Public Opinion on Marijuana Use in Michigan

Stella M. Resko, M.S.W., Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Coordinator, Graduate Certificate in Alcohol and Drug Use Studies
School of Social Work & Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute

Goals and Overview of Talk

- Background on marijuana use, recent policy changes, shifts in public opinion, and marijuana use
- Overview of Michigan Prevention Association’s Public Opinion Survey
- Discuss the implications for treatment and prevention and future research directions
Marijuana Use

- Marijuana is the world’s most commonly used illicit substance
  - Between 119 and 224 million marijuana users worldwide (UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012).
- Approximately 18.1 million current (past month) marijuana users in the US (SAMHSA, 2012).
- Among American illicit drug users, roughly two thirds (64.3%) report the use of only marijuana (SAMHSA, 2012)

Cannabis Policy in the U.S.
Medical vs. Recreational Marijuana Use

- Medical marijuana is typically regulated by public health departments and made available through a small number of licensed physicians and dispensaries (Choo et al., 2014).
- Legalization of marijuana for recreational use might be different in the extent of availability.

Marijuana Use & Adolescents

- Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit substance among adolescents (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2015).
- Adolescence is when use is often initiated.
  - By 12th grade, 44% of U.S. high school students report marijuana use (Johnston, et al., 2015).
Past Year Adolescent Marijuana Use (1975-2015)

- Peak rates of use in the late 1970’s
- Increase in 1990’s and from 2008-2011.

Marijuana & Adolescents

- Approximately 26% of youth who use marijuana meet DSM-IV criteria for substance use disorder (Wu et al., 2011).

- Half of individuals who enter treatment for marijuana use are under the age of 25 (Budney et al., 2007).
Adolescent Marijuana Use & Adverse Outcomes

- Future depression and anxiety disorders (Rey et al., 2004), fatal automobile crashes (Asbridge, Hayden and Cartwright, 2008), accidental injuries, chronic bronchitis and respiratory infections (Hall & Degenhart, 2009)
- Under the influence of marijuana, adolescents may display impaired judgment, contributing to risky behaviors: unprotected sex, driving under the influence, or riding with an impaired driver (Gruber and Pope, 2002).

Adolescent Marijuana Use & Adverse Outcomes (2)

- Earlier age of onset for marijuana use is associated with increased risk of developing substance-use problems (Brook, Brook, Zhang, Cohen, & Whiteman, 2002; Lynskey et al., 2003).
- Frequent marijuana use among youth associated with impaired cognitive functioning and brain development (Meier et al., 2012; Schweinsburg, Brown, & Tapert, 2008)
Public Opinion

- Despite these potential consequences, the levels of perceived risk and disapproval of marijuana among adults and adolescents are low and steadily declining (Gallup, 2011; Johnston et al., 2015).
- When Gallup (2011) first surveyed adults in the United States regarding marijuana legalization in 1969, only 12% favored it.

Shifts in Public Opinion

- October 2016: Public support for making marijuana legal reached 60%
Michigan Prevention Association Survey: Methods

- Web-based survey of Adults in Michigan
- Recruitment: MPA advertised the study via email, online postings (e.g. Facebook), and meetings
  - Relied on members/community partners for recruitment
- Data collection over 3 week period (August-September 2016)
- Yielded N=2,608

Michigan Prevention Association Survey: Measures

- Survey developed with input from MPA committee:
  - Marsialle Arbuckle, Michelle Beeck, Jesse Kauffman, John Kroneck, Keri Marsh, Amy Moore, Susan Papple, Stella Resko, Barry Schmidt, Mike Tobias, Stephanie VanDerKooi.
- Utilized existing marijuana questions from Gallup, Pew, and General Social Survey
- Several study-specific items developed for this project.
- Demographics were from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health (2015)
Characteristics of the Sample

- N=2,608
- 68.3% Female
- 40.8% had children under 18 in their household
- Ages Range from 18-88
  - Mean 45.6, S.D. 13.4
- 65.8% Married or cohabitating

Characteristics of the Sample:

**Race**
- White: 84%
- Af-American: 9%
- Latino: 3%
- Other: 4%

**Education**
- HS Diploma/GED or less: 37%
- Bachelor's Degree: 41%
- Graduate / Professional Degree: 22%
Characteristics of the Sample

Employment Status

- Most Participants (75.5%) were Employed Full-time
- Smaller numbers in other employment groups:
  - 9.6% Employed Part-time
  - 7.6% Retired
  - 7.2% Other (Students, Homemaker/Stay at Home Parent, laid off, unemployed)

Characteristics of the Sample:

Political Party Identification (N=2,608)

- Democrat: 39%
- Republican: 24%
- Independent: 29%
- Other: 8%
Substance Use: Most participants report lifetime history of marijuana and cigarette use

- Marijuana Lifetime: 63.6%
- Marijuana Past Year: 18.9%
- Cigarette Lifetime: 64.5%
- Cigarette Past Year: 18.1%
- Other Drug Use Lifetime: 3.7%

Public Opinion in Michigan: Would legalization of marijuana would lead to more use by those under 21? (N=2,608)

- Yes: 52%
- No: 33%
- Unsure: 15%
Most people would be bothered by marijuana use in public, but not at home

- People used in public: 65.9%
- Dispensary opened in your neighborhood: 51%
- People used in own homes: 16.7%
- Your child’s teacher used marijuana: 57.2%

Similar to National Results from Pew
Most feel Marijuana Legalization will have a Negative Impact

Mixed Opinions about Legalization and Road Safety

What impact, if any, will marijuana have on road safety?

- 54.6% Less Safe
- 42.0% Not make much difference
- 3.4% More Safe
Most recognize marijuana is more potent, but less than 50% consider it a serious health risk.

Most have some concerns about use by...

11/14/2016
Not in my community...

Almost half of participants (45.7%) feel marijuana would not be a problem at all in their community with legalization.

Public Opinion in Michigan:
Do you think that Marijuana should be made legal for recreational use or not? (N=2,608)

- Yes: 47%
- No: 41%
- Unsure: 12%
Support for Legalization Differs by Sex

*** Difference is Significant at $p < .001$

Support for Legalization Differs by Political Identification

*** Difference is Significant at $p < .001$
Support for Legalization Differs by Education

![Bar chart showing support for legalization by education level.](chart.png)

- **Support Legalization**
  - HS/GED: 53
  - Bachelor’s: 50
  - Grad/Professional: 41

**Difference is Significant at p < .001**

Other Differences

- People with children in their household were LESS LIKELY to support legalization (44% vs. 48%)
- People who have used marijuana are MORE LIKELY to support legalization (61.0% vs. 22.6)
- Differences by Race (white, African American or Other) were not significant.
Changing Policies: Concerns about Adolescents

- Concern within the growing political debate on marijuana is whether legalization of medical and recreational marijuana results in increased access and use among adolescents.

- Studies have only recently begun to examine the effect of liberalized marijuana policies in the United States.

Changing Policies & the impact on Adolescents: Initial Research

- Initially, we saw significant differences:
  - In 2013: MTF data showed 40.4 percent of high school seniors in medical marijuana states reported smoking marijuana in the past year compared to 29.7 percent in non-medical marijuana states.
  - Two other studies found higher rates of marijuana use among adolescents in states that had legalized medical marijuana (Cerdà, Wall, Keyes, Galea, & Hasin 2012; Wall et al., 2011).

- Cross-sectional data and therefore were unable to determine whether the higher rates preceded or came in the wake of new policies.
Changing Policies & the impact on Adolescents

- In 2014 MTF data, there was no significant difference in the rates of marijuana use among high school seniors in medical marijuana states compared to non-medical marijuana states (34.5 and 30.1 respectively).
- Most studies conducted to date have generally shown that state-specific legalization of medical marijuana has not led to an increase in recreational marijuana use by adolescents.
  - Youth Risk Behavior Survey researchers found rates of current (Choo et al., 2014) or lifetime (Lynne-Landsman, Livingston, & Wagenaar, 2013) marijuana use did not significantly increase among adolescents following enactment of medical marijuana legislation.

Changes in Policy: Impact on Intent to Use

- 10% of high school seniors with no lifetime history of use report that they intend to initiate use if marijuana is legalized for recreational use (Palamar, Ompad, & Petkova, 2014).
- 18% of high school seniors who report lifetime marijuana use indicate that they intend to use marijuana more often if it is legal (Palamar et al., 2014).
Changes in Policy & How Marijuana is Used

- Edible marijuana use is more prevalent among adolescents in states with medical marijuana
  - 40% of 12th graders in medical marijuana states who consumed marijuana in the past year reported having consumed it in an edible form
  - versus 26% in non-medical marijuana states.

Potential Impact on Treatment and Prevention

- Community norms growing more tolerant of marijuana use and policies shifting toward increased marijuana legalization
  - Could create challenges for adolescent prevention and treatment (Resko, 2015).
- Providing services might be more difficult
  - potentially greater access to marijuana and widespread beliefs that marijuana use is harmless or even beneficial to the user (Hopfer, 2014).
  - Adolescents might not understand why prevention and treatment professionals advise them to avoid or stop using marijuana.
Potential Impact on Treatment and Prevention

- Adolescents rarely enter into substance-abuse treatment independently (Godley & White, 2005).
- Their marijuana prevention and treatment needs must be understood in the context of familial, social, and cultural expectations (Resko, 2014; Resko, 2015).
- Parents, family members, neighbors, and other adults might view marijuana as a less serious problem and one that does not warrant the need for treatment.

Conclusions

- As the number of states legalizing marijuana use increases, additional research will be needed to fully assess the effect of legalization on adolescents.
- It will be important to consider how these policies are implemented and whether specific components of these policies have a greater impact on adolescent marijuana use.
- Social workers and other substance use prevention and treatment practitioners must continue to educate the public about the potential harms associated with adolescent marijuana use, regardless of legal status.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Michigan Prevention Association for allowing me to help with this study.

Special thanks to:

- John Kroneck and Marsialle Arbuckle
- Michelle Beeck, Jesse Kauffman, Keri Marsh, Amy Moore, Susan Papple, Stella Resko, Barry Schmidt, Mike Tobias, and Stephanie VanDerKool.
- Participants of the study

For more info, contact Stella M. Resko:
stella@wayne.edu