

# Trends in Substance Use in a Prohibitionist University Compared to General College Populations

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**Background:** Researchers at the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions have conducted surveys on health risk behaviors among Andrews University students from 1995 to 2023. This occurs every 5-7 years with 6 data collection time periods, and an N of between 500-700 each time. There has been a core of questions that focused on substance use that allow us to examine trends. Andrews University is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Church and University forbid the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and all illegal substances. The use of substances may result in disfellowship from the church and removal from the university (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2016; University Student Handbook, 2023). In the past, many protestant churches were prohibitionist, but today, only Adventists and Mormons remain so (McBride et al., 2021).

**Literature Review:** Theories of cultural change suggest that over time, groups that occupy the same cultural space and time move toward each other in behaviors and values (Schaefer, 2020; Sieger & Zulkarnain, 2022). This is called cultural diffusion or leveling. Cultural lag suggests that Andrews students substance use rates will lag 5-10 years behind general cultural use trends. Theories in the Sociology of Religion, consistent with cultural change concepts, focus on the movement of religious groups from sect where behaviors and values are distinct from general culture to a denomination where members reflect general cultural behaviors and values. Sociologists have classified the Adventist Church as an established sect, moving toward a denomination and a strict church (see, Iannoccone, 1994; Dudley, Hernandez, McBride, 1997; Schaefer, 2020; McBride et al., 2021).

**Research Question:** Have there been changes in the gap between the rates of substance use by Andrews students and a national sample of college students? In 1995, Andrews students used substances at about half to one-third the rate of the national sample. This presentation addresses whether that gap has increased, remained stable, or decreased. The research literature suggests that students at Andrews will, over time, will use substances closer to the rate of the general college population because of cultural diffusion.

**Methods:** Data was collected in classes using a purposive sample that included classes reflecting student demographics, different university schools, and majors. All studies had institutional IRB approval.

**Analysis:** Analysis focused on trends in differences between the substance use rates of Andrews' students at each data collection time period compared to rates of use in a national population of college students from the Monitoring the Future Project (Patrick et al., 2022).

**Findings:** In examinations of five data points between 1995 and 2018, the gap in the rates of substance use between Andrews University students and a general U.S. college population remained about the same each time period. However, both groups tended to increase or decrease use over the same time periods. Data from the March 2023 collection period will be included in the presentation and will be examined to see if cultural leveling has occurred or if Andrews students have been able to resist the pull of cultural leveling.

## References

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### 50 word abstract

This presentation will compare trends in substance use between 1995 and 2023 in student populations from Andrews University and a U.S. national college sample to ascertain if the initial gap in use remained over time. Cultural diffusion theories suggest that behavioral gaps between subcultures and general culture disappear over time.