

Oct. 4, 2000

Contact: Jody Oesterreicher
Sandy Slater

(312) 996-8277; joest@uic.edu
(312) 413-0475; sslater@uic.edu

MARIJUANA USE RISES AND FALLS WITH PRICE AND PERCEIVED HARM, STUDY SHOWS

Marijuana use among youth decreases as marijuana prices and perceived harmfulness rise, conclude researchers from the UIC ImpacTeen Project and University of Michigan Youth Education and Society Project (YES!). Their recent study also assesses the extent to which trends in marijuana prices and perceptions of use risks *predict* cycles in youth marijuana use.

Marijuana use among high school seniors declined to a recorded low between 1981 and 1992, when price more than tripled. The trend reversed itself after 1992, when price fell by 16 percent.

The study shows that perceived risk of harm from marijuana use had a substantial impact on the reduction in marijuana use between 1981 and 1992 (as perceived risk rose) and in the subsequent increase in use after 1992 (as perceived risk declined). These conclusions, now taking price into account, are consistent with ones reached earlier by the University of Michigan investigators, who for years have argued the importance of perceived risk in explaining trends in the use of various drugs.

Complete findings are presented in the Bridging the Gap paper titled "Marijuana and Youth," found under "Papers and Presentations" at www.uic.edu/orgs/impacteen

"This is the first paper that uses nationally representative data to look at the impact of prices on youth marijuana use," said Frank Chaloupka, professor of economics at UIC and director of the UIC ImpacTeen Project.

Traditionally, researchers have not considered price as a determining factor in marijuana use among youth. The handful of studies that have examined the relationship between youth marijuana use and price relied on small, unrepresentative samples, Chaloupka explained.

The researchers recommend that further research be conducted to provide a more complete understanding of the relative impact of price and attitudes on youth marijuana use.

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“Changes in the price of marijuana and in the perceived risk of harm from regular marijuana use contribute to an understanding of the number of teens who use marijuana and underscore the usefulness of considering price in addition to more traditional determinants in future studies,” said Chaloupka.

ImpacTeen researchers have been leaders in investigating the effects of price on the demand for tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs. In researching the effect of price on marijuana use among youth, the paper’s authors employed data on marijuana prices and potency from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Office of Intelligence, and data on the demand for marijuana among a nationally representative sample of American high school seniors from the annual Monitoring the Future Survey conducted by UM researchers. The National Institute on Drug Abuse funds the survey.

The ImpacTeen and YES! projects make up the Bridging the Gap initiative, a five-year interdisciplinary partnership of nationally recognized substance abuse experts in economics, etiology, epidemiology, law, political science, public policy, psychology and sociology. Bridging the Gap is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation’s largest health philanthropy.

The authors of “Marijuana and Youth” are Bridging the Gap researchers Rosalie Liccardo Pacula, RAND; Michael Grossman, National Bureau of Economic Research; Chaloupka, UIC; Patrick M. O’Malley and Lloyd D. Johnston, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan; and Matthew C. Farrelly, Research Triangle Institute.

UIC’s Health Research and Policy Centers administers the ImpacTeen project and serves as the overall coordinating center for the Bridging the Gap initiative. ImpacTeen, with UM’s YES! project, is building on existing information about youth alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use and abuse and collecting data on trends, markets, policies, legislation, enforcement, treatment, educational programs, advertising and other environmental factors. The initiative will merge these data with nationally representative surveys of youth to evaluate the relative effectiveness of specific prevention programs and policies in reducing youth substance use and abuse.

An essential goal of Bridging the Gap is to provide comprehensive and definitive research that will enable legislators and policymakers to develop effective policy and make informed decisions about appropriating dollars earmarked for substance abuse prevention programming.

KEYWORDS: YOUTH, MARIJUANA, DRUGS, ECONOMICS, RESEARCH

A recent study by researchers from the UIC ImpacTeen Project and University of Michigan Youth Education and Society Project concludes that the prevalence of youth marijuana use decreases as marijuana prices rise and as perceived harmfulness increases.