



CONTACT: Prabhu Ponshe
Society for Prevention Research
703-918-4860
Prabhu@preventionresearch.org

Carol Vieira, Burness Communications
(401) 714-0821
(571) 723-2432 (cell)

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DRUG USE TRENDS AFFECT RISK OF MARIJUANA IN DEVIANCE PRONE BOYS, BUT NOT GIRLS

New Historical Study finds Occasional Users are Prone to Deviance too

WASHINGTON, DC, March 4, 2008— When national drug use trends among adolescents go up or down, the risk of marijuana use among deviance-prone male youth also goes up or down. Among deviance-prone female youth, it does not, according to a study in the March issue of *Prevention Science*.

The risk of marijuana use among deviance-prone boys is a reflection of the social acceptance of drug use among adolescents. The risk among deviance prone girls, however, does not change with shifts in the popularity of drug use. Deviance prone girls are just as likely to use marijuana during years of high and low national use.

The study, based on data collected from 44,751 students from the 12th grade from 1979 to 2004, also showed that deviance proneness is not only related to regular, more problematic use of marijuana, but is also related to occasional use of the drug.

Michelle Little, Ph.D., of the Prevention Research Center at Arizona State University in Tempe, who is the lead author of the study, said the findings are important for prevention programs.

“Parents and teachers need to be aware that historically, even those teens that use marijuana occasionally have been more likely to show antisocial or risky behavior. Also it appears that adolescents’ social rejection of marijuana use has been a powerful drug-use deterrent. Therefore, to prevent drug use, we need to drive down social acceptance of marijuana use among all adolescents through a variety of media campaigns and risk-focused prevention programs. We should also combine that with drug use prevention programs targeted for deviance prone male and female teens,” Little said.

The study measured “deviance proneness” based on a variety of factors, including criminal behavior, such as shop lifting or property damage; truancy; low pro-social commitments to school and religion; and thrill seeking. Regular marijuana use was defined as weekly marijuana use; occasional use was defined as up to three times per month. Regular and occasional use cutoffs are based on current understanding of drug usage levels that are related to social, personal and family problems among teens.

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Marijuana Use & Deviance/ add one

While previous studies have shown the relationship between a deviance-prone profile and frequency of drug use, “this is the first study to establish this relationship across 26 years of national historical data for both male and female youth,” according to Little.

The findings of her study are restricted to Caucasian or European-American youth. They do not extend to African-American or Latino students because those groups were not represented in the sample in sufficient numbers for statistical reliability.

Adolescent marijuana use declined significantly between 1979 and 1992 and then went up again by 1997-1999. Adolescent social approval of marijuana was at a contemporary low in 1992.

“During times of low population use of marijuana, male youth who are deviance prone are more likely to limit their use of marijuana than during historical peaks in adolescent marijuana use. This suggests that deviance-prone male youth respond to the social acceptance of marijuana use. By contrast, the data shows that deviance-prone girls do not necessarily respond in similar fashion. Deviance-prone female teens show similar risk for marijuana use during years of high and low national use,” according to Little.

During the 26 years of the study, on average, 61.1% of high school seniors did not use marijuana, 29.9% used it occasionally or up to 3 times a month, and 9% were regular users.

The study was based on data from the Monitoring the Future, a prominent national survey of drug use conducted by the University of Michigan.

Prevention Science is a journal of the Society for Prevention Research, an international organization focused on the advancement of science-based prevention programs and policies through empirical research. The membership of the organization includes scientists, practitioners, advocates, administrators and policymakers who are concerned with the prevention of social, physical and mental health problems and the promotion of health, safety and well being.

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