

STASH, Vol. 9(12) - Dude, where's my life? How college student life goals predict marijuana use

November 6, 2013

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the general population. Moreover, its use among college age students is higher than for any other age group (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2012). Although the relationship between student pursuit of goals and alcohol use has been studied (Rhoades & Maggs, 2006), researchers and others know less about the relationship between marijuana use and goals. This week's STASH reviews a study that assessed the relationship between students' life goals and their marijuana use (Wright & Palfai, 2012).

Methods

- Researchers recruited 198 students (59.6% female) from an intro to psychology course to complete a questionnaire on life goals and marijuana use.
- The life goals section asked students to volunteer 5 life goals (i.e., idiographic goals) that they were working to achieve and also asked college students to indicate the extent to which they endorsed 5 "typical goals" (i.e., normative goals).
 - The normative goals were doing well in school, socializing, having a good romantic relationship, being involved in groups/teams/organizations, and being physically fit.
- Students rated each goal on a 0-10 scale for its personal importance to them (i.e., goal salience) and their perceived ability to reach the goal (i.e., goal likelihood).
- Students also reported their past 90 day marijuana use and frequency of use.
- The researchers conducted [logistic](#) and [linear](#) regression analysis to determine if student life goals could predict marijuana use or marijuana use frequency.

Results

- Participants who placed more importance on achievement goals reported less past 90-day marijuana use. But, participants who placed more importance on social goals reported more past 90-day marijuana use. (See Table 1.)
- When students rated idiographic goals as having more personal importance, they were less likely to report past 90-day marijuana use. (See Table 1.)
- Goal likelihood was not a good predictor of marijuana use/frequency. (Not shown)

Predictor	Odds Ratio	Confidence Interval
Block 1		
Gender	1.30	[0.73,2.31]
Block 2		
Gender	1.05	[0.56, 1.97]
Achievement	0.85*	[0.78, 0.93]
Social	1.09*	[1.02, 1.15]
Romantic	1.00	[0.96, 1.04]
Groups	0.97	[0.93,1.01]
Fitness	0.99	[0.94, 1.04]
Block 3		
Gender	1.08	[0.57, 2.07]
Achievement	0.88*	[0.81, 0.97]
Social	1.12*	[1.04, 1.19]
Romantic	1.01	[0.97, 1.05]
Groups	0.96	[0.92, 1.00]
Fitness	1.00	[0.95. 1.05]
Idiographic	0.57*	[0.39, 0.83]

Figure. [Odds ratios](#) (OR) of 90-day marijuana use [95% [Confidence Intervals](#) (CI)] (modified from Wright et al.). *= p < 0.01.

Limitations

- These results do not necessarily generalize to populations beyond college students. Moreover, psychology students are probably overrepresented in the sample.
- The study does not measure any causal relationship, due to its design.
- Although self-reported frequency of marijuana use was measured, the questionnaire fails to measure quantity of marijuana used or verify use with more objective measures, such as urine screens.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that individuals' reported value for their goals are linked with marijuana use. Students who were interested in academic goals were less likely to use marijuana, and students who were interested in social goals were more likely to use marijuana. Interestingly, students who placed a lot of importance on their personal (i.e., idiographic) goals had lower marijuana usage, even when controlled for other normative goals. These results suggest that motivating students in the pursuit of their academic and personal goals could enhance intervention strategies. However, as the study was not longitudinal in nature, further study is warranted to assess any causal relationships.

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

References

Rhoades, B. L., & Maggs, J. L. (2006). Do academic and Social Goals Predict Planned Alcohol Use Among College-Bound High School Graduates. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 35(6), 913-923.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]. (2012). Results from the 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings. 2013

Wright, L. L., & Palfai, T. P. (2012). Life goal appraisal and marijuana use among college students. *Addictive Behaviors*, 37(7), 797-802.