

# Relationships Among Marijuana, Opioid Pain Meds, and Heroin

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According to youth surveys, community prevention coalitions have made excellent progress in decreasing cigarette smoking and underage drinking by Connecticut youth. However, current use of marijuana by high school aged youth has remained relatively high. Youth surveys are typically conducted every two years by town-wide coalitions, sponsored by the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. Quantitative Services is an independent contractor for surveys and evaluation, and has implemented over 60 surveys in 20 towns over the past 12 years. The survey is based on the Governor’s Prevention Initiative for Youth (GPIY) survey designed in the 1990’s by the University of Connecticut.

Findings in this report are based on data from 18 surveys – two from each of nine towns – from a total of 6,000 Connecticut youth. The entire socio-economic spectrum within the State is covered, with data from six DRG’s (District Reference Groups, as designated by the Department of Education). The purpose of this analysis is to evaluate the possibility the use of marijuana may be a gateway to the use of other substances (especially opiates), by comparing self-reported current marijuana users with non-users. Conclusions are presented here.

- **Current use of marijuana** (i.e., at least once in the past 30 days) has been about 25% among high school juniors and seniors in most Connecticut towns for several years. Perceived **risk of harm** from regular use of marijuana has decreased steadily over these years, following its legislative designation as a “medicine”.
- There is a significant correlation between the **abuse of opioid pain medicines** (i.e., use in one’s lifetime without a medical order) and experimentation with **heroin**. This is true of high school students (grades 9-12), both marijuana users (Figure 1) and non-users (Figure 2), in all DRG’s surveyed.
- Marijuana users report much **higher abuse of pain meds** (14-fold) than non-users (Figure 3). Current use of heroin is very low among high school students, but experimentation (i.e., use in one’s lifetime) is reported by almost 2% of marijuana users, and fewer than 0.5% of non-users.
- The current **use of one or more other illicit substances** is about 5 times higher among marijuana users. The list includes heroin, cocaine, LSD, angel dust, methamphetamine, synthetic cannabinoids, and several others.
- These correlations are about the same in towns across Connecticut, regardless of socio-economics or demographics, and have remained about the same since at least 2008.

Figure 1.

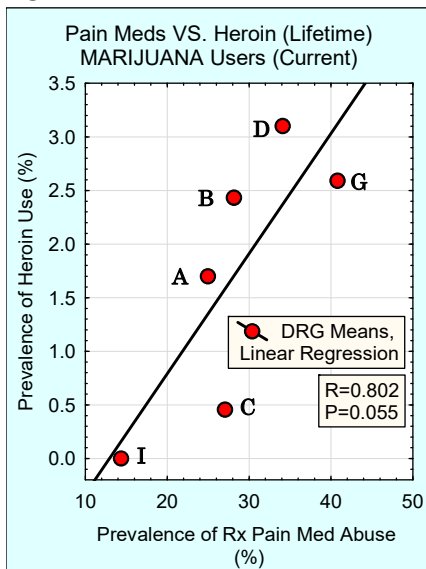


Figure 2.

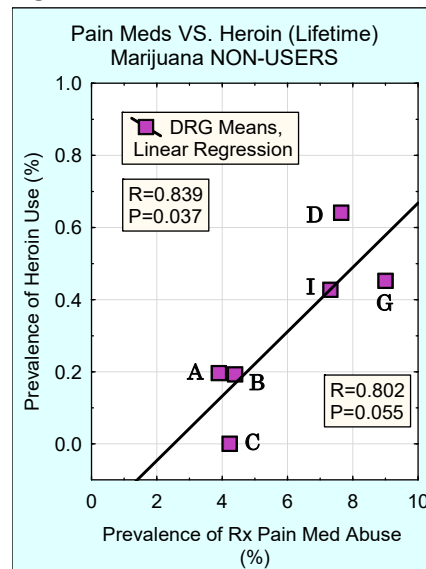


Figure 3.

