

**YOUTH COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT:
TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL LEAVERS STUDY**

**SPONSORED BY THE BUREAU OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE SERVICES
CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE
COMMUNITY HEALTH RESEARCH GROUP**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The high school drop out rate is of concern in Tennessee. Eighteen percent of 9th graders will drop out of school before the end of 12th grade, according to a 1994 report. Little is known, however, about what happens to these youth once they leave high school. As adults, it is believed that high school leavers experience higher rates of unemployment and poverty, have excess health and mental health problems, lack health insurance coverage, and suffer other adverse consequences. Little research, however, is available to confirm or deny these suspicions.

This study, sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Health, Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services and conducted by the Community Health Research Group, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the summer of 1994, examines the health risks, the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, and the alcohol and drug use problems experienced by high school leavers. In addition, the study includes reasons given by these young people for leaving high school as well as their experiences of coping in contemporary society without a high school degree.

For the purposes of this study, a high school leaver is defined as a youth between the ages of 16 and 19 who left school without receiving a high school diploma or GED certificate and who is not currently enrolled full-time in a public, private, alternative, technical, or vocational school. Eligible respondents could be working toward a GED as long as they were not enrolled in school. Usable data for the study were collected from 338 youth who met these criteria.

The Tennessee High School Leavers Study was conducted in three metropolitan regions of Tennessee - Knox County, Davidson County, and Shelby County and in some surrounding rural regions. The data were obtained mainly by face-to-face interviews with recent school leavers. Telephone interviews were conducted in 15% of the cases. Twenty-five percent of the respondents were interviewed in a youth detention facility in East Tennessee. This non-probability sample of youth was selected using eligibility screening and eliciting volunteer subjects from recreational areas, housing developments, malls, waiting rooms of job service and unemployment offices, social service agencies, juvenile court and juvenile detention facilities, on street corners, at video arcades and pool halls, and in various GED programs.