

*Martha's Vineyard*

*Youth Focus Group  
Report  
2010*



*Reported by The Outcomes Project  
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## Methodology

Two focus groups were held at Martha's Vineyard High School to assess perceptions of marijuana and prescription drug misuse on Martha's Vineyard among youth. Each group was asked the same questions about both marijuana and prescription drugs. These groups consisted of students enrolled in a leadership class. Older students (in grades 11 and 12) were sought out as it was believed they would have more exposure to and knowledge of these drugs. Each group met for approximately one hour.

Students were given YTF t-shirts and beach balls after participating in the focus group. Active consent from the participants was given.

Questions were developed that sought to gauge student's perceptions or opinions about where youth obtain and use these drugs, perception of use of these drugs among their peers, consequences of use of these drugs, enforcement of laws/policies against these drugs and what would prevent youth from using drugs.

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### *Focus Groups Sample*

The focus groups were conducted on Monday, January 11, 2010 at Martha's Vineyard High School.

**Table 1. Focus Group Sample**

<b>Group 1:</b>		<b>Group 2:</b>		<b>Total</b>
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	
<b>9<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	0	<b>9<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	0	0
<b>10<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	1	<b>10<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	0	1
<b>11<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	9	<b>11<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	10	19
<b>12<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	4	<b>12<sup>th</sup> Grade</b>	5	9
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>	
<b>Male</b>	5	<b>Male</b>	3	8
<b>Female</b>	9	<b>Female</b>	12	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>29</b>

## *Marijuana Focus Group Findings*

### **I. Access: Where Students Believe Youth Obtain Marijuana**

- Everywhere
- Your house
- Parents who use it have it in the house
- Friends
- A lot of people grow it themselves
- Bring it from off the island
  - *“Your neighbor’s backyard, friends, everywhere, it’s so easy to get.”*
  - *“It’s like part of the culture, a lot easier to acquire than alcohol.”*

### **II. Perceptions of Marijuana Use**

#### **Where Youth Use Marijuana**

- Parties (homes)
- The woods
- School (before, during and after-however, less so during school)
- Beach
- In cars
  - *“The bathroom here at school smells like weed at least once a week (the boy’s bathroom).”*
  - *“Kids will leave the school during lunch to smoke weed, it’s hard though, to leave the school during lunch.”*

#### **What percentage of Martha’s Vineyard Youth Do Youth Think Use Marijuana On Martha’s Vineyard**

*(34% (n= 142) is the current/ past 30 day use rate for marijuana, lifetime use rate is 50% (n= 214) 2009 Martha’s Vineyard High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey)*

- Tried it -90%
- Use at least once in the past 30 days 70-80%
- Use at least once a week -40%

#### **Community Perception**

- Adults don’t care because everyone does it, youth and adults
- A lot of parents do it too
- Adults assume youth will use marijuana
- People are more concerned with other drugs; they don’t think marijuana is a big deal, more concerned with hard core drugs.
- It’s from a plant, not as harmful as other drug
  - *“Not necessarily seen as ok to do, but adults would rather youth smoke marijuana than drink alcohol...parents would be more upset to find their child drunk than high.”*
  - *“It’s a part of the culture; so many people on the island were hippies and stuff.”*

### **Do more people on Martha's Vineyard use marijuana than in other communities?**

- Yes
  - *"Yes, we are in isolation and there are large amounts if it on the island."*

### **III. Why Youth Use Marijuana**

- Fun
- Relaxes you
- For the high
- Friends do it
- There is no pressure- no one will force you to smoke, people do it because they want to
- Do it in a social setting
- There is nothing to do on the island
  - *"There is nothing else to do after 10 p.m."*
  - *"Lack of activities, like it's 3 degrees out, like why don't we just get high?"*
  - *"There needs to be more for us to do on the island."*

### **IV. Consequences of Marijuana Use**

#### **Harm in Using Marijuana**

- None
- It's illegal
- Kills brain cells
- Gateway drug
- Spend more money to pay for snacks because of the cravings for food
- Long term harm is memory loss
  - *"No harm within the first 10 years you start using it."*
  - *"Makes you a lot lazier."*
  - *"If you use it recreationally it is not harmful though."*
  - *"Some people lost everything because they go caught up with drugs, and it started with marijuana."*

#### **Potential Consequences of Marijuana Use**

- Increased appetite
- Grades may suffer
- Get caught
- You lose motivation if it takes over your life
- It can be on your criminal record
- Hinders your judgment
- Lung failure
- Reputation goes down, if you just smoke everyday, it's not cool

## **If adults in your life found out you were using marijuana, what would happen?**

### *Coaches*

- Coach might care if you were a really good athlete, not as much if you weren't that good
- If you are a star athlete they won't penalize you
- Athletes would have to miss 25% of their games
- You'd be kicked off

### *Parents*

- Not care, some may freak out, depends on the parent
- Lose trust in you, be disappointed, be very mad
- Depends on parent...some think alcohol is worse than marijuana some would be disappointed
  - *"Personally, my mom would probably kill me."*

### *School*

- Some teachers care, others don't at all
- Suspended for 10 days from school
- It depends on if you are a good student or not
- Teachers see it all the time, they know the kids that are always high

### *Police*

- Depends on the police, some might take it and tell you to go home, some might turn you in to your parents
- Depends if you know the cop, they might let you off, if you don't know them, there would probably be penalties
- Cops can't really do anything about it, if they don't have a warrant they can't search you
  - *"Nothing really, you don't hear about it much, it would depend on the cop though, some might take it and just say don't do it again, some might take you home to your parents or to the police station."*
  - *"You'd have to be really stupid to get caught."*

## **Marijuana Vs. Other Drugs**

- A lot of people who don't drink alcohol smoke marijuana
- Way more people smoke marijuana than drink alcohol
- More people drink
- People smoke during the week and on weekend and drink alcohol just on the weekends, not during the week
- A lot of people think they drive better when they are high, a lot of people drive when high, and they smoke in their car then drive.
  - *"A lot of people say they'd rather smoke than drink."*
  - *"When we did the English exchange they were like so surprised that so many kids smoked pot."*

## **V. Prevention of Marijuana Use**

### **Who has talked to you about marijuana use, what have they said?**

- Health class
- D.A.R.E. class
- Parents (A lot of parents turn their heads though)
- Older siblings
- Friends
  - *“That it is a gateway drug, bad for your health, it can consume your life and becomes part of a routine for you, and you need it before and after school, before you go to bed.”*
  - *“My brother said not to try it until after high school.”*
  - *“A lot of parents did it in college and stuff but now they don’t want their kids to do it, but a lot of kids get the weed from their parents and a lot of parents will ask their kids for weed for themselves.”*

### **What would prevent youth from using marijuana**

- So many people smoke on the island, you can’t really get away from it
- People get bored and then go smoke
- There needs to be a lot more things to do here, people do it out of boredom
- There hasn’t been any major tragedy involving marijuana to prevent people from using the drug.
- People don’t see the harm in using marijuana
  - *“It is very accessible and people do it out of boredom, especially in the winter, there is nothing to do on Martha’s Vineyard at night (after 10pm), a bowling alley here would be great.”*
  - *“I think the majority of kids are just going to try it out of curiosity, unless in the rare case that they know someone who has died from it, but that is so rare.”*
  - *“If my parents found out, all trust would be lost.”*

### **Messages that promote marijuana use**

- None
- Music festivals (Aquinas music festival)
- Parties

### **Messages that condemn marijuana use**

- TV
- YTF
- Assignment notebook

## Perception of Passage of Question 2

- Kids don't worry as much about getting in trouble with it, it is seen as more acceptable
- 100% in favor of it, kids shouldn't be charged just for trying it
- They don't think about it really, act the same way as before
- Do not think passage changed enforcement much; cops might be a little more lenient now though.
  - *"It is less serious of an offense, not as big of a deal, adults voted on it; obviously the majority don't see it as that big of a deal (using marijuana)."*
  - *"If you are a super stoner you're probably happy."*
  - *"If I was a cop and knew I couldn't really bust anyone I would feel so bad."*

## *Marijuana Focus Groups Summary*

Several of the topics discussed in the focus groups were related to questions that were asked in the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The data from this survey is shown in Table 1 in order to provide supplemental comparative data to the findings in this report.

**Table 2. Current Marijuana Data from MVHS 2009 YRBS**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Past 30-Day (current) Use	34%
Perception of Peer 30 day use (think "typical" MVHS student has used marijuana in past 30 days) <i>This number should be low.</i>	90%
Perception of harm ("moderate" or "great" risk of harm from regular use) <i>This number should be close to 100%.</i>	73%
Perception of parental disapproval (believe parents would think it was "wrong" or "very wrong" to use regularly) <i>This number should be close to 100%.</i>	83%



## ***Prescription Drugs Focus Groups Findings***

### **I. Access: Where Students Believe Youth Obtain Prescription Drugs**

- Drug dealer
- When students have their wisdom teeth out and will ask for more pain meds when they don't really need it
- Get them from people who don't need them anymore (they were originally prescribed to the person and had ones left over)
- People get it from their doctor and sell them
  - *“Whoever does have a problem with pain medication, they will ask their doctor for more, pretend they need it when they really don't.”*
  - *“Kids can take them from their parents if they have them at home.”*
  - *“My mom flushed them down the toilet after I got my wisdom teeth out and didn't need them anymore.”*

### **II. Perceptions of Prescription Drug Use**

#### **Where Youth Use**

- Parties, do it with other drugs, like alcohol and marijuana
- Home
- No idea
  - *“Everywhere, some people do it like everyday.”*
  - *“Not during school, at like parties, they do it on their own time.”*
  - *“They do it with drinking at parties, with other drugs.”*

#### **How Prescription Drug Misuse is viewed**

- Think it is wrong to take prescription drugs without doctors orders
- People don't think it's cool, kind of gets pushed aside, people are more concerned with alcohol use.
- Kids do it because they are depressed

#### **How Many Youth Do Youth Think Use Prescription Drugs on Martha's Vineyard**

***(4% (n= 15) is the current/ past 30 day use rate for Rx drugs, 2009 Martha's Vineyard High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey)***

- Less than 10%
- 15-20%
- 20% have tried it, maybe 6% do it regularly like on the weekends
- Definitely less than half, very few students use all the time
  - *“There are a lot of kids who don't go out to parties, but do it (use prescription drugs).”*

### **When would you use?**

*Students were asked under what circumstances (if any) they would take a prescription drug that was not prescribed to them.*

- Never
- None, it's too risky, it's stupid, you don't not knowing what the effects are
- No idea what's in them
  - *"It's dumb."*
  - *"It's really not an issue here for us, I mean maybe for some people, but like you don't see people doing pills, you see people with like a joint or alcohol or something, but not pills, it's like that distant of an issue for us."*

### **Community Perception**

- Not cool, people would be concerned for you, they don't want you to overdose and die.
- That you are dumb, stupid
- It's much more dangerous than marijuana
  - *"With marijuana it's like, 'Oh don't do that here', with pills it's like 'Don't do it at all.'"*

### **Do more people on Martha's Vineyard misuse prescription drugs than in other communities?**

- No, definitely not

## **III. Why Youth Use Prescription Drugs**

- To get high, have a different feeling, feel good
- To combat depression
- Curiosity
- Getting out of their element
- Stupidity
- Maybe it's cheaper than marijuana or alcohol
- There is really no pressure to do it and not a lot of youth do it.
- Mostly older kids, who are over 18 years old and still on the island, who didn't go away to college, they are the ones who do it.
- People may do it to increase the feeling of alcohol
  - *"You don't really know if someone is using it, you can tell if someone is drunk, but not if they are using prescription meds."*
  - *"I think people take it with alcohol to increase the feeling of alcohol."*
  - *"If someone was the designated driver, they might take prescription drugs instead of drinking; they think they can still drive ok."*
  - *"The kids who do it, no one really thinks they are cool."*
  - *"I think people use it after they had surgery, like they don't just try it out of the blue, they take it after surgery and then want more."*

## **IV. Consequences of Prescription Drug Misuse**

### **Harm in Misusing Prescription Drugs**

- Overdose
- Damaging your body, and mental damage
- You can do something stupid
- You don't know
- Reputation will go in the gutter
- Become addicted
- Become addicted to other drugs
  - *"You are putting your body in danger."*
  - *"Some pills aren't good to have with alcohol, risky to mix with other stuff."*

### **Potential Consequences of Prescription Drug Misuse**

- Addictive
- Bad for health
- Some effects are unknown so makes it dangerous
- Death

### **If adults in your life found out you were using prescription drugs, what would happen?**

#### *Coaches*

- You won't be able to play 25% of the games if caught
- If you're a good athlete, it wouldn't matter, no punishment

#### *Parents*

- They would be very upset
- So much worse than alcohol and marijuana, be very upset
- Shocked
  - *"They would try to get me help, obviously if are abusing pills you need help."*

#### *School*

- Suspended for 10 days

#### *Police*

- Harder to enforce, you can't smell prescription drugs like you can alcohol on breath or marijuana
- You don't really care about it, the cops would probably be surprised themselves to find kids with prescription drugs
- You could have a legit prescription for the medicine but still be abusing them or giving them to other people
- Kids that take prescription drugs are depressed or have serious problems that make them take these drugs, not many kids do this.
- No clue what they would do
- Easier to hide from the police than alcohol and marijuana

## **Prescription Drugs Vs. Other Drugs**

- More people definitely use alcohol and marijuana than prescription drugs on Martha's Vineyard.

## **V. Prevention of Prescription Drug Misuse**

### **Who has talked to you about prescription drug misuse?**

- Health class, say it is addictive, bad for health and dangerous
- Health class kind of touches on it a little
- It's not a really popular topic
- Not really
  - *"Health classes talk more about alcohol and marijuana use than prescription drug use."*
  - *"Parents a little, they are more concerned with alcohol use. They just would not expect prescription drug use."*

### **What would prevent youth from misusing prescription drug**

- Seeing harm it can do to your body
- Knowing all the effects and risks
- It's not as social of an activity
- Knowing that it is so easy to overdose on them, I mean you can't really overdose on weed, but pills you can and you can die
- If you don't know where to get them, you won't use them
  - *"It is hard to know all the side effects and harm because there are so many prescription drugs and they have different effects on the body when abused."*
  - *"They (health classes) kind of just touch up on it, if kids knew more about the bad effect, it might prevent youth from using."*
  - *"Knowing people whose lives have been negatively affected by pills, I mean we all know people who have died or whose lives have been ruined by overdosing."*

### **Messages that promote prescription drug misuse**

- None

### **Messages that condemn prescription drug misuse**

- None
- "Above the influence" TV ads
- It's not really that big of a problem here

## *Prescription Drug Focus Group Summary*

### *Prescription Drugs*

One question discussed in the focus groups was related to questions that were asked in the 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey. The data from this survey is shown in Table 2 in order to provide supplemental comparative data to the findings in this report.

**Table 3. Current Prescription Drug Data from MVHS 2009 YRBS**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Past 30-day (current) use	4%
Perception of peer 30-day use (% of students who think the "typical" SHS student has used prescription drugs without a doctor's order in past 30 days) <i>This number should be low.</i>	NA
Perception of harm ("moderate" or "great" risk of harm from regular use) <i>This number should be close to 100%.</i>	NA
Perception of parental disapproval (believe parents would think it was "wrong" or "very wrong" to use regularly) <i>This number should be close to 100%.</i>	NA

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### **Knowledge of Youth Task Force**

Students were also asked if they have heard about YTF before and what they thought the YTF was.

- Yes, members were in focus group
- They are on the island
- They know about sticker shock
- Prevent drug use among youth, positive influence, have had group discussions with them, around during prom time
  - *"They have come to school to talk to us, trying to prevent drug use among kids."*

## Summary of Themes

### *Marijuana Use*

Martha's Vineyard High School students perceive access to marijuana to be very easy, reporting that you can find it "anywhere." They report that youth use marijuana at parties (houses), the woods, school, at the beach and in cars. The students perceive that between 70% and 80% of Martha's Vineyard High School students have used marijuana at least once in the past 30 days, the actual use rate is 34%, n= 142 (2009 MVHS YRBS Report). They also perceive that 90% of students have used marijuana at least once in their lifetime, the actual lifetime use rate is 50% (n= 214) (2009 MVHS YRBS Report).

Students perceive that adults in the community do not care that youth use marijuana because they assume youth will use the substance. Students perceive that adult use of marijuana on the island is high. The students who participated in the focus group claim that people in the community are more concerned with other drugs besides marijuana and that adults prefer youth use marijuana to alcohol. Students perceive marijuana to be not as harmful as other drugs because it is from a plant and "natural." Students also report that they believe more people on Martha's Vineyard use marijuana than in other communities, one participant stated "Yes, we are in isolation and there are large amounts of it on the island."

Reasons why youth use marijuana include, for fun, relaxation, because their friend use, because they like to feel high and because there is nothing else to do on the island. They reported there is little to do in the winter and after 10pm on the island and that there should be more activities for youth to participate in, such as a bowling alley. Participants reported that there is little peer pressure to use marijuana; people use the drug because they want to, not because they are forced.

Students report that marijuana can be a gateway drug, can cause memory loss, increased appetite, can hinder judgment and cause a loss of motivation if used too much. They also report consequences such as lung failure, trouble with the law and being viewed as "not cool" if you smoke everyday.

Students report inconsistencies if adults in their life found out they were using marijuana. They stated that some teachers, parents, coaches and police would be very upset and there would be some sort of punishment, however, some of these adults may not view it as a serious offense, depends on the adult (parent, teacher, coach). They reported athletes would have to miss 25% of their games; however they report star athletes may not be penalized. They report students would be suspended for 10 days if caught smoking in school. They perceive that good students may not be penalized for using marijuana in school. The majority of students agreed that their parents would be very upset if they were caught using marijuana but state that there are other parents who do not mind and that many parents smoke themselves and acquire the marijuana from their children. Students perceive that their peers smoke during the week and on the weekends, while people drink mostly just on the weekends.

In response to the question, "What would prevent youth from using marijuana?" MVHS students reported that many people smoke on the island and it is hard to get away from it, that youth use marijuana out of boredom, they do not perceive it to be a harmful

substance and that there has not been a major tragedy involving marijuana to act as a deterrent.

Those in the focus group reported that marijuana has been discussed with them in health class, D.A.R.E., by parents, older siblings and friends. The students stated that parties and the Aquinas music festival promote marijuana use and that television ads, YTF and their assignment notebooks (given by the school) condemn use of the substance.

When asked about the passing of Question 2, to decriminalize marijuana, making it a civil as opposed to a criminal offence, (which was asked on the November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008 ballot), and students reported that their peers do not worry as much about getting caught with the drugs as they did before. Some students reported that marijuana must not be a big deal if adults want to decriminalize it, they do not think that the passage of Question 2 has changed enforcement by the police, perhaps that they are little more lenient now than in the past.

### ***Prescription Drug Misuse***

Martha's Vineyard High School students report that youth access prescription drugs to abuse from drug dealers, from their friends who do not need them anymore, their own homes (take it from parents) and their own prescriptions (asking the doctor for more when they do not really need them, painkillers etc.). The students in the focus groups reported that prescription drug misuse is viewed negatively in the community and by themselves. Their peers do not view it as "cool" and that most people who misuse the drugs are depressed. They perceive that most adults are more concerned with alcohol abuse by teens than prescription drug misuse. Students reported that youth use at parties with other drugs (alcohol and marijuana), at home and during their own time (not at school).

Students perceive that less than 6% of students are current (at least once in the past 30 days) prescription drug misusers, the actual rate of misuse by MVHS students is 4%. Students reported that they would never under any circumstances misuse prescription drugs, that it is too risky and you don't know the effects of prescription drugs because "there are so many different types, you never really know what you are getting." They reported that the community views abusing prescription medications as "not cool." Students report that people on Martha's Vineyard would be very concerned if someone was abusing prescription medications and would not want the individual to overdose. When asked if they believe people on the island misuse prescription drugs more so than in other communities all participants reported, "no, definitely not."

Students stated that youth misuse prescription drugs in order to become high, have a different feeling and to feel good; they report that there is no pressure to use and that most students do not use these drugs. They state that it is mostly older youth who are misusing prescription drugs, those who are over the age of 18 and who did not leave the island after high school, who did not go away to college.

When asked about consequences, the students reported that misuse become an addiction, that you never know the side effects, you may do something you later regret, overdose, death and that you can greatly damage your body and your reputation. Students reported that their parents (and perceive that most parents) would be very upset if they were misusing prescription drugs, that it is viewed as being much worse than alcohol and marijuana use. They reported that you would be suspended for 10 days if caught by the

school and that athletes would be suspended for 25% of their games (however, if it was a good athlete, it may not be for as much). They report that it is harder for the police to enforce because you can not smell prescription drugs like you can alcohol or marijuana. They state that it is easier to hide from the police than other drugs but that it is not a big problem in their community.

Martha's Vineyard High School students perceive that more people use alcohol and marijuana versus prescription drugs on the island. They report that they have discussed prescription drug abuse in health class, but that the topic is not covered in detail. They report that health class focuses more attention on alcohol and marijuana use. Participants reported that knowing more about the harmful effects to the body and mind as a result of abusing prescription medications would be helpful in preventing youth from misusing the drugs. The students reported that there are no messages that promote prescription drug misuse and that "Above the Influence" television ad campaigns condemn the abuse of these medications.

### **Limitations of Focus Groups**

This data only reflects the thoughts and opinions of the individual participants that agreed to participate in these groups, it is possible that other MVHS students might have differing opinions in this subject matter. Efforts were made to randomly select students to participate.