



# Substance Use Determinants in Jamaican Under-25s: Family, Peers, Spirituality and Maltreatment (Literature Review)



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## Background

**Substance use** has numerous implications for under-25s – including adverse medical, psychiatric and academic consequences. In Jamaica, the **18-24** age range is the highest consumer of substances, with **under-18** use commonplace<sup>[1]</sup>. Jamaica is undergoing rapid change in its **attitudes** and **laws** regarding substance use; understanding the reasons why under-25s use substances will help inform future **interventions** and **policy decisions**.

Substance Use Prevalence in Jamaican Secondary School Students<sup>[2]</sup>

Substance	Lifetime use (% population)	Past year use (% population)	Past month use (% population)
Alcohol	64.1	44	23.6
Tobacco	27.5	9.6	4.4
Cannabis	20.7	11.7	6.2
Inhalants	13.3	6.6	4.1

## Aims

This review will investigate the determinants of substance use in under-25s in Jamaica, aiming to identify key sub-groups to target with interventions, and propose topics for further research.

## Methods

A literature search was performed with **Ovid**, producing 379 results, of which **41** remained after **inclusion/exclusion criteria** were applied. Additional sources were utilised as the review was written. All research discussed pertains to under-25s in Jamaica.

Review

### 1. Family relationships

- **Cannabis use** was higher in stressful families<sup>[1]</sup>; cannabis is used as **self-medication** to cope with **stressful family relationships**.
  - A satisfying family life acts to **mediate academic stress**, reducing substance use<sup>[3]</sup>.
- No such relationship was found for tobacco and alcohol, whereas Oshi et al. (2018) found **alcohol use** to be higher in **divorced-parent families** (which experience more stressful relationships)<sup>[4]</sup>

### 2. Peer influences

- Young Jamaicans at **university** encounter a social environment **more accepting** of substance use, so are **more likely** to use substances<sup>[5]</sup>.
- However, **positive peer influences** may **mediate stress**, particularly in the stressful university environment, **discouraging** substance use as a **maladaptive coping mechanism**.
- **Negative peer influences** (e.g. **peer pressure**) predispose young Jamaicans to licit and illicit substance use<sup>[1]</sup>.

### 3. Religion and Spirituality

- Higher levels of spirituality are **protective** against substance use<sup>[1]</sup>.
- However, being **Rastafarian** made **cannabis use 2.33 times** more likely in **males**<sup>[6]</sup>.
  - Cannabis used as a **sacrament**; users report greater **mental clarity** and **connectedness** with 'Jah' (God)<sup>[7]</sup>

### 4. Childhood maltreatment

- **Physical and emotional child abuse** make substance **more likely** later in life in response to **trauma**<sup>[8]</sup>.
- **Sexual abuse** in childhood does not predict substance use in later life, contrary to international literature .

Cases of childhood maltreatment in Jamaica, 2007-2015<sup>[9]</sup>.



**Conclusions:** Various factors can **protect against** or **predispose** substance use in Jamaican under-25s. **University students** and under-18s brought up in **single-parent families** are key sub-groups to target with interventions. Further research on **mechanisms** by which these determinants work, particular **religions** and which determinant has the **greatest effect** is recommended. This review, and future research, can help inform policy decisions and intervention design for the key sub-groups found.

## References

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