

The Straight Dope: Studies Suggest Parental Monitoring Can Help Decrease Adolescent Marijuana Use

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Marijuana is the most widely used illicit drug by adolescents, with almost 42% of high school seniors admitting to having experimented with it. Continued marijuana use may result in a number of serious consequences including depression, cognitive impairment, cardiovascular disease, and certain forms of cancer. As such, it is critical to prevent marijuana use by adolescents and numerous behavioral and medical scientists have been trying to establish the best means of prevention.

Many studies have focused on parents as being the best avenue for preventing adolescent marijuana use. Specifically, parental monitoring (when the parents know where their children are, who they are with, and what they are doing) has been seen as attenuating a number of negative adolescent behaviors, including gambling, sexual activity, and drug use. However, the strength of the relationship between monitoring and marijuana usage has been unclear; for example, if adolescents use marijuana, they may be more likely to hide that from their parents, compared to other behaviors. Despite this uncertainty, millions of dollars are spent annually on programs and media campaigns that urge parents to monitor their children's behavior.

Psychologists Andrew Lac and William Crano from Claremont Graduate University reviewed numerous studies to examine the connection between parental monitoring and adolescent marijuana use. For this review, Lac and Crano selected 17 studies from the literature, which contained data on over 35,000 participants. Criteria the researchers used for selecting studies included adolescent participants, that the research focused exclusively on marijuana, and that parental monitoring was evaluated by adolescent self-reports, not parents' reports of their own monitoring behavior.

Results of this comprehensive analysis, reported in the current issue of *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, reveal that there is in fact a strong, reliable link between parental monitoring and decreased marijuana usage in adolescents. In addition, the strongest effects were seen in the female-only studies.

The authors note, "Our review suggests that parents are far from irrelevant, even when it comes to an illegal and often secretive behavior on the part of their children." They conclude that the information gleaned from this analysis may be useful for marijuana-based prevention programs that target parents and might provide some insight into alleviating risky adolescent behavior.