Data from over 6,500 15-18 year olds shows 95 per cent say vaping is around for them and their peers, and over 70 per cent say that use is problematic

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Survey data from over 6,500 15-18 year olds gathered by the DSM Foundation has shown that 95 per cent of respondents say that vaping is one of the main substances used by their peers, and over 70 per cent name it as a substance that they think is causing their peers the most problems.

The survey was carried out during the 2022-23 academic year, with students in Years 11-13 (or equivalent) asked to complete it anonymously ahead of a workshop delivered by one of the DSM Foundation's drugs education team members. Surveying students in this way means the charity gains valuable insight into a range of topics, including any drugs education the students have previously had, any subjects they particularly want covered during the DSM Foundation session, and their perceptions about substance use, behaviours and motivations.

In response to the question "Which are the main substances people in your year group use, if they do?", vaping was the most popular answer, followed by alcohol at 93 per cent, cigarettes at 76 per cent, and cannabis/weed at 74 per cent. The next most commonly given answer was cannabis edibles at 44 per cent, then nitrous oxide at 30 per cent, ketamine at 27 per cent and cocaine at 20 per cent, with other substances ranking lower.

Vaping was again the most commonly given answer in response to the question "Which substances do you think cause people in your year group most problems, if anyone does have problems?", followed by alcohol at 56 per cent, cigarettes at 41 per cent and cannabis/weed at 37 per cent. Again, other substances ranked lower.

In terms of acceptability, vaping scored highly; in response to the question "What attitude do you think people your age have towards substance use?" those completing the survey were able to select "OK to use regularly", "OK to use occasionally", "OK to try" or "not OK" for each substance. 62 per cent regarded regular use of vaping as acceptable, with alcohol next at 52 per cent. The "OK to use occasionally" figures were 18 per cent and 36 per cent for vaping and alcohol respectively, with cannabis/weed also at 36 per cent for this, and cannabis edibles and cigarettes both at 32 per cent. The highest level of unacceptability, gaining the greatest score for "not OK" was benzodiazepines/Xanax at 65 per cent, with steroids , LSD, cocaine, MDMA/ecstasy, ketamine and magic mushrooms all scoring over 45 per cent in terms of this response to this question.

Students were asked about the reasons for someone their age using drugs, with "curiosity", "socializing" and "for fun/relaxation" the highest rated responses. However, over 50 per cent stated "pressure" as one of the three main reasons they thought someone their age might use drugs, with around 42 per cent giving "coping with problems" and 28 per cent "addiction" in their top three.

DSM Foundation Director, Founder and Dan's mum Fiona Spargo-Mabbs said: "These data are incredibly useful for us in planning our drug education to make sure we meet the needs and priorities of students, but they also provide an invaluable insight into evolving trends, attitudes and behaviours, which inform all our wider work. The DSM Foundation shares the concerns of so many, seeing the levels of vaping rising so rapidly, especially since disposable vapes make this so attractive, accessible and easy for young people to do, presenting huge challenges to schools. Education is absolutely key to addressing this, for both young people and parents, alongside effective enforcement of regulations restricting exposure and availability to young people in real world situations.

"But we also mustn't lose sight of the spectrum of issues, risks and challenges our young people face around other substances they can find themselves making decisions about, and their shifting attitudes and perceptions, such as the ever-increasing acceptability of cannabis use by adolescents. We need to remain vigilant, to listen to young people, and to make sure we work together across our communities to educate and support them to make safer choices about drugs, whatever form these take."

Information for editors:

The DSM Foundation was established in 2014 following the death of 16 year old Daniel Spargo-Mabbs from an accidental overdose of ecstasy. His family felt that he simply hadn't known enough to be able to make decisions that would keep him safe, and realized there was a huge gap in the resources and

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support available to schools, so set up the charity in order to spare other families going through what they had experienced.

The aim of the DSM Foundation is to provide young people with relevant, age-appropriate, up to date and evidence-based information about drugs so they develop the skills to make choices that will keep themselves and their friends as safe as possible. To this end, the charity does a lot of work in schools, colleges and community organisations with children and young people, and also provides workshops for parents and caregivers, and training for school and college staff – the two groups shown by NHS survey data as the most likely sources of information about drugs and alcohol sought out by 11-15 year olds. Educational settings are also able to access “I Love You Mum, I Promise I Won’t Die”, a verbatim play by Mark Wheeller that was commissioned by the charity to tell Dan’s story in the words of his family and friends, through studying the work itself, or booking a Theatre in Education performance. Schools and colleges can also download age-appropriate, relevant, up to date and evidence-based drugs education resources free of charge from the DSM Foundation website for delivery by teachers through PSHE/PSE provision.

For more information about the DSM Foundation, go to https://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk/.

Media enquiries about this press release or the work of the DSM Foundation should be sent to media@dsmfoundation.org.uk.

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