

MARIJUANA USE AND OTHER HIGH RISK BEHAVIORS

Partners in Prevention (PIP) has been Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium since 2000. The coalition, made up of 21 universities in Missouri, works to promote healthy behaviors on college campuses. In order to gain an understanding of the current health behaviors of college students, PIP implements the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) each year. The data gathered from the MCHBS allows PIP to assess high-risk student behaviors, such as marijuana use.

DISCUSSION

According to the 2014 MCHBS, 23% of Missouri college students report using marijuana in the past year. MCHBS data suggest that marijuana users report engaging in other high-risk health behaviors significantly more often than their peers who do not use marijuana, as illustrated in the table below.

Students Engaging in Past Year Marijuana Use	Yes	No
2 Hour Binge Drinkers	51%	14%
Past Year Tobacco Use	46%	8%
# Sex Partners Past Year	2.39	0.97
Past Year used Alcohol or Drug to be more comfortable	58%	17%
Past year - Relationship gone farther because of alcohol or drugs	55%	17%
Emotionally\verbally abusive relationship	31%	20%
Sexually abusive relationship	28%	22%
Physically abusive relationship	32%	22%
Mentally abusive relationship	32%	21%
Past year suicidal thoughts	23%	13%

Data suggest that 51% of students who used marijuana in the past year reported higher rates of binge drinking, compared to students who did not use marijuana (14%). Similarly, 46% of marijuana users also report using tobacco, while only 8% of non-users reported using tobacco. This trend holds true for a variety of other health behaviors such as: using alcohol or drugs to be more comfortable with a sexual partner, letting a sexual encounter go further than intended due to alcohol or drugs, reporting an abusive relationship, and a higher frequency of suicidal thoughts. Additionally, marijuana users reported having an average of 2.39 sexual partners in the past year, while non-users reported having an average of 0.97 sexual partners in the same time frame.

SUMMARY

Marijuana use remains a controversial topic in Missouri and across the US. Creating a intervention plan to

address marijuana use alone can prove difficult due to its taboo nature, and when use is coupled with one or more of the above behaviors, the potential for harm to the user greatly increases. While it is unfortunate that students are being affected by multiple negative health behaviors at once, it also presents an opportunity for selecting a variety of interventions for this group of students in order to lower overall rates of marijuana use. MCHBS data asks students to report on a variety of demographics, in addition to marijuana specific circumstances, such as where the student typically uses. This makes it possible for campuses to filter data in order to get a better profile of a typical user on their campus and create a well-targeted intervention.

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Funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Behavioral Health