

STASH Vol. 3(7) - How marijuana use among American Indian youth stacks up

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In a previous issue of STASH 2(6), we reported University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future (MTF) study showing an elevated rate of marijuana use among Latino adolescents compared to non-Latino adolescents in the United States (US). This week we will compare US trends in marijuana use among American Indian (AI) adolescents with non-AI adolescents.

Beauvais, Jumper-Thurman, Helm, Plested, and Burnside (2004) report on an annual survey of 7th-12th grade AI youth living on or near a reservation from 1975 to 2000. During school, researchers surveyed between 1,500 and 2,500 adolescents annually about lifetime marijuana use. Beauvais et al. used MTF data about lifetime marijuana use among a nationally representative sample of about 16,000 12th graders annually as a non-AI comparison group. The authors did not conduct statistical tests to determine whether there were significant differences in marijuana use between the AI and non-AI samples.

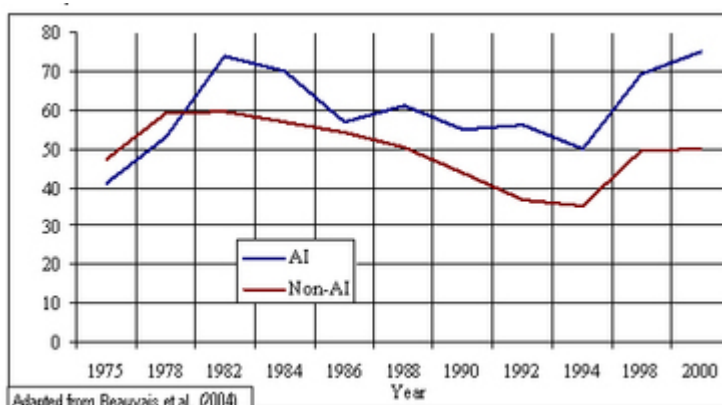


Figure 1. Prevalence (%) of 7-12th grade American Indian (AI) and non-AI 12th graders who have ever used marijuana. Click image to enlarge.

Figure 1 shows that although the AI group is younger, their use of marijuana is higher than the non-AI sample. Trends in marijuana use from 1975 to 2000 are similar for both groups. There is an increase in marijuana use until the early 1980s, a decline in marijuana use until the early 1990s and an increase again

during the early 1990s.

This study has some limitations. Findings describing AI marijuana use among this sample might not be representative of all AIs. Grouping all AIs together ignores large differences between various subgroups and cultures. Therefore this statistical representation might ignore considerable variation within the AI population. Both the AI and non-AI samples might have lower than typical marijuana use rates because this study used self-report measures and collected this information only from adolescents attending school. Self-reports in school might have biased the extent of marijuana use reports; further, dropouts and absentees might have been more likely to use marijuana.

Despite these limitations, this evidence seems to show reliably that AI youth report higher rates of lifetime marijuana use than the non-AI population. Higher lifetime marijuana use might be due to single, ritualistic practices among AIs, more permissive attitudes toward marijuana use than non-AIs, or more accessibility to marijuana use for AI living in some areas. Future research could explore AI use rates by more specific factors such as tribe, cultural affiliation, or geographic location to inform the development of public health interventions specific to AI populations.

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

References

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