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## Characteristics of the Daily Marijuana User

Lloyd D. Johnston, Ph.D.  
Institute for Social Research  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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Understanding more about daily marijuana users is essential to stemming the spread of its abuse. Statistics on who uses, how much, why they start, stop, or continue will help in four basic treatment areas: Identifying those who are most at risk for use; assessing the importance of intervention; providing convincing prevention messages; and uncovering some of the psychological dynamics that are integral to any process of intervention.

My data are based on five years of annual surveys conducted by the Institute for Social Research. From 16,000 to 19,000 high school seniors' drug use has been charted through self-reporting questionnaires in a program called Monitoring the Future, which began in 1975. Trends in daily use have emerged for seniors as well as for subgroups followed through six years after graduation into the more varied worlds of college, work, military service, and homemaking.

I refer to "frequent" users as the daily user group: that is, those who currently use at a daily or nearly daily level. At present, this includes one of every 11 seniors, or nine percent, a drop from the peak of 11 percent in 1978 but an increase from the six percent charted in 1975.

The decline seen in the last two years could be attributed to young peoples' health concerns about marijuana use and a decline in peer acceptance of pot smoking, both results of public education on the subject.

I believe that the most effective preventive forces lie with accumulating credible scientific evidence on health effects and with continuing shifts in peer norms. I emphasize "credible" because I think an overzealous propaganda campaign, however good its intentions, has the danger of backfiring.

### DAILY USERS IN HIGH SCHOOL

Almost twice as many males as females are daily users; almost twice as many non-college-bound seniors as col-

lege-bound seniors are daily users (both comparisons rated 13 percent and 7 percent). Blacks use daily at about half the level reported by whites (5 percent and 11 percent), and the rates from broken homes are only marginally higher than those from intact ones. Little difference is seen among regions in the country, but is predictably tied to size of communities.

Daily users have lower school grades and higher truancy rates from school; they are more likely to hold jobs and to have less religious commitment than non-users, who also are more conservative politically. Daily users tend to spend more recreational time with the opposite sex than the average, and the rate is particularly high among the 30 percent of seniors who go out for fun four or more nights a week. Of those who are almost never home in the evenings, 34 percent are daily marijuana users.

### DAILY USERS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

Single persons are almost twice as likely to smoke daily as are married individuals (11.4 percent versus 6.6 percent). Despite an overall 2.6 percent increase in daily use after high school, those who married showed almost no increase—up 0.2 percent, and those with children showed a decline—down 1.5 percent. Married couples without children are more inclined toward daily pot use than those with children—11 percent versus 8 percent.

While nearly half the seniors surveyed continued living at home after graduating, those who moved out showed a larger increase in daily use—up 3.9 percent for those who moved versus 1.3 percent for those who didn't. In other words, those living with their parents smoked less than graduates who didn't—10 versus 12 percent.

Of those continuing their education after high school, full-time students showed the greatest increase in daily use after leaving high school—up from 4.5 percent to 8.3 percent. This group had a lower than average daily use rate, however; they had started from a lower level and were catching up. Part-time students were the next lowest category, at 10 percent; 13 percent of non-students were daily users.

As for employment, those out of work had the highest rate—14 percent. Those with a full-time civilian job were next at 13 percent, and 12.4 percent of those in the military were daily users, a drop from their high school figure, which was 13.4 percent. Full-time homemakers, mostly married women with children, had the lowest rate, 4 percent.

Rates according to living conditions were highest for those in rented rooms and apartments (14 and 12 percent) and lowest for those in college dorms (8 percent).

### USE OF OTHER DRUGS

Of the 1979 seniors, more than a fourth of daily pot users were also daily drinkers (27 percent for the general age group). Six in 10 smoked cigarettes daily (59 percent versus 25 percent of the age group) and daily users had a much higher than average figure for use of other illicit drugs—five to seven times as high.

Of these, 47 percent used amphetamines, 31 percent cocaine, 15 to 17 percent barbiturates, LSD, PCP, methaqualone, and tranquilizers, with nearly two-thirds also users of hashish.

Use of cigarettes, alcohol, and various illicit drugs began early for daily users. By the eighth grade, 40 percent smoked daily and 50 percent had had their first drink. About half had tried marijuana by eighth grade and the remainder by ninth grade, with use of other illicit drugs usually starting after ninth grade.

### POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF USE

Whatever long-term physical and psychological effects result from marijuana use, they will probably be related to how long, how much, and how frequently a person has smoked the drug.

Daily use appears to become a fairly stable pattern, at least through age 22. Roughly 60 percent of high school daily users said that they still smoked every day a year after graduating; four years after high school, 51 percent of the class of 1975 reported continued daily use and 34 percent were current but not daily users.

Of 15 possible problems seen resulting from marijuana use, daily users cited loss of energy most frequently—42 percent. About one third thought it dampened their interest in other activities and one third thought it hurt their job or school performance.

Almost 40 percent felt daily use hurt their relationships with their families and nearly a quarter saw negative effects on relationships with teachers. Few saw any effects on friendships or relationships with those of the opposite sex (10 percent and 16 percent respectively).

About a tenth (11 percent) thought that marijuana made them less emotionally stable and as many felt it caused them to drive unsafely; more than a quarter said that they thought less clearly under the influence of pot. (Given the tendency of daily pot smokers to use other drugs, it is difficult to prove that marijuana causes more accidents and moving violations. Yet, daily users have a higher than average number of

accidents and traffic violations, many of which occurred while drivers were high.)

Most of these figures are closely replicated by the 1979 sample of 19- to 22-year-olds, with a few interesting differences: The older group had more problems with loss of energy and with thinking clearly, suggesting that these effects might be cumulative. They also reported fewer relationship problems than younger users, presumably because leaving home or school reduces social conflict over drug use.

That the behavior is proving to be more enduring and stable than many may have thought increases the probability of cumulative, long-term effects. And that so many young people are becoming daily users—with such a high proportion of them also daily cigarette smokers—now puts a substantial number of people at risk of whatever the long-term consequences prove to be.