

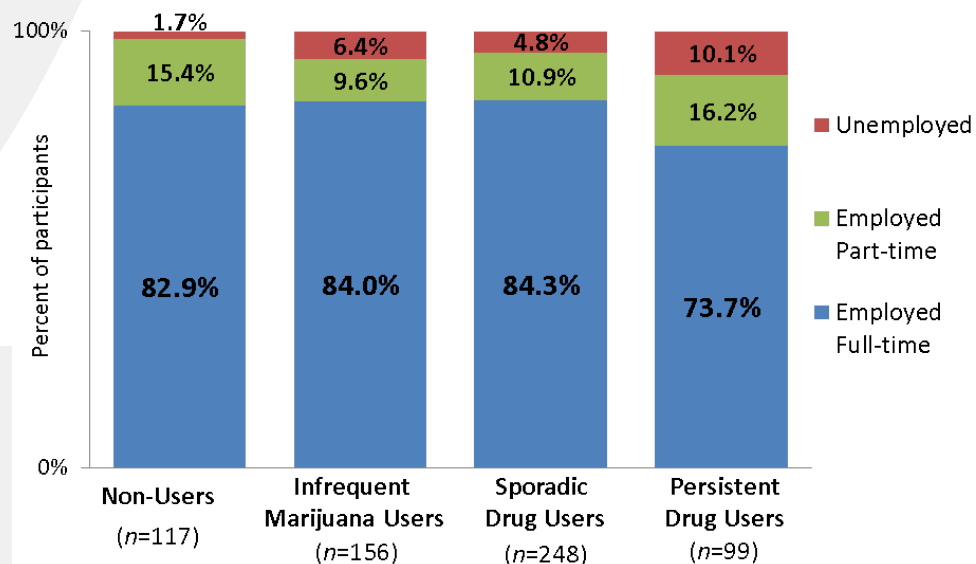
# Drug use patterns in young adulthood and post-college employment

## MAJOR FINDINGS:

Findings from the College Life Study (CLS) reveal that persistent drug use during college may increase the risk of unemployment after graduation. These associations were examined in a sample of 620 individuals who were no longer enrolled in college six years after college entry. Individuals were grouped according to their patterns of drug use during their first four years in college. As shown in Figure 1 below, persistent drug users were more likely than non-users to be unemployed, as opposed to employed full-time or employed part-time. Persistent drug users were also more likely to be employed part-time than full-time when compared with non-users. Furthermore, even drug use limited to infrequent marijuana use predicted worse employment outcomes, with 6.4% of infrequent marijuana users being unemployed compared to 1.7% of non-users. These associations remained significant when holding constant other risk factors for unemployment, including demographic and personality characteristics.

Additionally, researchers investigated whether the prevalence of past-year alcohol and drug use disorders differed by employment status (see Figure 2, next page). After holding constant gender, race, and neighborhood income, individuals who were employed part-time were twice as likely as full-time workers to meet criteria for drug abuse and almost four times more likely than full-time workers to meet criteria for drug dependence. While alcohol dependence was most prevalent among unemployed individuals, it was not significantly higher than in part-time and full-time employed individuals after adjusting for other factors. Alcohol abuse was highly prevalent regardless of employment status. Even among full-time workers, approximately two out of five young adults met criteria for alcohol abuse.

**Figure 1. Post-college employment status by college drug use patterns**



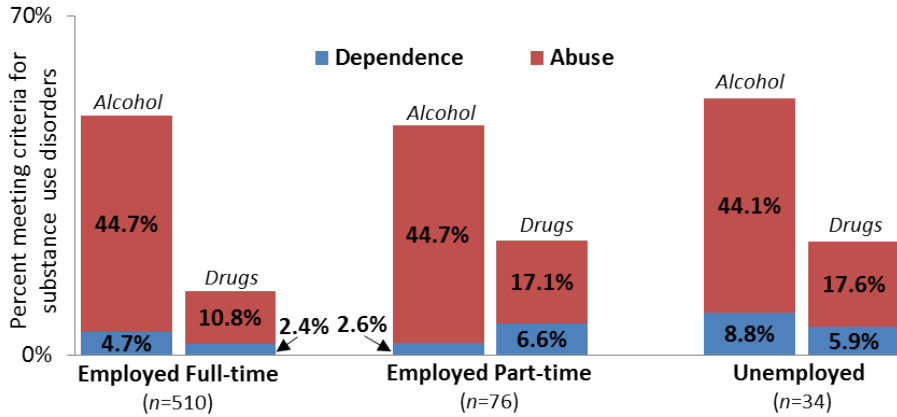
**Note:** "infrequent marijuana users" used marijuana at least once during college but did not use any other illicit drugs; "sporadic drug users" used at least one drug other than marijuana at least once during college, but not every year; "persistent drug users" used an illicit drug other than marijuana in every year studied.

### Of major interest to:

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



Figure 2. Past-year alcohol and drug use disorders by employment status



**Practice and Policy Suggestions:** There is a need for more research on the relationship between drug use during college and long-term employment outcomes. Furthermore, there is a need to investigate possible pathways between drug use and unemployment. Future studies should examine whether interventions targeted at reducing drug use might increase chances of employment after the student graduates from college. Finally, given the high prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse observed in this sample—even among those employed full-time—greater efforts to assess substance-related problems among recent college graduates who have secured employment is warranted.

The complete publication referenced in this research brief can be found here: Arria, A.M., Garnier-Dykstra, L.M., Cook, E.T., Caldeira, K.M., Vincent, K.B., Baron, R.A., O’Grady, K.E. (2013). Drug use patterns in young adulthood and post-college employment. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. 127(1-3), 23–30. doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2012.06.001



### 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.

This research brief was prepared by Olga Moshkovich.

