

Social Norms

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a statewide coalition of 21 public and private colleges and universities in Missouri with the mission of building safe and healthy campuses. PIP tracks efforts to reduce high-risk behaviors with trend data gathered through the annual implementation of the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) survey. It is common on college campuses for students to miscalculate the frequency and severity of other student's high-risk behaviors. Thus, social norm questions have been added to the MACHB in order to assess perceived versus actual behavior on campus amongst students.

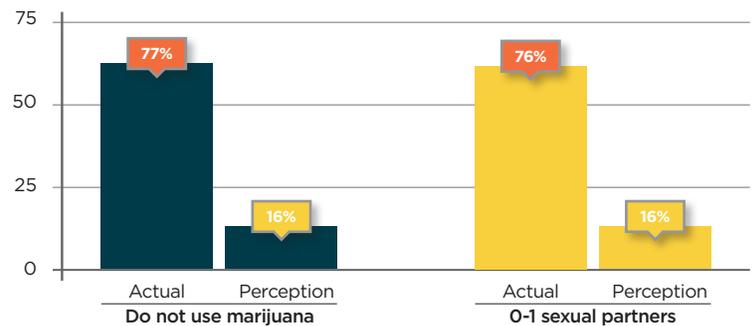
Discussion

There are several sections on the MACHB that review social norms on campus. Three of the most concerning topics on the MACHB are alcohol consumption on a typical night, illicit drug use, and sexual health due to the large gap between perceived and actual behaviors amid college students. When referring to sexual health, 76% of individuals indicated that they have had 0 or 1 sexual partners in the past year. However, when asked how many sexual partners they believed other students have had; only 16% selected 0 or 1. Conversely, 55% believed their fellow peers had 3 or more partners in the past year, whereas the actual amount reported is 14%.

Further, for marijuana usage, approximately 77% of students did not use over the past year. However, students completing the survey indicated that they believe only 16% of their fellow peers have not used marijuana in the past year. When indicating misuse of prescription drugs, 17% indicating using prescription drugs 1 or more times, whereas participants rated 75% of 'typical students' to abuse prescription drugs at least once over the past year.

The MACHB allows students to indicate their average intake of alcohol on a typical night of drinking. Students rated themselves as having around 2.6 drinks in a night, while contrarily rating others on campus much higher; friends at 4 drinks, typical students at 4.4 drinks, and fraternity/sorority members at an overwhelming 6.3 drinks.

Perception vs. Reality



Average Drinks on a Typical Night



Summary

Currently, several campaigns across Missouri are speaking out about misperceived social norms on campus, and how they may be impacting the harmful behaviors of college students. Posters and graphics demonstrating accurate data have become a common method of explaining social norms on campus in order to validate the frequent misconceptions that many students have towards fellow peers. **For more information, please visit pip.missouri.edu/sn.html.**

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