

Metro Now

DRINKS, DRUGS NEW FAD AMONG TEEN STUDENTS

ORCHIE BANDYOPADHYAY

What's common to a racy Hollywood flick and Delhi's upper middle-class teens? Fast cars, designer labels, unlimited money and risky flirtation with drugs and alcohol.

A survey of boys and girls between the 14 and 17 years of age in the NCR's public schools reveals that many adolescents have experimented with drugs and alcohol or associate with those who do.

The survey of 541 boys and 459 girls, conducted by the Department of Mental Health and Behavioral Sciences, Max Hospital, shows that these teens think it is fashionable to drink, do drugs and indulge in sex.

Some of the findings are startling and really scary because several teens say they have been party to drink driving. "I have sat in a car which had been driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol," 15 per cent of the boys surveyed said. They also admitted to may have done it often. But drink driving isn't a boys-only club — six per cent girls have done this, too.

Smoking in school is another startling finding. Five per cent girls and 12 per cent of boys fall in this category. The numbers suggest smoking is a popular pastime with a majority of students inside school.

"A lot of experimentation is happening among young schoolchildren. It is because children feel it is fashionable to copy role models. It doesn't matter if it is right or



For kids, having a drink or making out is part of being cool and experimenting

wrong. Even the media has influenced them as it often glamorises potentially destructive behaviours such as drinking, drugs, affairs, and intimate teen relationships. Then there's peer pressure," Dr Samir Parikh, Max Healthcare's chief psychiatrist, said.

Stricter drinking rules do not seem to have thwarted these kids because underage drinking is rampant, if the survey is to be believed.

"Having one drink at a party is something that everyone does," 16 per cent of boys and 11 per cent of girls say. But these smaller percentages collectively spell doom as it means a large number of school students — more than 600 students from a population of 1,000 — could be drinking at parties.

The survey also shows that substance abuse is another 'habit' with teenagers. For them, experimenting with new drugs — the most serious of transgressions — once in a while is common, especially at parties. At least, nine



per cent boys and four per cent girls are the experimenting variety. And the hot spots for this experimentation and troublesome indulgences are these hi-flying parties.

But such surveys also give you something else to look forward to: a social programme to help these kids. "These surveys form the basis of a new Pro-Social Moderator Programme that will help children lead a positive life. Workshops will be held to train three students from a school so that they become role models and impart positive values to other younger students," Dr Parikh said.