

# Why pot-smoking declines—but doesn't end—with parenthood

June 1 2017, by Kim Eckart

---



Becoming a parent doesn't necessarily deter adults from smoking marijuana, a University of Washington study has found. Other factors influence continued use. Credit: University of Washington

Adults who smoke marijuana often cut back after becoming

parents—but they don't necessarily quit.

The influence of a significant other and positive attitudes toward the drug overall, in addition to the onset of parenthood, also are factors in whether someone uses marijuana.

It's a changing landscape for marijuana use, as laws ease and cultural acceptance grows—in Washington state and elsewhere around the country. Against that backdrop, the study by the University of Washington's Social Development Research Group (SDRG) aims to present information about marijuana use among parents and nonparents alike.

"When it comes to adults, we don't know long-term consequences of moderate marijuana use in the legal context, so that we cannot say that we absolutely must intervene," explained Marina Epstein, a UW research scientist and lead author of the study. "However, when it comes to parents, their use is strongly related to their children's marijuana use, and that is a significant problem, since adolescent marijuana use can be harmful. Our study wanted to prepare us to build effective interventions for all adults if it becomes an issue."

The study, published online May 19 in *Prevention Science*, surveyed 808 adults (parents and nonparents), a group the SDRG first identified as fifth-graders at Seattle elementary schools in the 1980s as part of a long-term research project. For the marijuana study, participants were interviewed at specific intervals over a 12-year period, ending when most participants were 39 years old. That survey concluded in 2014—two years after marijuana was legalized in Washington. A parent-only subset of 383 people was surveyed at separate times, ending in 2011, just before the statewide vote that gave rise to pot shops.

Women and people of color made up approximately half the big study

pool; of the parent subsample, about 60 percent were women, and an equivalent percentage were people of color.

The increasing availability of marijuana, along with shifting societal opinions about it, lends a timeliness to the findings and provides potential for further study, Epstein said. What factors affect behavior, especially among parents? Past studies have linked parenthood with decreased marijuana use; what makes this one different is the examination of other influences, too, and how those might inform intervention strategies.

More than half of Americans now support legalizing marijuana, according to a 2015 Pew Research Center [report](#), and data from 2014 indicate a majority of Americans view alcohol as more damaging to a person's health than pot.

Meanwhile, concerns about the health effects of marijuana tend to focus on children and teens—years when the brain is still developing. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institute on Drug Abuse stress the potential for [long-term cognitive impairment](#), problems with attention and coordination and other risk-taking behaviors due to heavy marijuana use. For those reasons, medical professionals recommend that parents avoid using marijuana—or drinking heavily—around kids to prevent modeling the behavior.

The UW research found that, in general, a greater percentage of nonparents reported using marijuana in the past year than parents. At age 27, for example, 40 percent of nonparents said they had smoked pot, compared to about 25 percent of parents. By participants' early 30s, their marijuana use had declined, but a gap between the two groups remained: Slightly more than 16 percent of parents said they smoked pot in the past year, while 31 percent of nonparents reported the same.

But the study also showed that participants who started using marijuana as young adults were much more likely to continue to use into their mid-to late 30s, even after they became parents. Having a partner who used marijuana also increased the likelihood of participants' continued use. Those trends were true of both [parents](#) and nonparents, demonstrating the impact of attitudes and the behavior of others, Epstein said.

"This shows that we need to treat substance use as a family unit. It isn't enough that one person quits; intervention means working with both partners," she said. "We also need to tackle people's positive attitudes toward [marijuana](#) if we want to reduce use."

And while the health risks to adults are being debated, the focus on children can be a driver for prevention campaigns, Epstein said.

**More information:** Marina Epstein et al. Predictors of Adult Marijuana Use Among Parents and Nonparents, *Prevention Science* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s11121-017-0801-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-017-0801-5)

Provided by University of Washington

Citation: Why pot-smoking declines—but doesn't end—with parenthood (2017, June 1) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-06-pot-smoking-declinesbut-doesnt-endwith-parenthood.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.