

**YOUNG MONTHLY MARIJUANA USERS SHOW HIGH BAD BEHAVIOR RATES**

- MAJORITY FIRST SMOKED BEFORE AGE 14; ONE THIRD SMOKE POT DAILY
- MORE LIKELY TO CARRY A GUN, HURT OTHERS, CONSIDER SUICIDE
  - AS LIKELY TO JOIN A GANG AS A SCHOOL GROUP

WASHINGTON, Sept. 3 – Students who use marijuana at least once a month are more likely to act violently, join gangs, carry guns and contemplate suicide, a new study by Pride Surveys revealed today.

Most started to smoke before their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, fare worse academically and are less involved in organized school activities, like sports teams and band. (Research shows that students who regularly engage in extracurricular activities are less likely to use drugs.)

The national study compared the behaviors of 14,182 students in grades 6-12 who use marijuana monthly, or more often, with 84,559 students who have never used the drug. Students from 24 states participated in the study.

Among monthly marijuana users, one third (33%) smoked daily and nearly three-fourths (70%) smoked at least once a week. More than 8 in 10 said they get “very high” or “bombed/stoned” when they smoke (88%).

Marijuana use begins at an early age with 60% of users trying marijuana before their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday and 85% beginning to smoke before age 16. As marijuana use begins, so do other negative behaviors. Among marijuana-using students in grades 6-8 (ages 11-14), 64% said they had stolen something worth five dollars or more, versus 14% of their age group who had not tried marijuana.

	<b>*Marijuana users %</b>	<b>Non-users</b>
<b>Harmed other with weapon</b>	16	1
<b>Carried gun to school</b>	16	1
<b>Considered suicide often</b>	18	4
<b>Made good grades</b>	46	72
<b>Skipped school</b>	71	24
<b>Joined a gang</b>	37	7
<b>Joined school group</b>	38	58
<b>Trouble with police</b>	63	16
<b>Trouble at school</b>	21	5

\*Unless noted, comparisons are between students in grades 6-12 who use marijuana monthly and those who do not use marijuana.

More

Males were more likely to comprise the marijuana-using group (57%) while females were more present in the non-marijuana group (53%).

Marijuana is by far the most popular drug among American youth. One in eight students (13%) in grades 6-12 and nearly one in four 12<sup>th</sup> graders (23%), use marijuana monthly. Among students who used an illicit drug, 86% smoked marijuana.

Only 4% of students in grades 6-12 used illicit drugs such as cocaine, heroin and ecstasy *but did not use marijuana*, while 29% of monthly marijuana smokers also used cocaine, 19% used heroin, and 29% used ecstasy.

*“When you are talking about adolescent drug use, you are overwhelmingly talking about marijuana. It is important to understand the behavioral differences between students who frequently use marijuana and those who don’t use it at all,” said Dr. Thomas J. Gleaton, author of the study.*

The research does not show a cause and effect between marijuana use and negative behaviors, but it does show a relationship that is consistent across variables such as harming others, bearing weapons, gang membership and academic shortcomings. The relationship is consistent across years.

Pride Surveys have been used by federal and state agencies and by more than 8,000 school systems to identify levels of student drug use, violence and other behaviors.

### **Guns and violence**

Among marijuana users, 16% said they had carried a gun to school at least once in the past year. Among the non-marijuana group, just 1% reported they carried a gun to school.

More than a third of marijuana users (34%) *who also report having been hurt at school by another student* carried a gun to school.

*“When marijuana users are harmed, they respond by arming themselves in alarming numbers,” Gleaton said. (Among the non-marijuana group, 3% reacted to physical harm by carrying a gun.)*

Students were also asked, “have you carried a gun for protection or as a weapon” *while not at school*. Marijuana users were practically four times more likely to answer yes (35% vs. 9%).

	<b>*Marijuana users %</b>	<b>Non-users</b>
<b>Carried gun as weapon outside school</b>	35	9

More

Marijuana users also reported that they committed violent behavior in greater numbers. For example, 16% of the marijuana group reported they harmed another student at school using a weapon (gun, knife or club), versus 1% in the non-marijuana group. Similarly, 57% of the marijuana group said they harmed another student by hitting, slapping or kicking, versus 24% in the non-marijuana group.

### **Gangs vs. school activities**

Although a June 2002 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court allowed mandatory drug testing for students engaged in extracurricular school activities, today's study by Pride Surveys – and a 1995 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources – showed that these students are least likely to engage in risky behavior such as drug use.

Pride found that 34% of students who never join in school activities reported drug use, versus 18% who frequently participate.

Student marijuana users were as likely to join a gang (37%) as to participate in school activities (38%) “often” or “a lot”. This compares to 7% of the non-marijuana group who joined gangs and 58% who regularly took part in school activities “such as sports teams, band, clubs, etc.”

John P. Walters, director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, said the monthly marijuana users studied by Pride constituted the crux of the nation's adolescent drug problem.

*“If our schools and parents were to utilize recognized, successful intervention techniques, including drug testing, we would be able to identify these youth and get them the counseling and treatment they need to turn away from drug use,” Walters said.*

### **Suicide, grades and police problems**

Marijuana users are almost five times more likely to think of suicide frequently than non-users (18% vs. 4%). They are less likely to make good grades (46% vs. 71%) and more likely to skip school (71% vs. 24%). They are four times more likely to be in trouble at school (21% vs. 5%) and nearly four times more likely to get in trouble with the police (63% vs. 16%).

### **Harmfulness and availability**

Two perceptions often associated with marijuana use show wide disparities between the two groups. While 73% of non-users believe marijuana is “very harmful” to health, only 11% of monthly users agree. Conversely, 16% of non-users believe marijuana is “very easy” to obtain, while 71% of users find it readily available.

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