

# The dangers of drugged driving are outpacing drunk driving

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Doctoral student Andrew Yockey is one of a team of researchers at the UC School of Human Services who study substance abuse causation and prevention. Credit: Yockey

A recent study of drugged driving, by a team of University of Cincinnati researchers, shows that a sizable percentage of individuals reported the use of marijuana and other illicit drugs while operating behind the wheel.

"We need to focus our efforts on drugged driving, in addition to drunk driving, because drugged driving causes such a high level of fatalities, says Andrew Yockey, a doctoral student in UC's College of Education, Criminal Justice and Human Services and researcher at the UC Center for Prevention Science.

Yockey is lead author on the study "Drugged driving among U.S. adults: Results from the 2016-2018 [national survey](#) on [drug use](#) and health"—published in the *Journal of Safety Research*.

"Even though less people are driving, drugs are increasing in availability and are being found in more reports of drugged driving in the U.S.," says Yockey.

The study found that while 8.52% of adults reported driving under the influence of alcohol, compared to 4.49% who drove under the influence of [marijuana](#), a sizable number of adults used both marijuana and other drugs while under the influence of alcohol.

The most commonly reported drugs used while drugged driving are marijuana and opioids, with nearly one in five individuals reporting the use of marijuana while driving a vehicle, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Additionally, the study states:

- Sexual minorities drove under the influence of alcohol more often than heterosexuals, and a sizable percentage also used

marijuana and other drugs including inhalants (70.34%), cocaine (68.9%) and hallucinogens (63.7%) while driving.

- Multiracial individuals had heightened involvement in driving under the influence of marijuana.
- Males were significantly more likely than females to engage in drugged driving.

The research looked at sample data in the United States, the most recent available at the time of the study collected from the National Survey Drug Use and Health Survey; researchers say that current estimates are trending the same, despite fewer people driving during the pandemic.

According to the most current data from the National Institutes of Health, in 2016, among people killed in driving accidents that year, 43.6% of drivers who were [drug](#) tested and had positive results: 50.5% were positive for two or more drugs and 40.7% were positive for alcohol.

The UC study is the first of its kind to examine drugged driving over multiple years among adults in the U.S., says Yockey and the study's co-authors: Keith King, the center's director, and co-director Rebecca Vidourek, both professors at UC's School of Human Services.

As legalization of marijuana and other drugs becomes more prevalent, King says, "There is serious concern as to how legalization will affect driving behaviors among adults," adding that more research is needed to specifically evaluate the impact of legalization; particularly among those found to be most vulnerable such as sexual minorities.

While the team utilizes research to identify the [risk factors](#), their efforts also concentrate on education, preferably at an early age, and identifying prevention strategies that are culturally relevant.

For example, Vidourek says that some cultures and communities are less likely to view marijuana as a drug and potentially harmful substance, which may affect its use while driving. "Identifying messages and strategies that are culturally relevant is imperative," she says.

"We need to be vigilant because the trends are increasing," says Yockey.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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