

Marijuana use may not make parents more 'chill'

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Sorry, marijuana moms and dads: Using pot may not make you a more relaxed parent, at least when it comes to how you discipline your children.

A study of California parents found that current [marijuana](#) users

administered more discipline techniques of all kinds to their [children](#) on average than did non-users. That includes everything from timeouts to, in some cases, [physical abuse](#).

"The acceptability of marijuana is growing in the United States and with that, more parents feel free to use the drug, sometimes even in front of their children," said Bridget Freisthler, co-author of the study and professor of social work at The Ohio State University.

"Some parents claim it makes them a better, more relaxed parent, but that may not be the case."

The effect of marijuana use on parenting is a relevant concern: A 2017 survey from Yahoo News and Marist College found that 54 percent of adults who use marijuana in the United States are parents. A majority of those parents have children under the age of 18. Some groups of "marijuana moms" claim that use makes them better parents.

The results of this new study suggest that marijuana users—who are nearly always (92 percent of the time) also alcohol users—are trying to control their kids more than non-users, Freisthler said.

"It appears that users may be quicker than other parents to react to minor misbehavior," she said.

"We can't tell from this study, but it may be that parents who use marijuana or alcohol don't want their children to spoil the buzz they have, or bother them when they have a hangover."

Freisthler conducted the study with Nancy Jo Kepple of the University of Kansas. Their results were published online this week in the *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*.

The researchers interviewed 3,023 randomly selected California parents of children 12 years old or younger by telephone in 2009. They asked participants about their recent use (in the past year) and past use (a year or more ago) of alcohol, marijuana, methamphetamine and other drugs.

They also asked how often the parents used non-violent discipline (such as timeouts or taking away privileges), corporal punishment (such as spanking) and physical abuse (such as hitting a child with a fist).

This is one of the first studies to look at how use of specific types of substances are related to a variety of parental discipline practices in the general population, Freisthler said.

The findings revealed that parents who used marijuana in the past year tended to use more of all types of discipline compared to non-users, even after taking into account a variety of other factors that could impact use of discipline, such as parental stress and depression and child and parent demographics. The same was true of alcohol users.

Parents who had used alcohol or marijuana in the past, but were not at the time of the research interview, also applied most types of discipline more often than did non-users.

And the more substances that parents used, the more often they disciplined their children in all types of ways, according to the study. For example, parents who reported using the most substances practiced physical abuse at a rate about 1.45 times greater than those who used only one substance.

Results showed that the annual frequency of physical abuse was 0.5 times higher among parents who used both alcohol and marijuana in the past year, compared to those who consumed only [alcohol](#).

"The use of several different kinds of substances certainly is a warning sign that parents may be relying more heavily on discipline to control their children," she said.

Freisthler said this study shows that while marijuana use has become more mainstream and is legal in more states, there is still need for caution.

"Marijuana use is not risk-free. It affects a lot of behaviors, including parenting."

More information: Bridget Freisthler et al, Types of Substance Use and Punitive Parenting: A Preliminary Exploration, *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/1533256X.2019.1640019](https://doi.org/10.1080/1533256X.2019.1640019)

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