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# The University of Michigan

## news

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EDITORS: Detailed information on the drug use study may be obtained from Dr. Lloyd Johnston, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109, telephone (313) 763-5043.

ANN ARBOR---A University of Michigan study indicates that marijuana may become a permanent recreational drug. More young people now use it, fewer associate detrimental effects with its use, and fewer now disapprove of its use.

In addition, decriminalization of marijuana may not be accompanied by an increased use of other drugs, according to findings from research conducted by the University's Institute for Social Research.

The findings demonstrate that marijuana use has been rising in the past several years without a corresponding rise in the use of other illicit drugs.

The ongoing study program, known as "Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of Lifestyles and Values of Youth," annually surveys the attitudes of some 17,000 high school seniors across the nation. The latest findings are based on data from 1975, 1976, and 1977.

During that period, marijuana usage increased steadily. By 1977, 56 per cent of the high school seniors had at least tried marijuana, an increase of about 9 per cent over the three years. In addition, about 1 in 11 were daily or near-daily users, also an increasing proportion. But more important, ISR researchers say, overall use of other illicit drugs did not increase over the comparable time interval. They believe this finding may have important policy implications because it appears to refute the argument that an increase in marijuana consumption will necessarily lead to an increase in the use of other drugs.

According to the three social scientists directing the study---Lloyd Johnston, Jerald Bachman, and Patrick O'Malley---the majority of high school seniors claim their personal use (or nonuse) of marijuana would be unaffected by decriminalization.

The proportion favoring decriminalization has increased so that now only 22 per cent of the high school seniors believe marijuana use still should be treated as a crime, the investigators report. This increase corresponds with a substantial and steady drop over the last two years in the proportion who personally disapprove of this drug. In fact, regular

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marijuana use receives disapproval from about the same proportion as the regular use of alcohol and cigarettes.

Fewer than 10 per cent of the young people in the study believe experimenting with marijuana is very risky. Only 36 per cent believe regular use involves much risk.

Generally, young people consider regular smoking to be more harmful than regular marijuana use, and regular drinking to be about as harmful.

About 36 per cent of the seniors report having used a drug other than marijuana without medical supervision. Of these drugs, stimulants (primarily amphetamines, which have been used by one in four seniors) were most popular. They were followed in popularity by tranquilizers (tried by 1 in 5), sedatives (tried by 1 in 6), hallucinogens (tried by 1 in 7), inhalants and cocaine (both tried by 1 in 10), and heroin (tried by 1 in 50).

While the number of young people using one or more of these drugs has remained constant over the last three classes of seniors, there have been some shifts in the popularity of particular drugs. Over the past two years, for example, hallucinogens like LSD and peyote have declined slightly in popularity, the use of the specific hallucinogen PCP has increased somewhat, and cocaine use has increased.

The study also found that daily alcohol consumption, which stands at about 6 per cent among seniors, has remained relatively steady, and that males continue to outnumber females in daily usage.

Regular smoking, on the other hand, has increased somewhat among females, nearly eliminating a sex difference which has existed for decades. About 20 per cent of both sexes are active daily smokers by the end of high school. The majority of seniors (60 per cent), however, still feel that smoking carries a great risk; and over 40 per cent believe smoking in public places should be prohibited by law.

Students from smaller cities and the non-metropolitan areas are catching up to their urban counterparts in their usage levels and attitudes about drugs, the U-M researchers say.

Illicit drug use, daily drinking, and particularly daily smoking were found to be considerably more common among students not planning to attend four years of college than among those planning to attend.

These findings are contained in the report titled, "Drug Use Among American High School Students, 1975-1977," published by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and authored by Johnston, Bachman, and O'Malley.

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