

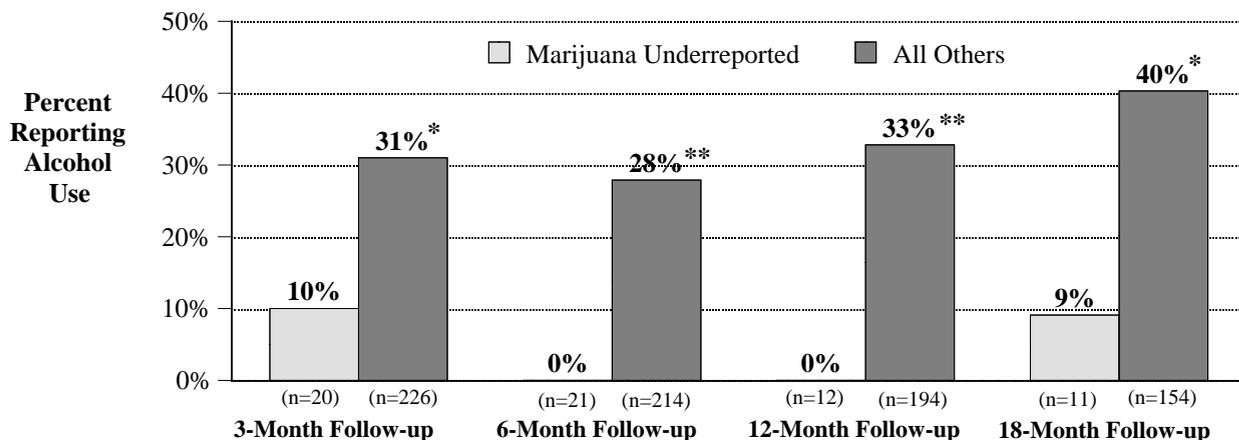
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

Truant Youth Who Underreport Marijuana Use Tend to Underreport Their Use of Alcohol but Not Risky Sexual Behaviors

The collection of valid self-reports of drug use from adolescents is critical for studies of criminal justice and clinical populations. Accurate drug use information is needed to inform treatment decisions and for studies of population drug use trends. This follow-up study of youths participating in a brief intervention for drug-involved truants examined whether persons who tested positive for marijuana but did not report marijuana use were also less likely to report alcohol use or risky sexual activities. The study found that underreporting of marijuana use was associated with self-denial of alcohol use (see figure below) but was not associated with self-reported engagement in risky sexual behaviors. According to the authors their findings suggest that “there is a bias in self-reporting alcohol use that may be similar to marijuana underreporting” (p. 8). Prevention and intervention programs for at-risk youth should be aware of how self-report bias might affect program process and outcomes.

Percentage of Truant Youth Reporting Alcohol Use, by Underreporting of Marijuana Use and Time of Follow-Up, 2007-2012



* $p \leq .05$ ** $p \leq .01$

NOTES: “The sample consisted of 297 youths who were enrolled and completed baseline interviews in the truancy intervention project between March 2, 2007 and June 21, 2012. Youths with a verified record of truancy were recruited for the study from the local truancy intake center, school social workers, and a community diversion program. Youths who were ages 11 to 17, resided within a 25-mile radius of the study site, had limited involvement in the juvenile justice system . . . , and demonstrated some indication of alcohol or other drug use . . . were enrolled in the project” (p. 3).

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Dembo, R.; Briones-Robinson, R.; Barrett, K.; Winters, K. C.; Ungaro, R.; Karas, L.; Belenko, S.; Wareham, J., “The Validity of Truant Youths’ Marijuana Use and Its Impact on Alcohol Use and Sexual Risk Taking,” *Journal of Child & Adolescent Substance Abuse*, Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1067828X.2013.844089>. For more information, contact Richard Dembo at rdembo@usf.edu.