Gateway Sequence of Drug Use May Not Apply to Heavy Drug Users

Previous studies have reported that between 75% and 93% of drug users followed a typical “gateway” sequence of drug use--alcohol, followed by marijuana, followed by other illicit drugs.* However, a recent study suggests that heavy drug users--those whose drug use occupies a substantial portion of their daily behavior--are less likely to follow this sequence of drug progression. A secondary analysis of data collected from two ethnographic studies of heavy drug users in New York City between 1984 and 1987 revealed that only 33% of the heavy drug users followed the conventional progression of drug use. According to the authors, these findings suggest that drug “sequencing patterns may vary markedly, depending on the overall drug involvement of the sample under study” (p. 193). Thus, “drug abuse prevention messages based on the gateway model may be least effective for a segment of the population that potentially will abuse drugs the most” (p. 194).

Sequence of Drug Use Progression by Heavy Drug Users,
New York City, 1984-1987
(N=285)


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