

Cannabis ads and store location influence youth marijuana use

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New WSU research shows regular exposure to marijuana advertising can increase the likelihood of adolescents using marijuana. Credit: Photo by Shelby Ireland on Unsplash

Advertising and location of cannabis retailers influence adolescents'

intentions to use marijuana, according to a new study in the *Journal of Health Communication* by Washington State University researchers.

Stacey J.T. Hust, associate dean in the Murrow College of Communication, and Jessica Fitts Willoughby, associate professor of communication, conducted a survey of 13- to 17-year-olds in Washington State to find out how [marijuana](#) advertising and the [location](#) of marijuana retailers influence adolescents' intentions to use the drug. The researchers also asked participants about their outcome beliefs—whether or not they thought using marijuana would be good for them personally and or socially.

Their research shows regular exposure to marijuana advertising on storefronts, billboards, retailer websites and other locations increased the likelihood of adolescents using marijuana.

"While there are restrictions against using advertising designed specifically to target youth, it does still appear to be having some influence," Willoughby said. "Our research suggests a need to equip adolescents with the knowledge and skills to critically evaluate marijuana advertisements."

Location of retail stores also played a role but the results of the survey were mixed.

While the actual density of marijuana retailers in an area was not associated with adolescents' intentions to use, study participants who said they lived within five miles of a marijuana shop were more likely to report intentions to use the drug than those who perceived they lived farther away.

"This was especially the case when they also reported having positive beliefs about marijuana use," Hust said. "The study participants who felt

positively about marijuana and perceived living close to retailers were the most likely to report intentions to use marijuana."

The results of the research team's study could have significant policy implications as states that have legalized recreational marijuana use grapple with ways to adhere to the drug's legal status while trying to prevent adolescent [marijuana use](#).

For instance, most states with legalized marijuana restrict placing retailers and advertisements next to schools, but other locations, where adolescents live and spend a lot of their time, remain largely unregulated.

"Our findings are particularly relevant given that most states that have legalized recreational marijuana have not restricted their proximity to neighborhoods or living areas, which may be particularly challenging in large metropolitan areas," Hust said. "States may want to consider using census data to identify the proportion of teens living in particular areas as they identify the location for marijuana retailers."

The researchers are currently in the process of conducting a new experiment where they are testing different types of advertisements to see how young people interpret and respond to them.

"One of the things this research and other studies suggest is that these advertisements are pretty prolific in certain areas and we want to see what type of appeals are used in the advertisements and how those appeals affect viewers," Hust said. "Our long-term goal is really to develop a better understanding of how adolescents can make healthy and informed decisions in an environment in which marijuana is legal."

More information: Stacey J.T. Hust et al, Youth's Proximity to Marijuana Retailers and Advertisements: Factors Associated with Washington State Adolescents' Intentions to Use Marijuana, *Journal of*

Health Communication (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/10810730.2020.1825568](https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2020.1825568)

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