

Marijuana use problems among first-year college students

MAJOR FINDINGS:

- From personal interviews with a large group of first-year, first-time college students, researchers estimated the prevalence of cannabis use disorders (CUD).
- 9.4% of the students interviewed met standard psychiatric criteria for CUD.
- 5.4% met criteria for cannabis dependence, and another 4.0% met criteria for cannabis abuse.
- Of students who used cannabis at least once in the past year, nearly one in four (24.6%) met criteria for abuse or dependence.

Aside from DSM-IV criteria, researchers also asked about six other cannabis-related problems (concentration problems, driving while high, missing class, problems with friends or family, and housing violations) among students who used cannabis at least five times in the past year.

Concentration problems (40.1%) and missing class (13.9%) were two of the more prevalent problems. Particularly concerning are the number of students who put themselves in physically dangerous situations after using cannabis (24.3%) and who drove while they were high (18.6%).

As can be seen in Table 1, the researchers explored cannabis use disorders and cannabis-related problems with respect to frequency of drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco cigarettes. Drinking frequency was not related to CUD or cannabis-related problems because they were similarly prevalent among frequent and non-frequent alcohol users. However, relative to non-smokers, students who had smoked at least one cigarette in the past month had significantly higher prevalence of cannabis dependence, cannabis-related concentration problems, and driving while high.

Practice and Policy Suggestions: Marijuana use and related problems among college students are not trivial and need to be taken seriously. Findings point to a need for improved screening and early intervention for drug-related problems among first-year college students. College administrators and health professionals should take advantage of the highly accessible college audience and implement policies and practices that will help students at risk for cannabis use disorders. There is also a need for more research on the consequences of cannabis abuse and dependence, both academic and health-related, which the researchers plan to explore in future studies.

Of major interest to:

- College Administrators
- Parents
- Educators
- Health Professionals
- Students
- Law and Policy Makers



Table 1. Prevalence of cannabis use disorders and cannabis-related problems by frequency of drinking and past-month cigarette smoking, among 474 “at-risk” cannabis users

	Among infrequent alcohol users ^a (n=235)	Among frequent alcohol users ^a (n=239)		Among cigarette non-smokers ^b (n=270)	Among cigarette smokers ^b (n=204)	
	%		χ^2 (df)	%		χ^2 (df)
Cannabis diagnostic groups						
Cannabis dependence	13.6	18.0	3.8 (3)	10.7	22.6	19.1 (3) ^c
Cannabis abuse	20.4	24.7		20.7	25.0	
Cannabis diagnostic orphans	21.3	18.0		19.3	20.1	
Non-problematic cannabis use	44.7	39.3		49.3	32.4	
Other cannabis-related problems						
Concentration problems after being high	37.9	42.3	.9 (1)	34.8	47.1	7.3 (1) ^c
Drove while high	19.2	18.0	.1 (1)	14.4	24.0	7.0 (1) ^c
Overslept and missed class	15.7	12.1	1.3 (1)	13.3	14.7	.2 (1)
Problems with friends	8.5	8.4	<.1 (1)	7.8	9.3	.4 (1)
Problems with family	8.1	8.0	<.1 (1)	6.7	9.8	1.6 (1)
Housing violation for drug use	3.0	2.9	<.1 (1)	2.6	3.4	.3 (1)

^a “Frequent” alcohol use was defined as drinking on 9 or more days in the past month; “infrequent” users drank 0 to 8 days in the past month.

^b Cigarette smokers were defined as smoking at least once during the past month.

^c Denotes statistically significant differences ($p < .05$).

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Caldeira, K.M., Arria, A.M., O’Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Wish, E.D. (2008). The occurrence of cannabis use disorders and other cannabis related problems among first-year college students. *Addictive Behaviors*. 33(3), 397-411.



About the College Life Study (CLS)

The CLS is a longitudinal study of 1,253 college students at a large, public, mid-Atlantic university. This study is one of the first large-scale scientific investigations that aims to discover the impact of health-related behaviors during the college experience. Any first time, first-year student between 17 and 19 years old at the university in the fall of 2004 was eligible to participate in a screening survey. The researchers then selected students to participate in the longitudinal study, which consisted of two-hour personal interviews administered annually, beginning with their first year of college. A full description of the methods used is available.¹ Inherent to all self-reporting research methods is the possibility for response bias. Because the sample is from one large university, the ability to generalize the findings elsewhere is uncertain. However, response rates have been excellent and attrition bias has been minimal.

For more information about the study, please visit www.cls.umd.edu or contact Amelia M. Arria at the University of Maryland, College Park, at aarria@umd.edu.

¹ Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., O’Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Fizzle, D.B., Johnson, E.P., Wish, E.D. (2008). Drug exposure opportunities and use patterns among college students: Results of a longitudinal prospective cohort study. *Substance Abuse*. 29(4), 19-38.

This research brief was prepared by Ilana Yergin, University of Maryland School of Journalism

