get into that circle, you cannot get out no matter how hard you are trying....

- \* The rest of them think that everybody does that, so they do not want to be isolated from the others. Unfortunately, that is so wrong.

## **ALCOHOL**

Alcohol is a sort of drugs that affects directly the central nervous system. It is a depressant, which means it slows the function of the central nervous system. Alcohol actually blocks some of the messages trying to get to the brain. This alters a person's perceptions, emotions, movement, vision, and hearing. Alcohol puts your health at risk. The risk of injuring

yourself, maybe even fatally, is higher when you are under the influence, too. One-half of all drowning deaths among teenagers is related to alcohol use. The use of alcohol greatly increases the chance that a teen will be involved in a car crash, homicide, or suicide.

Alcohol is widely used by teenagers. It may seem harmless during the teenage years, but the truth is that it can seriously damage teenagers' health. As a teen, your body is still growing and developing and introducing harmful materials can have long lasting consequences. No one is saying that one drink will necessarily kill you, but one drink can lead to many more and that is when problems take hold. Even though alcohol is forbidden for the minors, the number of teenagers who drink is increasing every day. Almost there is not a teenager who has never tried or even consumed alcohol.

Today, alcohol is widely available and aggressively promoted throughout society. Moreover, alcohol use continues to be regarded, by many people, as a normal part of growing up. Yet underage drinking is dangerous, not only for the drinker but also for society, as evident by the number of alcohol-involved motor vehicle crashes, homicides, suicides, and other injuries.

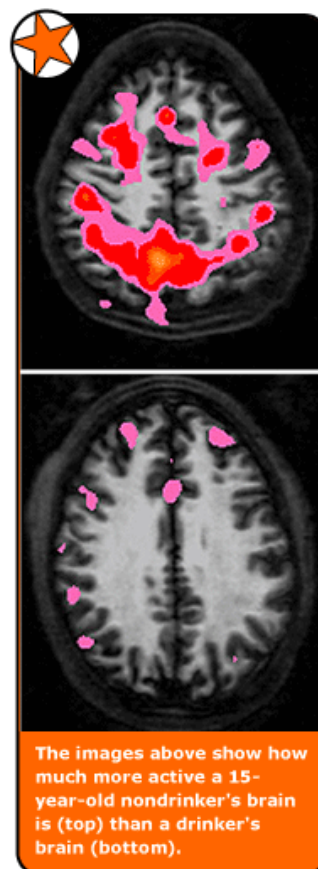


Image courtesy of Susan Tapert, University of California

It is made of natural ingredients (grains), so, if alcohol is a natural product, why do people need to be concerned about drinking it?

When people drink alcohol, it is absorbed into their bloodstream. From there, it affects the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord), which controls virtually all body functions. People who begin drinking early in life run the risk of developing serious alcohol problems,

including alcoholism, later in life. They also are at greater risk for a variety of adverse consequences. People who continue drinking heavily well into adulthood risk damaging their organs, such as the liver, heart, and brain. More young people are involved in violence, are hospitalised or die from alcohol-related causes than from the use of illegal drugs.

In very small amounts, alcohol can help a person feel more relaxed or less anxious. More alcohol causes greater changes. People who have overused alcohol may stagger, lose their coordination, and slur their speech. They will probably be confused and disoriented. Reaction times are slowed dramatically — which is why people are told not to drink and drive. People who are drunk may think they are moving properly when they are not, so they can look stupid. The impression is that drinking is cool, but drinking alcohol can make people do stupid or embarrassing things.



Teens who drink put themselves at risk for obvious problems with the law because it is illegal to drink if you are not adult, so you can get arrested. Teens who drink are also more likely to get into fights and commit crimes than those who don't. Drinking can also damage a student's ability to study well and get decent grades, as well as affect sports performance (the coordination).

One of the dangers of drinking is not recognizing when you have had too much. Different drinks have varying alcohol content and the body reacts differently to alcohol according to whether or not you have eaten, how thirsty you are, even what the time of day it is.

In addition to this, the number of teenagers who drink is bigger than it used to be. However, in my school, there is a difference between boys and girls' answers. Majority of the interviewed boys usually drink alcohol. No matter if that is once a month, or at weekends, or even every day, but...they DO drink very often and that is very alarming. As it was expected, the interviewed girls drink much less than boys do. One third drinks often, which means every weekend or once a month. And two thirds of them do not drink at all.

## SMOKING

The world's view on smoking cigarettes has changed dramatically over the last century. The habit was once considered to be cool, good for your health, and widely enjoyed by many people. No one could be seen acting in a movie without a lit cigarette in their hand! Today, smoking is considered to be a nasty, addictive habit that can kill you and those around you. You will not find them advertised anywhere – and you will not see anyone smoking inside a public building. Still, the number of people who smoke is even bigger than it was, especially the number of teenagers. Symptoms of addiction (strong desire to smoke, feeling tense when not smoking, being unable to stop smoking) can occur within weeks of starting to smoke, even if only occasionally. What is more, the earlier a teenager begins smoking, the more likely it is that addiction will occur.

Majority of people who are addicted started smoking when they were teenagers. The consequences of this poisoning happen gradually. They are increasing their risk of dying prematurely from smoking-related diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, and stroke. These diseases limit a person's ability to be normally active, and they can be fatal. It can make your life shorter for 10 years or more and people still continue smoking.



Why? The answer is addiction. Moreover, a smoker is not just a person who smokes some cigarettes. Smoking is a lifestyle. And the lifestyle of a smoker is very different than that of a non-smoker. Because smoking becomes so integrated into what you do and affects the decisions you make that it becomes integral to who you are as a person. Moreover, non-smokers surely do not want to be part of someone else's addiction. Although, there is a law in our country that does not allow buying cigarettes and alcohol if you are not an adult, you can buy a pack of cigarettes wherever you want.

Many teenagers agree with everything I said, but they still go out and smoke. That is because they will be with their friends and some of them will smoke, so the rest of the group will smoke too. When this moment happens, they will find it easier to smoke than to deal with the peer pressure. The word NO is the most important word for a teenager. When others want you to do things you do not want to do, you need to learn to say NO to them and to be strong enough that they have to back down and



accept NO for an answer. If you cannot say NO, you end up doing many things you do not want to do. Staying smoke free will give you a whole lot more of everything — more energy, better performance, better looks, more money in your pocket, and, in the long run, more life to live!



A large number of students in my school is addicted to cigarettes. To my surprise I found out that there is more than 70% of girls who smoke.

About one-half of boys smoke and all of them are convinced that they could stop smoking if they wanted. However, the truth is they are not aware of how huge their problem is. The life of a smoker is the life of addiction. Once you are addicted, you keep being it. You will smoke. Resistance is futile. You do not want to smoke. You wish you could quit. You intend to quit someday, but not today. Today you will smoke. And every time you smoke you will think back and wish you had never started in the first place.

## **DRUGS**

Drugs are chemicals that change the way a person's body or mind works. Drug is a depressant that slows down the functions of the central nervous system and makes us less aware of the events around us. Drugs are not good for health as they have many side effects and damage our brain, heart and other important organs.

Some drugs, such as alcohol, caffeine, nicotine and various prescribed and over-the-counter medications, are legal. Most legal drugs are restricted and their availability, quality and price strictly controlled. Other drugs, such as cannabis, methamphetamines, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin, are illegal. They are not subject to quality or price controls. This means that a person can never be sure of the drug's strength or what is in it. Different batches of an illegally manufactured drug may have different concentrations of the drug and other additives. Sometimes, the additives can be poisonous. Even the drug itself could be poisonous. Using any illegal drug is risky and should be avoided. They may contain very dangerous chemicals that can cause damage to the brain or even death. This can happen at first use and before addiction. The use of illegal drugs is increasing, especially among young teens.



Unfortunately, we live in a drug-taking society. Many parents wonder why young people would even think of trying drugs. A part of growing up is to experiment with new things and test limits, so it is not surprising that some young people try illegal drugs as well as those which are legal. Sometimes we think that only troubled young people use drugs. However, of the young people who have problems in their lives, only a small number turn to drugs. Using drugs, especially alcohol, is a way some young people try to manage problems in their lives.

Drugs can be classified according to the effect they have on people—and the way they change how a person thinks, feels or behaves. The three major classifications are depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens.

- *Depressant drugs* do not necessarily make a person feel depressed. They slow down the functions of the CNS and the messages going between the brain and the body. Depressants affect concentration and coordination. They slow down a person's ability to respond to unexpected situations. In small quantities they can cause a person to feel more relaxed, but in larger quantities they may cause unconsciousness, vomiting and, in some cases, death.

\* Alcohol

\* Inhalants (solvents, aerosols, petrol, glue)

\* Opiates (heroin, morphine, codeine, methadone)

\* Minor tranquillisers (Valium, Serapax, Rohypnol, Temazepam)

- *Stimulant drugs* speed up the messages going between the brain and the body. They can make a person feel more awake, alert, confident or energetic. Large quantities of stimulants can "over-stimulate" a person, causing anxiety, panic, seizures, headaches, stomach cramps, aggression and paranoia. Prolonged or sustained use of strong stimulants can also cause these effects.

\* Amphetamines (speed)

\* Caffeine (cola, coffee)

\* Cocaine

\* MDMA/Ecstasy (also hallucinogenic)

\* Nicotine (cigarettes)

- *Hallucinogens* distort a person's perception of reality. People who have taken them may see or hear things that are not really there, or what they see may be distorted in some way.

\* Dissociative anaesthetics (PCP, Ketamine - also depressant)

\* LSD (acid)

\* Mescaline

\* Psilocybin (magic mushrooms)

\* Marijuana (also depressant)

If some drugs are illegal, how can you find them? A drug dealer is someone who sells drugs illegally. Drug dealers can range from individual drug users buying a little extra of their drug to save money or to help pay for their habit, to groups working within highly organized money-making operations that run like any other business.



Traditionally, drug dealers are seen as a key part of the problem of addiction in our communities. Although this is the case with some drug dealers, in reality, there is a lot of variability among drug dealers, the types of drugs they sell, the reasons they sell, and who they sell drugs to.

Addiction is a complex disorder characterized by compulsive drug use. People who are addicted feel an overwhelming, uncontrollable need for drugs or alcohol, even in the face of negative consequences. This self-destructive behavior can be hard to understand. Why continue doing something that is hurting you? Why is it so hard to stop? The answer lies in the brain. Repeated drug use alters the brain - causing long-lasting changes to the way it looks and functions. These brain changes interfere with your ability to think clearly, exercise good judgment, control your behavior, and feel normal without drugs. These changes are also responsible, in large part, for the drug cravings and compulsion to use that make addiction so powerful. Unfortunately, teenagers often do not see the link between their actions today and the consequences tomorrow. They also have a tendency to feel indestructible and immune to the problems that others experience.

The path to drug addiction starts with experimentation. You or your loved one may have tried drugs out of curiosity, because friends were doing it, or in an effort to erase another problem. At first, the substance seems to solve the problem or make life better, so you use the drug more and more.

Drug use is associated with a variety of negative consequences, including increased risk of serious drug use later in life, school failure, and poor judgment which may put teens at risk for accidents, violence and suicide. But as the addiction progresses, getting and using the drug becomes more and more important and your ability to stop using is compromised. What begins as a voluntary choice turns into a physical and psychological need.

Addiction is a problem that affects every aspect of your life. Overcoming it requires making major changes to the way you live, deal with problems, and relate to others. It is not just a matter of willpower or simply wanting to quit. Getting off drugs for good is difficult without treatment and ongoing support. The good news is that there are many tools that can help you on your journey to sobriety. There is hope - no matter how bad the substance abuse problem and no matter how powerless you feel.

Good parenting is important to all children and young people and should help them to be healthy in all parts of their lives. However, good parenting will not necessarily prevent young people from trying drugs. They are at an age when they make their own choices about using drugs, and many other things as well. Blame is not helpful. Parents can prevent their children from using drugs by talking to them about drugs, open communication, role modeling, responsible behavior, and recognizing if problems are developing. One of the best treatments for

drug addiction is to consult with cocaine rehab centers for recovery. With treatment and support, you can counteract the disruptive effects of addiction and regain control of your life.

Although different drugs have different physical effects, the symptoms of addiction are the same no matter the substance. The more drugs begin to affect and control your life, the more likely it is that you have crossed the line from drug use to abuse and drug addiction. Unfortunately, when you are in the middle of it, you may be in denial about the magnitude of the problem or the negative impact it has had on your life. Whether you are addicted to nicotine, alcohol, heroin, speed, or cocaine, the effect on the brain is the same: an uncontrollable craving to use that is more important than anything else, including family, friends, school, and even your own health and happiness.

However, while drugs might make you feel better in the short-term, attempts to self-medicate ultimately backfire. Instead of treating the underlying problem, drug use simply masks the symptoms. Take the drug away and the problem is still there, whether it is low self-esteem, anxiety, loneliness, or an unhappy family life. Furthermore, prolonged drug use eventually brings its own host of problems, including major disruptions to normal, daily functioning. Unfortunately, the psychological, physical, and social consequences of drug abuse and addiction become worse than the original problem you were trying to cope with or avoid.

Abuse of specific drugs exposes users to a range of serious consequences:

- Marijuana use, which is prevalent among youth, has been shown to interfere with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Motivation and psychosexual/emotional development also may be affected.
- Cocaine use is linked with health problems including eating disorders, disabilities, and death from heart attacks and strokes. Hallucinogens can affect brain chemistry and result in problems with learning new information and memory.
- Methamphetamine can cause rapid heart rate, increased blood pressure, and damage to the small blood vessels in the brain that can lead to stroke. Heroin use can result in slow and shallow breathing, convulsions, coma, and even death.

Young people who inject drugs expose themselves to additional risks, including contracting HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), hepatitis B and C, and other blood-borne viruses. Chronic injection drug users also risk scarred or collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and valves, abscesses, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and liver and kidney disease.

Drugs do not help anything in the world. When teenagers have problems, some of them drink alcohol or even do drugs to get rid of their problems, but that will not do any good. Actually, it just causes more problems. Some of them do not even have problems; they just do it to be cool. Teenagers say that when you try it once, you just get hooked and cannot stop. They know that it is bad for them but they do it anyway.

One of the most dangerous effects of drug abuse and addiction is denial. The urge to use is so strong that the mind finds many ways to rationalize the addiction. You may drastically underestimate the quantity of drugs you are taking, how much it impacts your life, and the level of control you have over your drug use. However, the cost of denial can be extremely high - including the loss of important relationships, physical and mental health, and in the worst cases - life.

If people have to do drugs, alcohol, or harm themselves in anyway to be popular or to fit in with a group, they are too good for that group of people. True friends are people you can trust, have a good time with, and have faith in to do the right thing. They are the people that would not

want to see you hurt yourself. Think about the entire harm you can do to yourself, your family, your education, and most importantly...the rest of your life.

By analyzing the results of my survey I have found out that none of teenagers in my school consume drugs, neither boys nor girls. Nevertheless, as it is already mentioned, majority of them drink. That means that they even do not know that alcohol is a drug, too, and do not deal with it as they should.

## THE MYTHS ABOUT USING DIFFERENT VICES

MYTH 1: Overcoming addiction is a simply a matter of willpower.

Prolonged exposure to drugs alters the brain in ways that results in powerful cravings and a compulsion to use. These brain changes make it extremely difficult to quit by sheer force of will.

MYTH 2: Addiction is a disease; there is nothing you can do about it.

Most experts agree that addiction is a brain disease, but that does not mean you are a helpless victim. The brain changes associated with addiction can be treated and reversed through therapy, medication, exercise, and other treatments.

MYTH 3: Recovery can begin at any point in the addiction process - and the earlier, the better. The longer drug abuse continues, the stronger the addiction becomes and the harder it is to treat. Don't wait to intervene until the addict has lost it all!

MYTH 4: You cannot force someone into treatment; they have to want help.

Treatment does not have to be voluntary to be successful. People who are pressured into treatment by their family, employer, or the legal system are just as likely to benefit as those who choose to enter treatment on their own. As they sober up and their thinking clears, many formerly resistant addicts decide they want to change.

MYTH 5: Treatment did not work before, so there is no point trying again; some cases are hopeless.

Recovery from drug addiction is a long process that often involves setbacks. Relapse does not mean that treatment has failed or that you are a lost cause. Rather, it is a signal to get back on track, either by going back to treatment or adjusting the treatment approach.

Myth6: Everybody is doing it!

Not "everybody" is doing it. In fact, most teens are **NOT** doing it. Those who do "do it" do so infrequently, at parties or on different occasions. Most teenagers do not drink or do drugs regularly!

Myth7: It cannot hurt to try it.

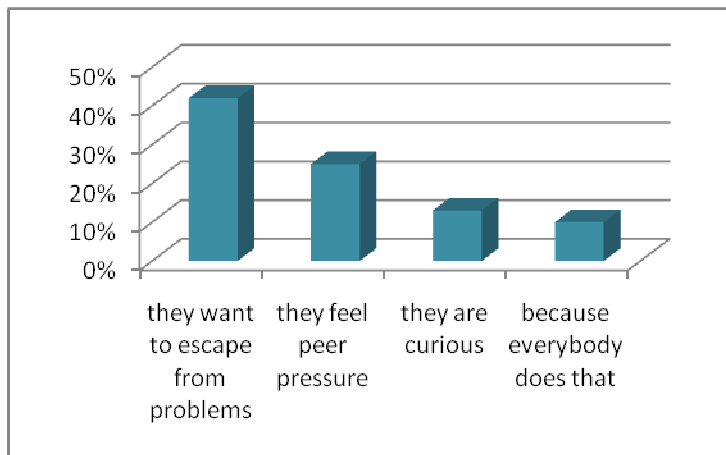
Yes, drinking, smoking and drug experimentation are generally looked at as "rights of passage", something that teens try on the road to adulthood. However, the reality is that most teens do not try drugs or alcohol until they are in college (if ever). High school use is the exception not the norm. It can hurt to try these things. You may fall victim to addiction, may do something you regret while under the influence, you may get violent or be the victim of violence, in extreme cases you may even die. There is a high correlation between frequent drug or alcohol use and teen suicide rates. If you really think that it cannot hurt to try, think again.

Myth8: I can quit whenever I want.

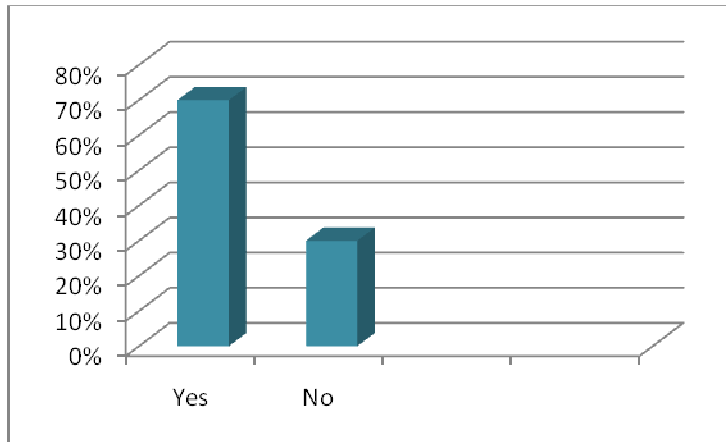
Most teens who try drugs and alcohol do so because they want to fit in with peers who are already indulging or because they are curious about what will happen. It is very easy to give in to the urge to try these things and not so easy to stop once you start. People who start drinking or doing drugs in their early teens (15 and under) are four times more likely to develop an addiction. Anyone who has to say, "I can quit when I want to!" already has a problem.

### A survey – graph presentation

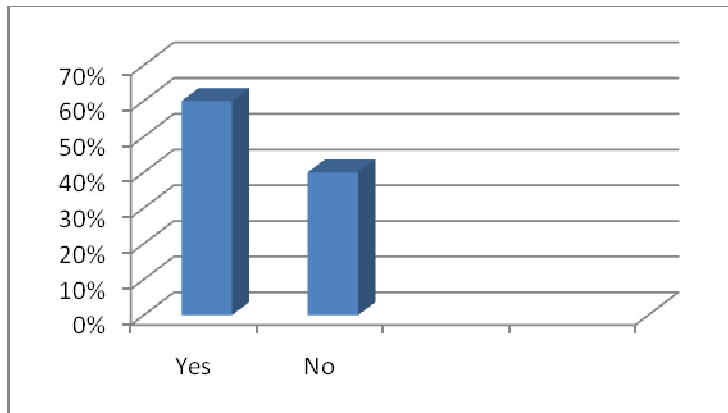
1. Why do many teenagers involve themselves in different vices?



2. Do you drink?



3. Do you smoke?



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## LITERATURE

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