

# Marijuana exposure opportunity and initiation during college: Parent and peer influences

## MAJOR FINDINGS:

College students are at high risk for being offered marijuana—and for initiating use for the first time—even if they never used marijuana in high school. In this sample of college-attending youth, of the students who had never used marijuana before entering college, 74% were offered the drug after starting college, and 54% of those who were offered marijuana tried it.

Prior research has suggested that adolescents whose parents monitor their behavior closely are less likely to have substance use involvement during high school. Parental monitoring involves setting rules and keeping track of the adolescent's activities, whereabouts, and friends. However, less is known about whether the protective effects of parental monitoring linger into and throughout college. Another important influence on adolescents' drug use comes from their peers, some of which might be more experienced marijuana users. Yet it is not clear how important these peer influences might be on marijuana use during college, especially for a student with no prior drug involvement.

In this study, high levels of parental monitoring during the last year of high school predicted a lower chance of exposure to marijuana in college by someone offering them a chance to use it. Also predictive of exposure: high percentages of marijuana-using friends. Moreover, the protective effect of parental monitoring was even stronger among students who had the most marijuana-using friends.

Having more marijuana-using friends also predicted whether a student would *use* the drug once they were exposed to it. Although parental monitoring during high school predicted exposure, it did not predict use once exposure had occurred.

It is not surprising that one-third of this college-attending sample had already used marijuana before entering college. Students who initiated marijuana use for the first time in college were less likely than their more experienced counterparts to develop a frequent pattern of use at any time during college: two-thirds of these students never used more than monthly.

### ***Of major interest to:***

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



**Practice and Policy Suggestions:** Because the findings indicate that affiliation with marijuana-using peers may influence whether a college student is offered marijuana in college—and/or actually uses it—the study lends support to the notion that peer-focused interventions should not be limited to high school. Rather, they should be extended into college, especially during the first two years when drug use initiation is most likely to occur.

For parents, these findings reinforce the message that they should not “let up” on monitoring their children during high school. By staying involved and vigilant of peer relationships, parents might also indirectly influence what kinds of friends their child associates with after they leave for college. Parent-focused interventions addressing friend selection and drug use opportunities might be particularly useful for parents of college-bound adolescents.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Pinchevsky, G.M., Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Vincent, K.B., O’Grady, K.E. (2012). Marijuana exposure opportunity and initiation during college: Parent and peer influences. *Prevention Science*. 13(1), 43-54. doi: 10.1007/s11121-011-0243-4



## 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.<sup>1,2</sup> 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](http://www.cls.umd.edu) or contact Amelia M. Arria at the University of Maryland School of Public Health at [aarria@umd.edu](mailto:aarria@umd.edu).

<sup>1</sup> Arria, A.M., Caldeira, K.M., O’Grady, K.E., Vincent, K.B., Fitzelle, 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.

<sup>2</sup> Vincent, K.B., Kasperski, S.J., Caldeira, K.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Pinchevsky, G.M., O’Grady, K.E., Arria, A.M. (2012). Maintaining superior follow-up rates in a longitudinal study: Experiences from the College Life Study. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*. 6(1), 56-72.

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