



The National Center on  
Addiction and Substance Abuse  
at Columbia University



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# The Importance of Family Dinners VII

September 2011

Conducted by:  
QEV Analytics, Ltd.  
Knowledge Networks

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# Accompanying Statement by Joseph A. Califano, Jr., Founder and Chairman

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Over the past 17 years, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA Columbia) has surveyed thousands of American teens and their parents to identify factors associated with an increase or decrease in the likelihood of teen substance use. We have learned that a child who gets through age 21 without smoking, using illegal drugs or abusing alcohol is virtually certain never to do so. And, we've learned that parents have the greatest influence on whether their teens will choose to use.

Our surveys have consistently found a relationship between children having frequent dinners with their parents and a decreased risk of their smoking, drinking or using other drugs, and that parental engagement fostered around the dinner table is one of the most potent tools to help parents raise healthy, drug-free children.

Simply put: frequent family dinners make a difference.

In this report, *The Importance of Family Dinners VII*, we examine the link between the frequency of family dinners and teens' substance use, their access to substances, and the quality of teens' relationships with their parents and siblings.

Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week), those who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are:

- Almost four times likelier to use tobacco;
- More than twice as likely to use alcohol;
- Two-and-a-half times likelier to use marijuana; and
- Almost four times likelier to say they expect to try drugs in the future.

There is also a correlation between the frequency of family dinners and a teen's access to drugs. Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners, those who have infrequent family dinners are more likely to be able to get alcohol, prescription drugs or marijuana in an hour or less.

This year's study again demonstrates that the magic that happens at family dinners isn't the food on the table, but the conversations and family engagement around the table. When asked about the best part of family dinners, the most frequent answer from teens is the sharing, talking and interacting with family members; the second most frequent answer is sitting down or being together. Add in similar responses such as spending time with particular family members or laughing and telling jokes, and the result is that three-quarters of teens who report having dinner with their family at least once a week find the interaction and being together to be the best part of family dinners.

Teens whose families frequently eat dinner together not only spend more time at the table together, they spend more time together in general. Time with parents is important: compared to teens who spend 21 hours or more per week with their parents, those who spend seven hours or less per week with their parents are twice as likely to use alcohol and twice as likely to say they expect to try drugs in the future. And the teens surveyed were more than three times as likely to say they would like to spend more time with their parents than to say they would like to spend less time with their parents.

Family dinner is an ideal time to strengthen the quality of family relationships. Teens having frequent family dinners are more likely to report having excellent relationships with family members. As the quality of teens' relationships with their parents declines, their likelihood of using tobacco, alcohol and marijuana rises. Siblings are important too: teens who believe their older siblings have tried illegal drugs are more likely to say they expect to try drugs in the future.

Of course, dinner isn't the only time parents can engage with their children. There are other opportunities for conversation and teens need consistent messages from parents on alcohol and other drugs. Teens whose parents agree completely with each other on what to say to their teen about alcohol and other drug use are less likely to use alcohol and marijuana and less likely to expect to try drugs in the future. Whenever the conversations occur, it is important for parents to talk to their teens about what is going on in their teen's life and what is expected with respect to alcohol and drugs.

Our research findings on the importance of family dinners inspired us in 2001 to create an annual, national day of celebration, *CASA Family Day--A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Children™*. *Family Day* is celebrated every year on the fourth Monday in September, as a reminder to parents of the importance of family dinners. In 2011, *Family Day* will be celebrated on September 26th. The president, the governors of all 50 states, and more than a thousand cities and counties all across America recognize the importance of family dinners by proclaiming and supporting *Family Day*. Hundreds of community organizations, churches, schools, and social centers celebrate *Family Day*. For more information about *Family Day*, and for ideas about how to make dinner together fun, visit our Web site, [www.CASAFamilyDay.org](http://www.CASAFamilyDay.org).

The findings presented in this report come from *The National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XVI: Teens and Parents*, which CASA Columbia released on August 24, 2011. This year we surveyed 1,037 teenagers ages 12 to 17 (546 males, 491 females), and 528 parents of these teens via the Internet. We also conducted our usual telephone survey of 1,006 teens ages 12 to 17 (478 boys and 528 girls) in order to continue tracking trends from prior years. The methodology for the 2011 annual survey is described in Appendix A.

## **A Word of Appreciation**

I want to express CASA Columbia's appreciation to Steve Wagner, President of QEV Analytics, Ltd., for administering the telephone survey and especially for his insightful work in analyzing the data, and to the staff at Knowledge Networks, including Jordon Peugh, Poom Nukulkiij and Jeffrey Shand-Lubbers, for their administration of the Internet-based survey.

On CASA Columbia's staff, Cathleen Woods-King managed this undertaking and wrote the report. Sarah Tsai of CASA Columbia's Substance Abuse and Data Analysis Center (SADAC<sup>SM</sup>) assisted in the data analysis. Kathleen Ferrigno, CASA Columbia's Director of Marketing, and Lauren Duran, CASA Columbia's Director of Communications, reviewed and edited the report. Emily Feinstein, Associate Director of The Joseph A. Califano, Jr. Institute for Applied Policy, assisted in the survey design and reviewed and edited the report. Jane Carlson efficiently handled the administrative aspects.

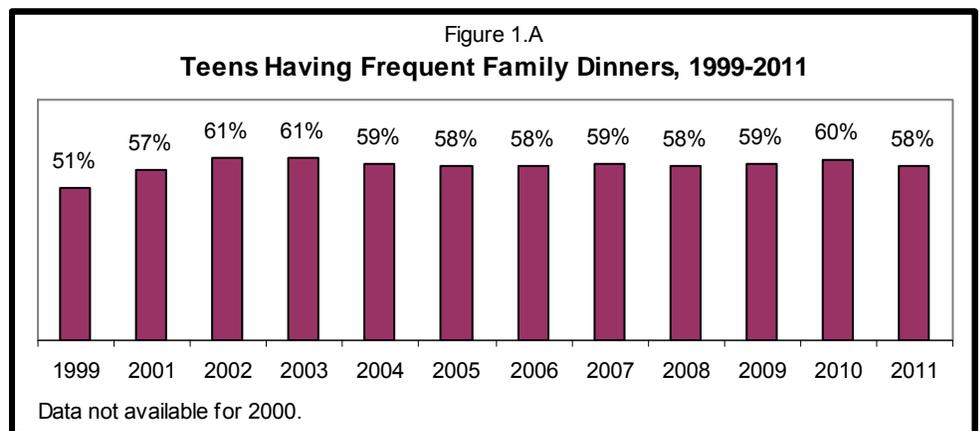
# Chapter I

## The Importance of Family Dinners

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### Frequency of Family Dinners

In this year's trend survey, \* 58 percent of teens report having dinner with their families at least five times a week, a proportion that has remained consistent over the past decade. (Figure 1.A)



### Dinner: A Time to Talk and Check In

We asked teens what they considered to be the best part of family dinners--other than the food. Among teens who report having at least one family dinner per week, over half say that talking, sharing, catching up and interacting with family members is the best part of family dinners. (Table 1.1)

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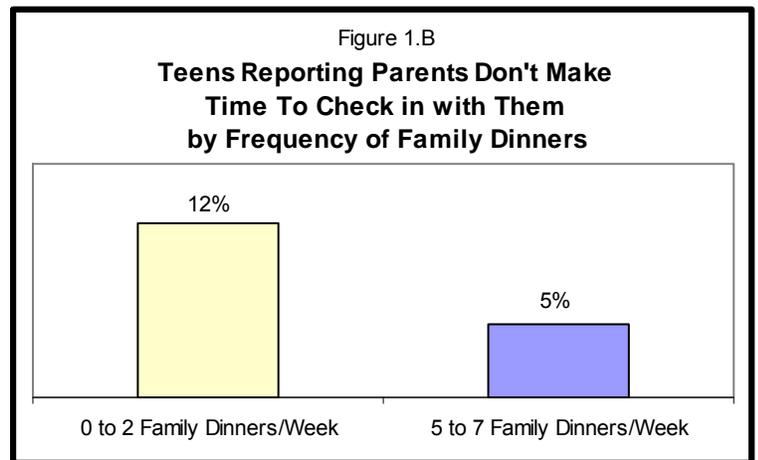
\* This year we conducted two nationally representative surveys--we surveyed 1,037 teens and 528 of their parents over the Internet, which we did for the first time last year and, as we have done in all past years, we surveyed 1,006 teens by telephone. In the telephone survey we asked teens questions that we have used to measure trends over time.

Table 1.1

**What would you consider to be the best part of family dinners, other than the food?**

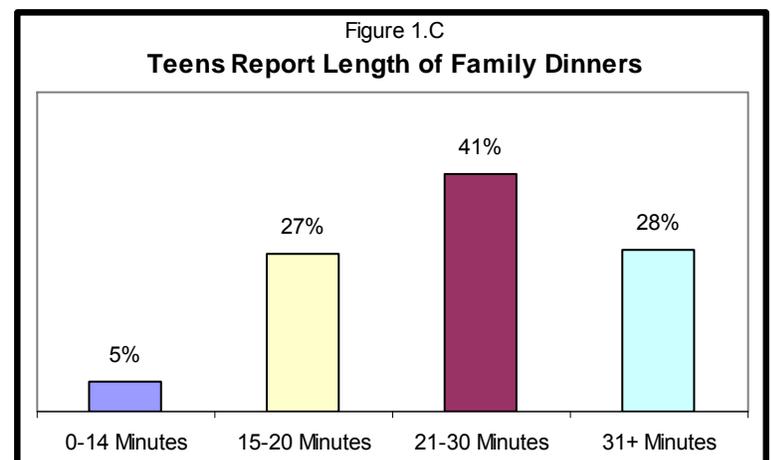
Responses	Percent
Share/catch up/talk/interact/conversation	54
Sitting down/being together	11
Spending time with family or particular individuals	6
Humor/laughing/jokes	5
Watch TV/movies	3
Cooking/doing things together	1
Other	2
No response/don't know	19

We asked teens, “Would you say that your parents [or parent or guardian] regularly make time to check in with you and find out what’s happening with you, or not?” Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week), teens who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are almost two-and-a-half times likelier to report that their parents do not regularly make time to check in with them. (Figure 1.B)

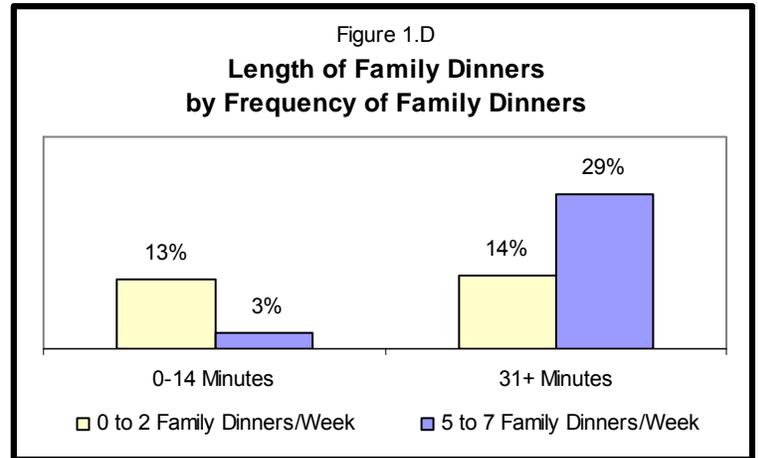


**Families Having Frequent Dinners Spend More Time Over Dinner**

We asked teens how long dinner with family usually lasts. Five percent say their family dinners usually last less than 15 minutes, 27 percent say 15 to 20 minutes, 41 percent say 21 to 30 minutes, and 28 percent say dinner usually lasts more than 30 minutes. (Figure 1.C)



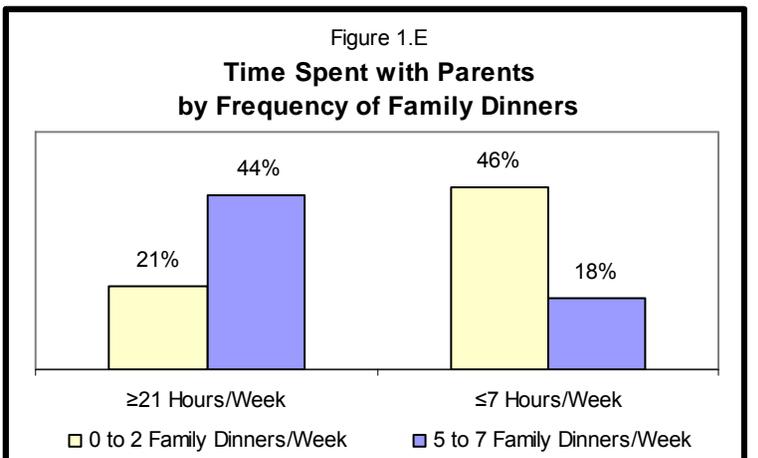
Teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week are four times likelier to say dinner lasts less than 15 minutes compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week. Compared to teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week, teens who have five to seven family dinners per week are twice as likely to say dinner lasts more than 30 minutes. (Figure 1.D)



## Time Spent with Parents Matters

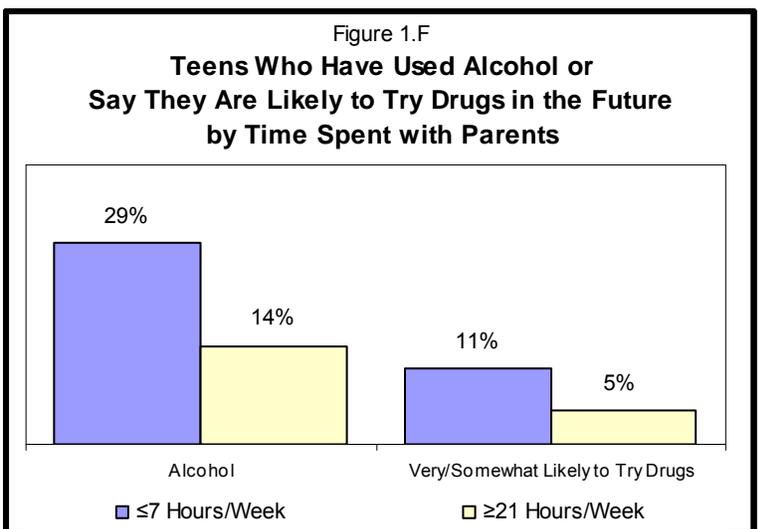
While 18 percent of teens say they would like to spend more time with their parents, only five percent say they would like to spend less time with their parents.

Teens having frequent family dinners spend more time in general with their parents. Teens who have frequent family dinners are twice as likely to spend 21 hours or more per week (or at least three hours per day on average) with their parents compared to teens who have infrequent family dinners. Teens who have infrequent family dinners are two-and-a-half times likelier to spend only seven hours or less per week (or one hour or less per day on average) with their parents than those who have frequent family dinners. (Figure 1.E)

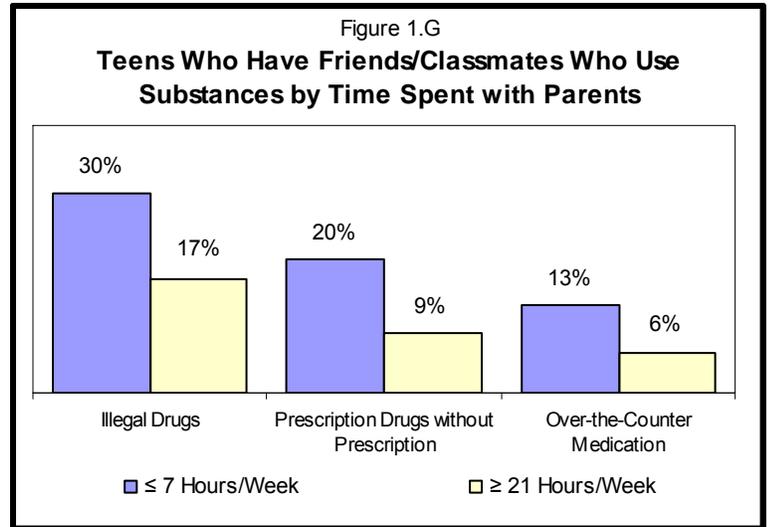


Compared to teens who spend 21 hours or more per week with their parents, teens who spend seven hours or less per week with their parents are (Figure 1.F):

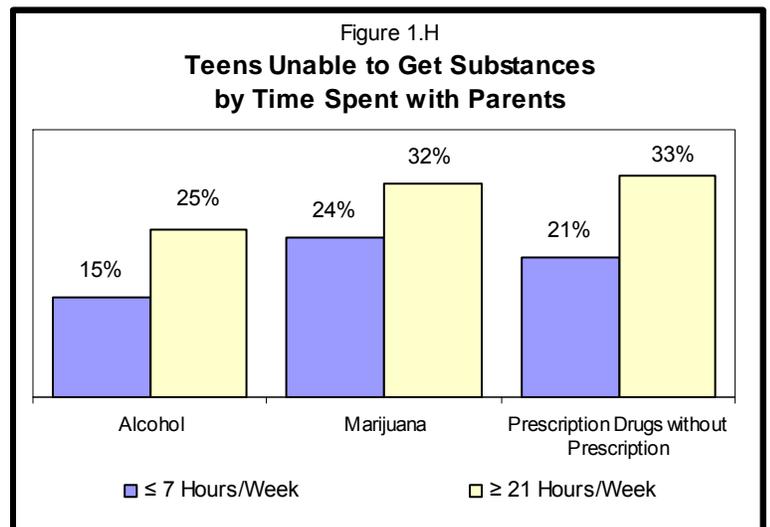
- Twice as likely to have used alcohol;
- Twice as likely to say they expect to try drugs (including marijuana and prescription drugs without a prescription to get high) in the future.



Compared to teens who spend 21 hours or more per week with their parents, teens who spend seven hours or less per week with their parents are about twice as likely to have at least one friend or classmate who uses illegal drugs, prescription drugs without a prescription to get high or over-the-counter medication to get high. (Figure 1.G)



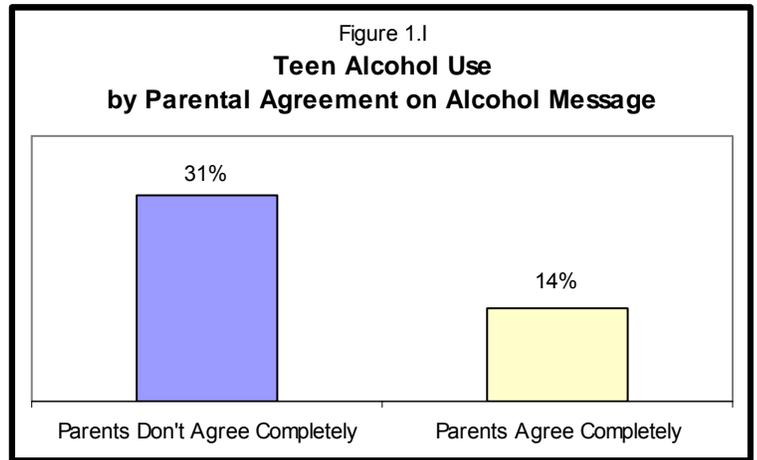
Compared to teens who spend seven hours or less per week with their parents, those who spend 21 hours or more per week with their parents are about one-and-a-half times more likely to be unable to get alcohol, marijuana or prescription drugs without a prescription. (Figure 1.H)



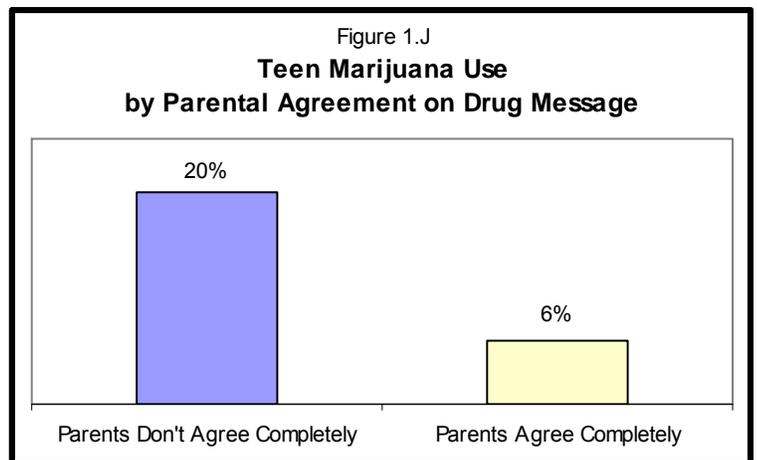
## Consistent Parental Messages About Alcohol and Other Drug Use Matter

We asked parents: When it comes to using drugs and drinking alcohol, how much do you and your child’s other parent agree on what to say to your child? Two-thirds of parents (67 percent) report that they “agree completely” with each other on what to say to their teen about drug use. Half (53 percent) of parents “agree completely” on what to say to their teen about alcohol use.

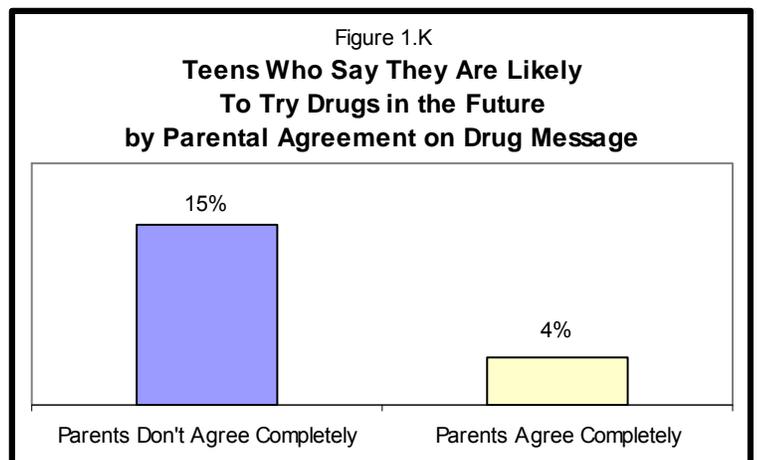
Compared to teens whose parents agree completely with each other on what to say to their teen regarding alcohol use, teens whose parents do not completely agree are twice as likely to have used alcohol. (Figure 1.I)



Compared to teens whose parents agree completely with each other on what to say to their teen regarding drug use, teens whose parents do not completely agree are more than three times likelier to have used marijuana. (Figure 1.J)



Compared to teens whose parents agree completely with each other on what to say to their teen regarding drug use, teens whose parents do not completely agree are three-and-a-half times likelier to expect to try drugs (including marijuana and prescription drugs without a prescription to get high) in the future. (Figure 1.K)





# Chapter II

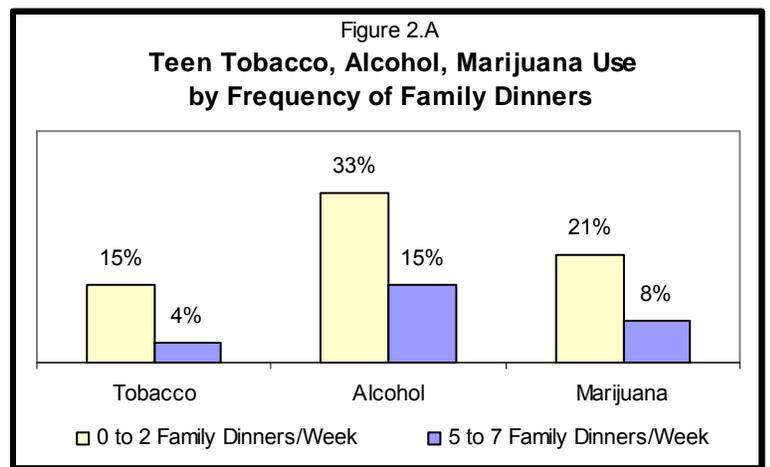
## The Relationship Between Family Dinners and Teen Substance Use and Availability of Substances

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### Frequency of Family Dinners and Teen Substance Use

Over the past 17 years, CASA Columbia's national survey of teens and parents has consistently found a relationship between the frequency of family dinners and teen drinking, smoking and other drug use.

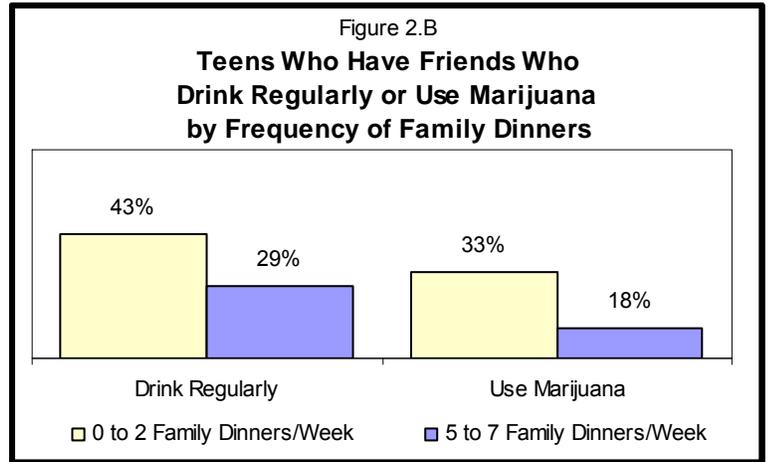
Compared to teens who have frequent family dinners (five to seven per week), those who have infrequent family dinners (fewer than three per week) are almost four times likelier to have used tobacco, more than twice as likely to have used alcohol, and two-and-a-half times likelier to have used marijuana. (Figure 2.A)



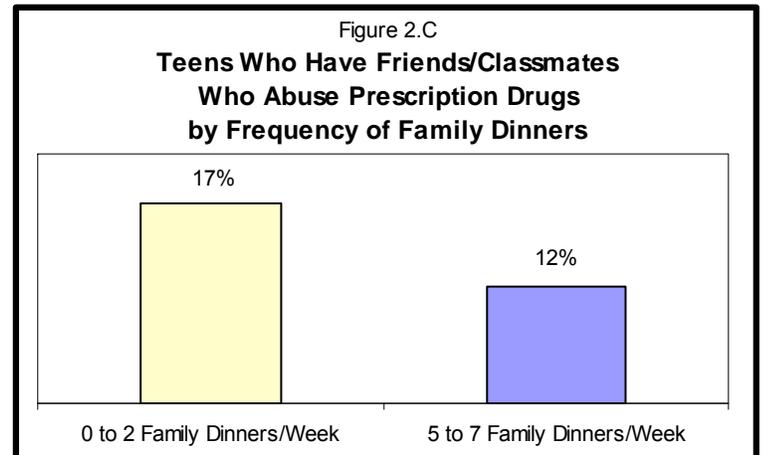
## Family Dinners and Having Friends Who Use Substances

Teens who have frequent family dinners are less likely to have friends who use substances.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are nearly one-and-a-half times likelier to have friends who drink regularly and almost twice as likely to have friends who use marijuana. (Figure 2.B)

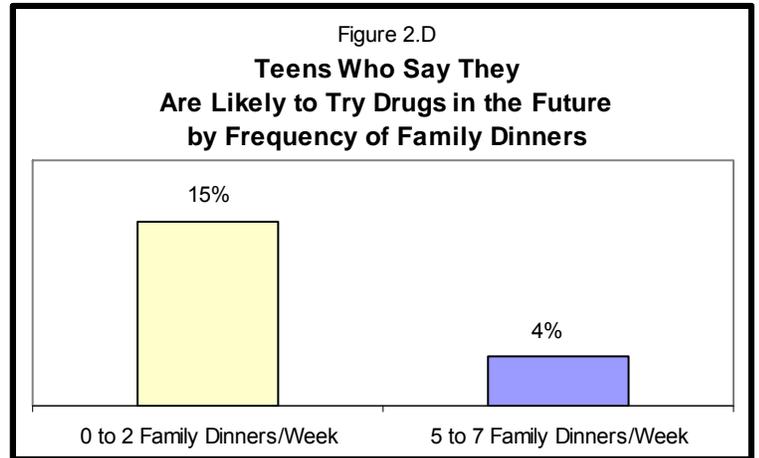


Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are nearly one-and-a-half times likelier to have at least one friend or classmate who uses prescription drugs without a prescription to get high. (Figure 2.C)



## The Relationship Between Family Dinners and the Likelihood of Future Substance Use

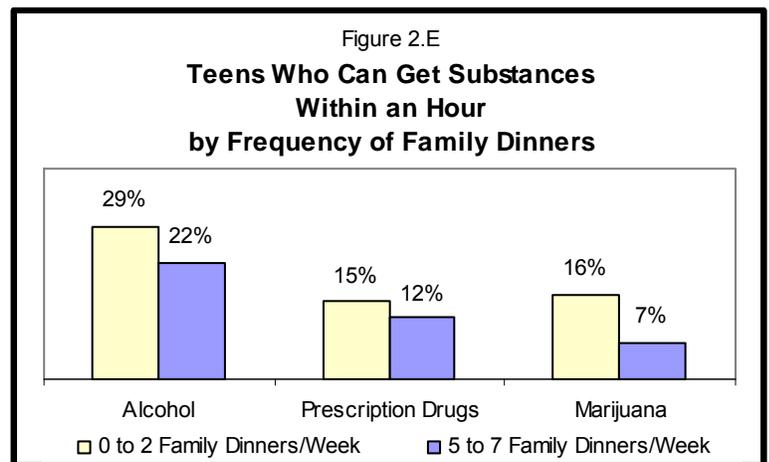
Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are almost four times likelier to say they expect to try drugs (including marijuana and prescription drugs without a prescription to get high) in the future. (Figure 2.D)



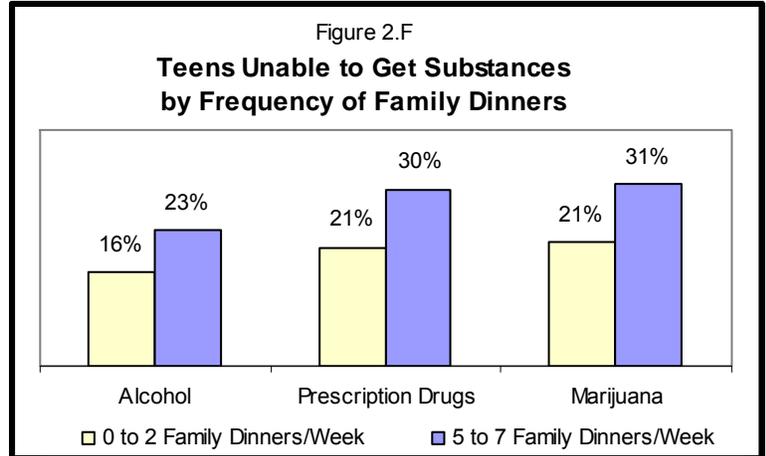
## Family Dinners and Teens' Access to Alcohol, Prescription Drugs and Marijuana

Teens who have infrequent family dinners are likelier to say they have ready access to alcohol, prescription drugs (without a prescription in order to get high) or marijuana, whereas teens who have frequent family dinners are more likely to report having no access to such drugs.

Compared to teens who have five to seven family dinners per week, those who have fewer than three family dinners per week are more likely to be able to get alcohol, prescription drugs or marijuana in an hour or less. (Figure 2.E)



Teens who have five to seven family dinners per week are about one-and-a-half times likelier to be unable to get alcohol, prescription drugs or marijuana if they want to, compared to teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week. (Figure 2.F)



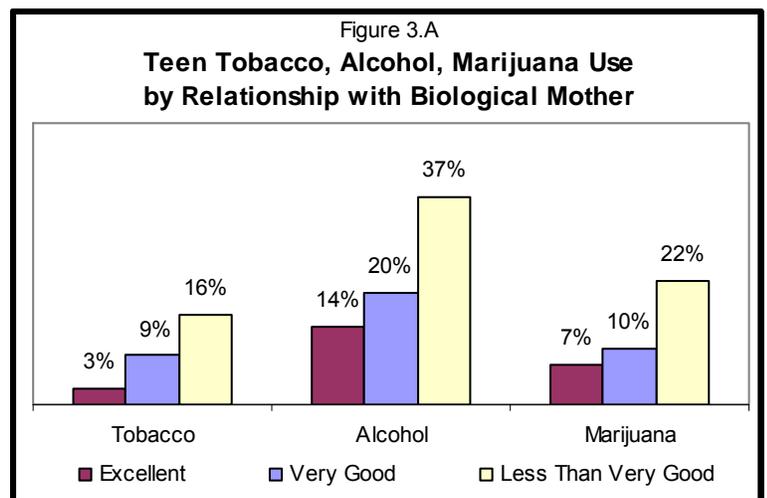
# Chapter III

## Family Dinners and Family Relationships

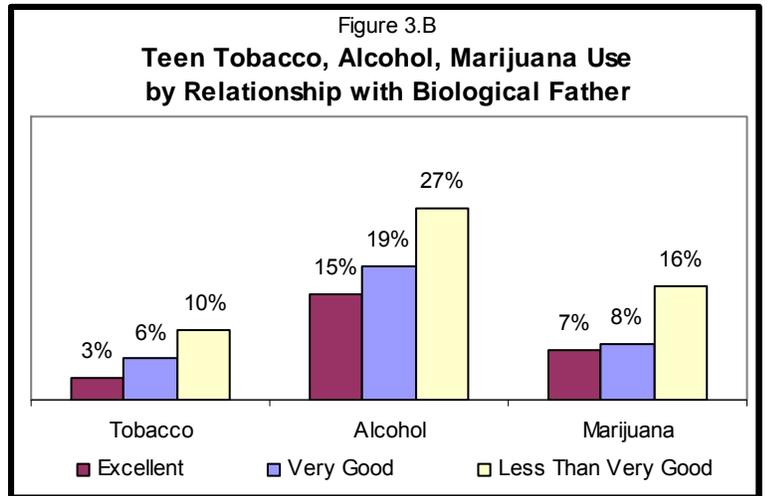
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### Quality of Family Relationships Associated with Teen Substance Use

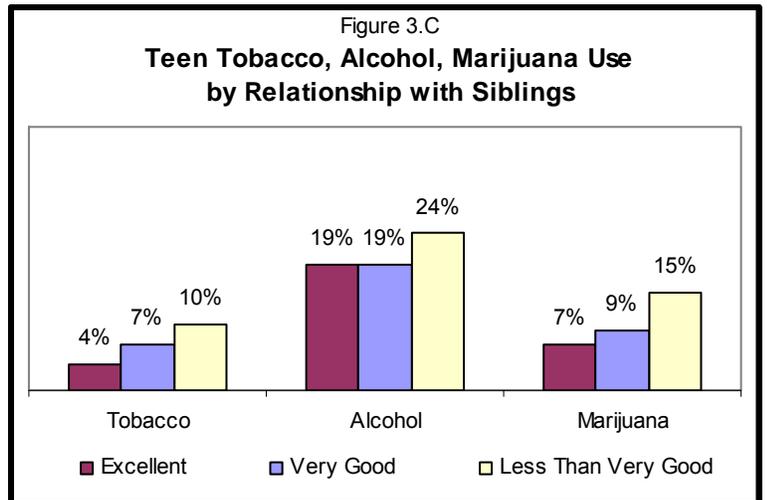
Teens reporting an excellent relationship with their mother are less likely to have used tobacco, alcohol or marijuana compared to those teens reporting a very good relationship with their mother. Similarly, teens reporting a very good relationship with their mother are less likely to have used each of these substances compared to teens reporting a less than very good relationship with their mother. (Figure 3.A)



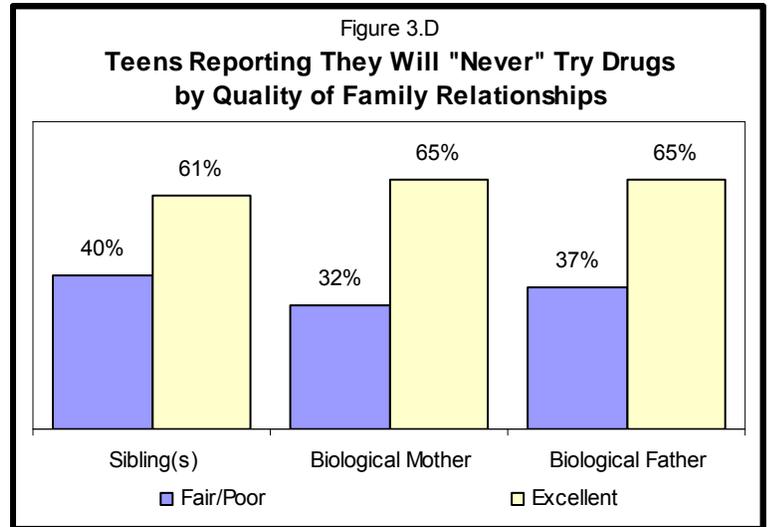
Teens reporting an excellent relationship with their father are less likely to have used tobacco, alcohol or marijuana compared to those teens reporting a very good relationship with their father. Similarly, teens reporting a very good relationship with their father are less likely to have used each of these substances compared to teens reporting a less than very good relationship with their father. (Figure 3.B)



There also appears to be some correlation between the quality of teens' relationships with their siblings and teens' likelihood of having used tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. However, only the results for marijuana use are statistically significant: as teens' sibling relationships decline from excellent to less than very good, the percentage of teens having used marijuana more than doubles. (Figure 3.C)



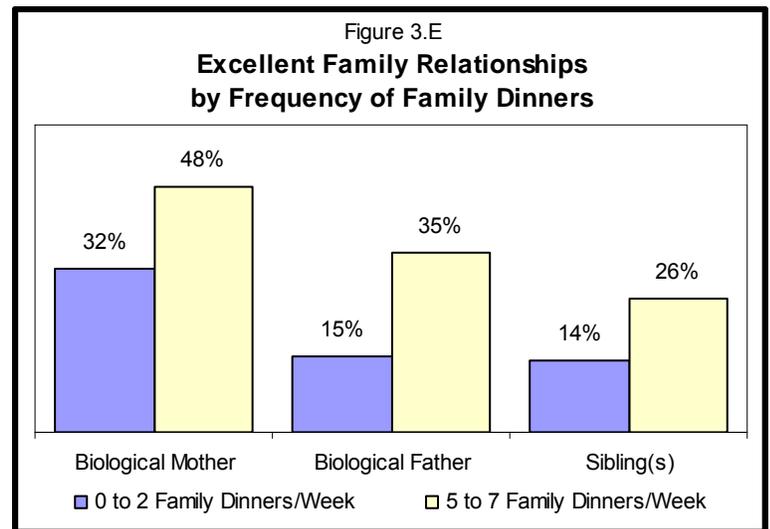
The percentage of teens reporting they will “never” try drugs in the future increases significantly as the quality of the teens’ relationships with mom and dad improves from fair or poor to excellent. This appears to hold true for teens’ sibling relationships as well, although the results were not statistically significant. (Figure 3.D)



### Family Dinners and the Quality of Teens’ Relationships with Mom, Dad and Siblings

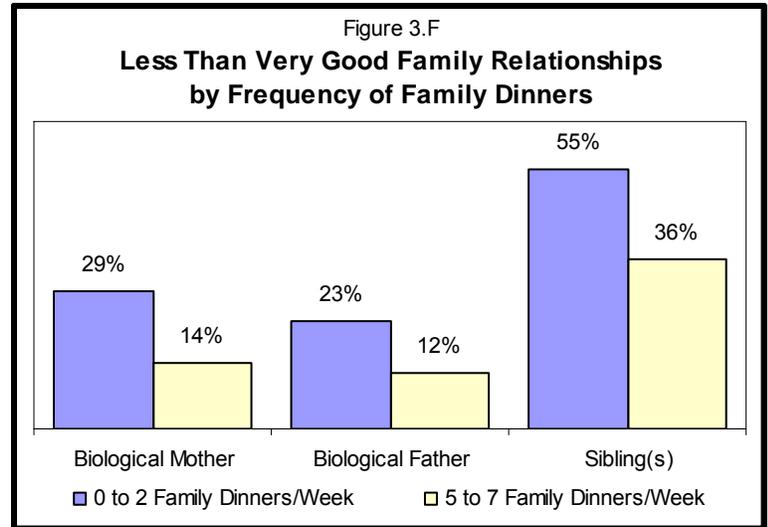
Teens having frequent family dinners are more likely to report having high quality relationships with both parents and with siblings. Compared to teens having fewer than three family dinners per week, teens having five to seven family dinners per week are (Figure 3.E):

- One-and-a-half times likelier to report having an excellent relationship with their mother;
- More than twice as likely to report having an excellent relationship with their father;
- Almost twice as likely to report having an excellent relationship with their sibling(s).



Teens having infrequent family dinners are more likely to report having less than high quality relationships with both parents and with siblings. Compared to teens having five to seven family dinners per week, teens having fewer than three family dinners per week are (Figure 3.F):

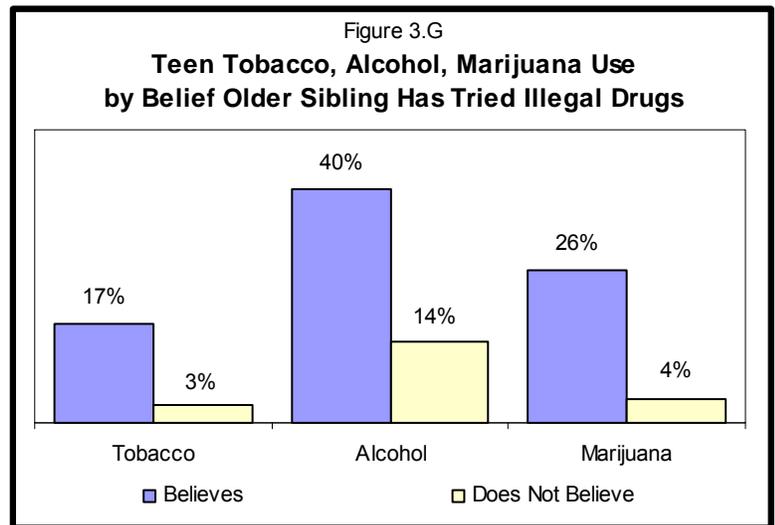
- Twice as likely to report a less than very good relationship with their mother;
- Almost twice as likely to report a less than very good relationship with their father;
- One-and-a-half times likelier to report a less than very good relationship with their sibling(s).



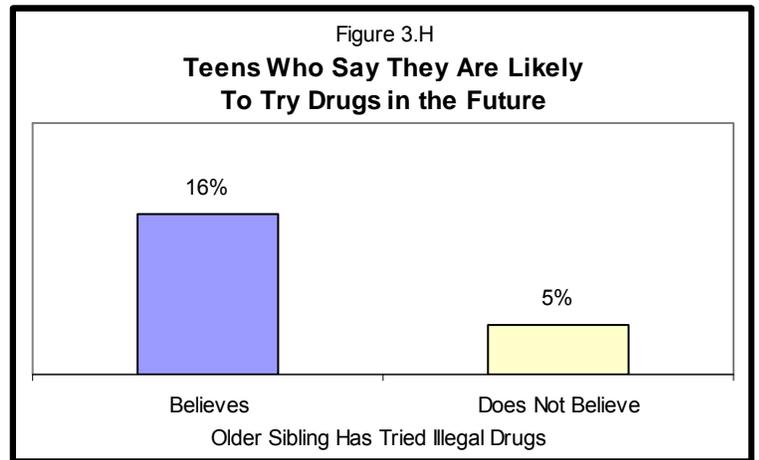
### Older Siblings’ Perceived Substance Use and Teen Substance Use

We asked teens, “If you had to guess, do you think your older brother(s) or sister(s) has/have ever tried an illegal drug?” Compared to teens who do not believe their older sibling or siblings have ever tried an illegal drug, teens who believe their sibling(s) have tried an illegal drug are (Figure 3.G):

- More than five-and-a-half times likelier to have used tobacco;
- Almost three times likelier to have used alcohol;
- Six-and-a-half times likelier to have used marijuana.

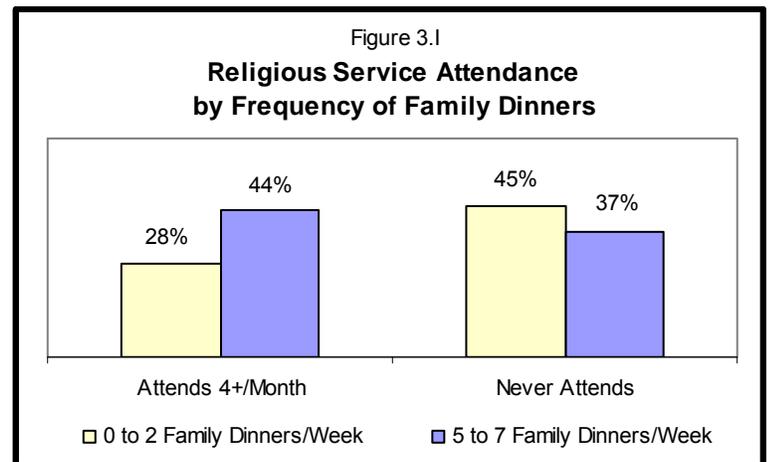


Compared to teens who do not believe their older sibling or siblings have ever tried an illegal drug, teens who believe their sibling(s) have tried an illegal drug are more than three times likelier to expect to try drugs (including marijuana and prescription drugs without a prescription to get high) in the future. (Figure 3.H)



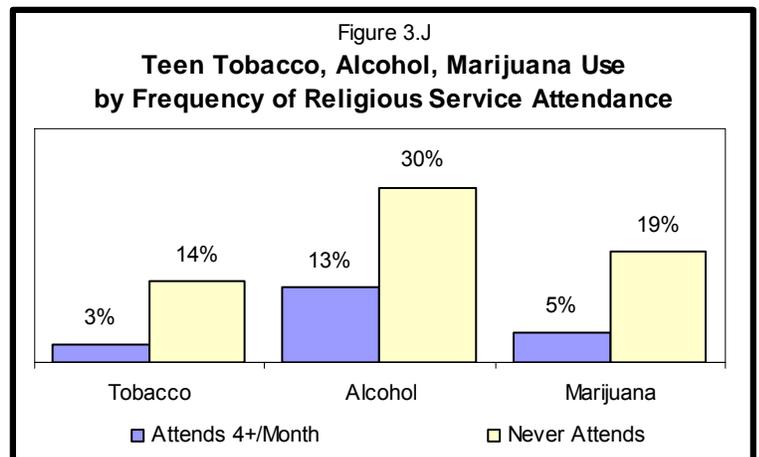
### Family Dinners and Attending Religious Services

Compared to teens who have fewer than three family dinners per week, teens who have five to seven family dinners per week are more likely to attend religious services weekly (four or more times a month) and less likely never to attend religious services. (Figure 3.I)



Compared to teens who attend religious services at least four times a month, those who never attend services are (Figure 3.J):

- Nearly five times likelier to have used tobacco;
- More than twice as likely to have used alcohol;
- Almost four times likelier to have used marijuana.





# Appendix A

## Survey Methodology

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The questionnaire for this survey was designed by the staffs of The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA Columbia) and QEV Analytics, Ltd. (QEV), a public opinion research firm located in Washington, DC. QEV has extensive experience conducting surveys and other forms of qualitative and quantitative research with adolescents and adults. Questions and themes were pre-tested by conducting two focus groups in St. Louis, Missouri, at a commercial focus group facility. The first focus group consisted of current high school juniors and seniors (16- to 19-year olds). The second focus group consisted of recent high school graduates (18- to 20-year olds).

The data in this report were derived from two surveys: (1) a telephone survey of 1,006 teenagers ages 12 to 17 conducted by QEV using the same random digit dial (RDD) sampling technique used in previous years; and (2) an Internet-based survey of 1,037 teenagers ages 12 to 17 and 528 of their parents conducted by Knowledge Networks using a methodology that combines RDD and address-based sampling (ABS).

### **QEV Analytics, Ltd. Survey**

In order to track trends from previous survey years, we contracted with QEV to conduct a telephone survey of children ages 12 to 17. As we have done in the past 15 surveys, this survey was conducted by telephone, utilizing a random household selection procedure called random digit dialing (RDD), in which a pool of telephone numbers was assembled by a commercial survey sample vendor utilizing extensive information concerning telephone number assignments across the country. Telephone numbers in this initial pool represented all 48 continental states in proportion to their population. The sample frame does not include cell phone-only households.

Households were qualified for participation in the survey by determining that a teen between the ages of 12 and 17 lived in the household. At least six call back attempts were made to each telephone number before the telephone number was dropped.

Once a household was qualified as the residence of an eligible teenager ages 12 to 17, permission for survey participation by the teen was sought from the teen's parent or guardian. After permission was obtained, if the potential teen participant was available, the teen interview was conducted. If the potential teen participant was not available at the time of the initial contact with the parent or guardian, then a call back was scheduled for the teen interview. The surveys were conducted in English only. The scripts designed to solicit parental consent for the teen participation in this survey were available in English and Spanish.

In total, 1,006 teenagers (478 males, 528 females) were interviewed between March 29 and May 9, 2011. The margin of sampling error for the telephone survey is  $\pm 3.1$  percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

The data collection process for this survey was supervised by Steven Wagner, President of QEV Analytics, Ltd.

## **Knowledge Networks Survey**

Knowledge Networks administered the survey through adult members of its online, nationally representative research panel and their children. The panel was created by randomly selecting households using two methodologies: random-digit dial (RDD) and addressed-based sampling (ABS). ABS involves probability-based sampling of addresses from the U.S. Postal Service's Delivery Sequence File. Randomly selected addresses are invited, through a series of mailings and, in some cases, follow up calls, to join the Knowledge Networks panel. ABS reaches households that are outside the RDD frame or are hard to reach through RDD, including cell phone-only households, households on do not call lists, and households

with caller-ID systems; 98 percent of households are "covered" using ABS. Knowledge Networks also utilizes list-assisted RDD sampling techniques based on a sample frame of the U.S. residential landline telephone universe, with an oversampling of telephone exchanges that have high concentrations of African-American and Hispanic households based on Census data. The 30 percent of numbers for which a valid postal address can not be matched to the number are undersampled. Advance letters are sent to households for which a valid address is available; subsequently, all of the randomly selected numbers are called and invited to participate in the Knowledge Networks panel. Numbers are called for 90 days, with at least 14 attempts made for non-answers and numbers known to be associated with a household.

In order to assure that the research panel is nationally representative, individuals are selected independently of Internet access and computer ownership, and individuals who attempt to self-select or volunteer to join the panel are excluded. Individuals who are randomly selected and agree to become members of the research panel are provided with a laptop computer and free Internet access if they don't already have a personal computer and Internet access in their home. Knowledge Networks administers a profile survey to each new panel member to collect basic demographic information (including the ages of all other individuals living in the member's household) which is used for eligibility and weighting purposes, and is attached to future survey results. Once the profile is complete the member is considered activated.

Once a week, activated members are invited, based on eligibility, to participate in a Knowledge Networks client survey. Participation is completely voluntary and panel members are free to participate (or not) in any given survey; however, if a member does not participate in a number of consecutive surveys, Knowledge Networks may remove that individual from the panel. Panel members are offered incentives to serve on the panel: those without a computer and Internet connection are provided with a laptop and free Internet access,

while those who have their own computer and Internet access earn reward points for participation that can be converted into cash (approximately \$4 - \$6 per month).

Knowledge Networks invited 1,601 men and 2,082 women (3,683) ages 25 and older with a child between the ages of 12 and 17 living in their home to participate in our survey. The panelists were asked to complete a screening which: (1) confirmed that they were the parent or guardian of a child ages 12 to 17 who lives with them, (2) if more than one eligible child lived in the home, randomly selected one child to participate, and (3) obtained the parent's consent for the child's participation in the teen survey. After completing the screening, the parent was instructed to invite the child to come to the computer and take the survey; the parent was also instructed to give the child privacy while doing so. Before the survey appeared on the screen, each teen was asked to provide consent for their own participation. While taking the survey, respondents were free to pause, to skip questions and to go back and change previous answers. The surveys were conducted in English only.

Knowledge Networks administered the surveys between March 27 and April 27, 2011. In total, 1,037 teenagers ages 12 to 17 (546 males, 491 females) completed the teen survey. The margin of sampling error for a survey of 1,037 teens is  $\pm 3.1$  percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

Seven hundred fifty parents of teens who completed the teen survey were randomly selected and invited to participate in the parent survey. In total, 528 parents (191 fathers, 290 mothers, 24 stepfathers, 5 stepmothers and 18 guardians) completed the survey. All of the parents interviewed reside in two-interview households, meaning that a teen was also interviewed from the same household; we only interview parents in households with a teen respondent because the main value of the parental data is in its relationship with the teen data. The margin of sampling error for a survey of 528, which is the size of the parent/guardian sample, is  $\pm 4.4$  percent (at the 95 percent confidence level).

The data collection process for the Knowledge Networks surveys was conducted by Jordon Peugh, Poom Nukulkiij, and Jeffrey Shand-Lubbers at Knowledge Networks.

The data analysis for this report was accomplished by Steven Wagner, President of QEV Analytics, Ltd., and Sarah Tsai of CASA Columbia; this report was written by Cathleen Woods-King of CASA Columbia.