

The NSDUH Report

January 8, 2009

Marijuana Use and Perceived Risk of Use among Adolescents: 2002 to 2007

In Brief

- The prevalence of past month marijuana use among adolescents (i.e., youths aged 12 to 17) generally decreased from 2002 (8.2 percent) to 2005 (6.8 percent), and then remained constant between 2005 and 2007
- The percentage of adolescents who perceived great risk from smoking marijuana once a month increased between 2002 (32.4 percent) and 2003 (34.9 percent), and then remained relatively stable between 2003 and 2007
- Adolescents who perceived great risk from smoking marijuana once a month were much less likely to have used marijuana in the past month than those who perceived moderate to no risk (1.4 vs. 9.5 percent)

Monitoring data on adolescents' marijuana use and their perceptions of risk in using it is vital for making decisions about implementing and targeting prevention programs. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) includes questions on marijuana use and perceptions of risk from smoking marijuana.¹ This report examines trends in past month marijuana use and perceptions of its risk among adolescents aged 12 to 17 between 2002 and 2007. Additionally, this report uses 2007 data to explore demographic differences in marijuana use and perceptions of its risk, along with the correlation between use and risk perception.

Changes in Use and Risk Perception

The prevalence of past month marijuana use among adolescents decreased between 2002 (8.2 percent) and 2005 (6.8 percent), and then remained steady between 2005 and 2007 (Figure 1).

The percentage of adolescents who perceived great risk from smoking marijuana once a month increased between 2002 (32.4 percent) and 2003 (34.9 percent), and then remained relatively stable from 2003 to 2007 (Figure 2).

Demographic Differences in Use and Risk Perception

In 2007, 6.7 percent of adolescents (an estimated 1.7 million persons) used marijuana in the past month (Table 1). Males were more likely to have used marijuana than females (7.5 vs. 5.8 percent). In addition, use increased with age, from 0.9 percent of those aged 12 or 13 to 5.7 percent of those aged 14 or 15 and 13.1 percent of those aged 16 or 17.

In 2007, 34.5 percent of adolescents perceived great risk from smoking marijuana once a month (Table 1). Females were more likely to perceive great risk than were males (36.7 vs. 32.4 percent). The percentage who perceived great risk decreased with age, from 42.1 percent of those aged 12 or 13 to 35.1 percent of those aged 14 or 15 and 26.9 percent of those aged 16 or 17.

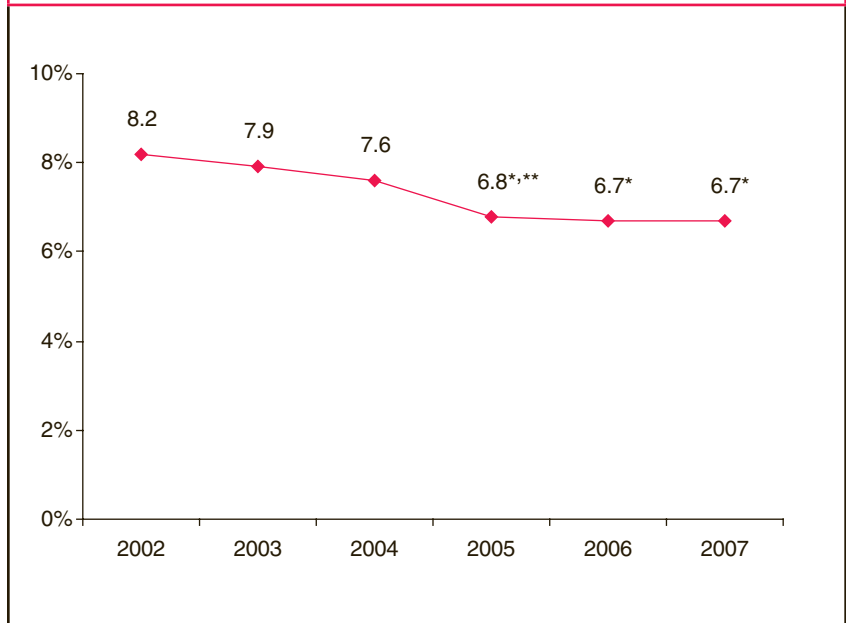
Risk Perception and Marijuana Use

Adolescents who perceived great risk from smoking marijuana once a month were much less likely to have used marijuana in the past month than those who perceived moderate to no risk (1.4 vs. 9.5 percent) (Table 2). This finding held for both genders and all three age groups.

Discussion

Trends among adolescents in past month marijuana use and perceptions of great risk from smoking marijuana

Figure 1. Percentages of Adolescents Who Used Marijuana in the Past Month: 2002 to 2007



Source: SAMHSA, 2002 to 2007 NSDUHs.

Figure 2. Percentages of Adolescents Who Perceived Great Risk from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month^{*}: 2002 to 2007**



Source: SAMHSA, 2002 to 2007 NSDUHs.

Table 1. Percentages of Past Month Marijuana Use and Perceptions of Great Risk from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month* among Adolescents, by Demographic Characteristics: 2007**

Gender/Age	Past Month Marijuana Use	Perceived Great Risk from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month
Total	6.7	34.5
Gender		
Male	7.5	32.4
Female	5.8	36.7
Age Group in Years		
12 or 13	0.9	42.1
14 or 15	5.7	35.1
16 or 17	13.1	26.9

Source: SAMHSA, 2007 NSDUH.

once a month were generally on opposite trajectories between 2002 and 2007. Marijuana use decreased between 2002 and 2005, and then leveled out; the perception of risk increased between 2002 and 2003, and then leveled out. Comparisons between marijuana use and perceptions of its risk in 2007 by demographic characteristics also showed generally opposing patterns. Marijuana use increased with age and was higher for males than females, while the perception of great risk decreased with age and was higher for females than males. Additionally, adolescents who perceived great risk from smoking marijuana were much less likely to have used marijuana themselves than those who perceived only moderate to no risk from such use.

Shifts in perceived risk of use of a substance are generally thought to signal future changes in the prevalence of use, but in the opposite direction. Tracking these measures may be useful to policymakers, educators, and prevention program staff in making decisions about when to deploy prevention messages and what segments of the youth audience they should target.

Table 2. Percentages of Past Month Marijuana Use among Adolescents, by Perceptions of Risk from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month* and Demographic Characteristics: 2007**

Gender/Age	Adolescents Reporting Past Month Marijuana Use	
	Perceived Great Risk from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month	Perceived Moderate Risk to No Risk from Smoking Marijuana Once a Month
Total	1.4	9.5
Gender		
Male	1.6	10.4
Female	1.3	8.5
Age Group in Years		
12 or 13	0.3	1.4
14 or 15	1.3	8.1
16 or 17	3.3	16.7

Source: SAMHSA, 2007 NSDUH.

End Note

¹ Respondents were asked how much they thought people risk harming themselves physically and in other ways when they smoke marijuana once a month. Response choices for this question were "great risk," "moderate risk," "slight risk," or "no risk."

Table and Figure Notes

* Estimate is significantly different from 2002 estimate at $p < .05$.

** Estimate is significantly different from previous year's estimate at $p < .05$.

*** Respondents with unknown perception of risk information were excluded from analyses.

Suggested Citation

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Research findings from the SAMHSA 2002 to 2007 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUHs)

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The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) is an annual survey sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The data used in this report are from the 2002 to 2007 NSDUHs. The survey collects data by administering questionnaires to a representative sample of the population through face-to-face interviews at their place of residence.

The NSDUH Report is prepared by the Office of Applied Studies (OAS), SAMHSA, and by RTI International in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. (RTI International is a trade name of Research Triangle Institute.)

The most recent information on NSDUH is available in the following publication:

Office of Applied Studies. (2008). *Results from the 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National findings* (DHHS Publication No. SMA 08-4343, NSDUH Series H-34). Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Also available online: <http://oas.samhsa.gov>.



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