

# Research Brief

Social Development  
Research Group



No. 20: October 2017

**Kevin P. Haggerty**  
Director

**Sabrina Oesterle**  
Assistant Director

**J. David Hawkins**  
**Richard F. Catalano**  
Founders

## MISSION of SDRG

To understand and promote healthy behaviors and positive social development among diverse populations, we:

- ◆ Conduct research on factors that influence development
- ◆ Develop and test the effectiveness of interventions
- ◆ Study service systems and work to improve them
- ◆ Advocate for science-based solutions to health and behavior problems
- ◆ Disseminate knowledge, tools, and expertise produced by this research

## Impact of Parent Marijuana Use on Child Substance Use

### Community Need

As marijuana legalization spreads, preventing teen marijuana use may become more difficult if use by parents and other family members increases or if social norms among parents and family members become more favorable toward marijuana use. This study used data from grandparents, parents, and children to test whether parent and grandparent marijuana use and attitudes predicted child cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use.

### Methods

Data came from the Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP) and the SSDP Intergenerational Project (SSDP-TIP). SSDP started in 1981 to test strategies for reducing childhood risk factors for school failure, drug abuse, and delinquency. Each year through the elementary grades, parents and teachers in intervention classrooms learned how to actively engage children in learning, strengthen bonding to family and school, and encourage children's positive behaviors. The panel of students was expanded in 1985, and the

students and their parents have been interviewed regularly since then. The SSDP-TIP sample includes parents from SSDP, their oldest biological child, and a second caregiver when available. This study includes data from before and after the legalization of nonmedical marijuana use in Washington State.

---

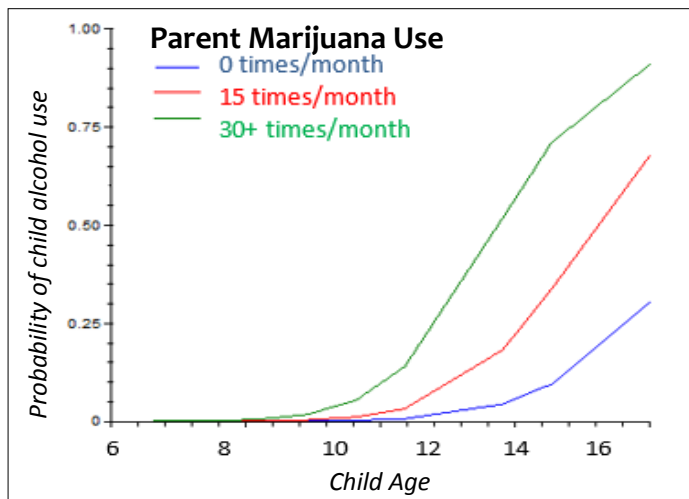
“Parents’...own marijuana use increases the likelihood of their underage children using marijuana.”

---

These two linked longitudinal studies include grandparents, parents, and children from 383 families. Parents provided information about their own marijuana use and grandparent marijuana use. Children provided information about their own cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use; their own attitudes about marijuana; and perceptions of their parents’ attitudes toward marijuana. We used multilevel modeling to test whether grandparent and

### Key Messages

- *The more parents use marijuana, the more likely their teenage children are to approve of drug use and to use marijuana and alcohol.*
- *In developing effective programs to prevent teen marijuana use, it's important to educate parents about the impact of their own use.*
- *It is also important to keep parental use in mind when considering public health marijuana prevention efforts.*

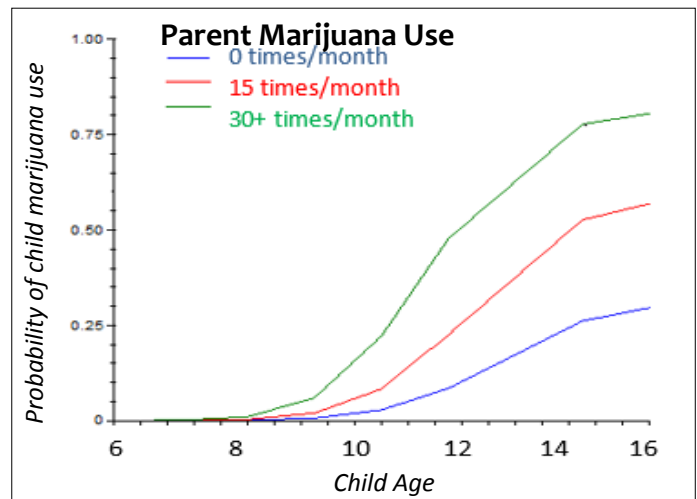


**Figure 1.** Blue, red, and green lines show the predicted probability of child past-year alcohol use at different levels of parent marijuana use frequency. Children whose parents use marijuana more frequently are more likely to use alcohol.

parent marijuana use predicted a higher likelihood of child cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use. We also tested whether any links between grandparent or parent marijuana use might be explained by children perceiving their parents to have pro-substance-use attitudes or by children themselves having pro-substance-use attitudes.

## Results

Grandparent marijuana use was not related to grandchild cigarette, alcohol, or marijuana use. Parent marijuana use was not related to child cigarette use. Parent marijuana use, however, did predict a higher likelihood of child alcohol and marijuana use (see Figures 1 and 2). Child perceptions of parental pro-drug-use attitudes predicted an increased probability of child alcohol and marijuana use in addition to parent marijuana use. When children's own pro-drug-use attitudes were included



**Figure 2.** Blue, red, and green lines show the predicted probability of child past-year marijuana use at different levels of parent marijuana use frequency. Children whose parents use marijuana more frequently are more likely to use marijuana themselves.

in the model, parent marijuana use was no longer related to the likelihood of child alcohol or marijuana use, indicating that parent marijuana use may result in children developing pro-drug-use norms that then increase their likelihood of using alcohol and marijuana.

## Conclusion

To the extent that parent marijuana use increases or parent or teen attitudes toward marijuana become more favorable under legalization, we may see increases in the use of alcohol and marijuana among youth. Public information campaigns should alert parents that their own marijuana use increases the likelihood of their underage children using marijuana and alcohol. State-level data on marijuana use and attitudes should be monitored closely to understand how marijuana legalization affects teen marijuana and other drug use and to inform policy.

For additional information on this topic, please refer to the original article:

Bailey, Jennifer A., Hill, Karl G., Guttmanova, Katarina, Epstein, Marina, Abbott, Robert D., Steeger, Christine M., & Skinner, Martie L. (2016). **Associations between parental and grandparental marijuana use and child substance use norms in a prospective, three-generation study.** *Journal of Adolescent Health, 59(3)*, 262-268.

This research was supported by research grants #R01DA12138, #R01DA023089, #R01DA033956, and #R01DA09679 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.