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Study Contends Pot Isn't a Major 'Gateway Drug'

Researchers say ethnicity, stress, unemployment are stronger predictors of hard drug use

FRIDAY, Sept. 3 (HealthDay News) -- A new report casts doubt on the argument that marijuana is a "gateway drug" that plays a major role in leading people to try other illegal drugs.

Researchers found that other factors, such as ethnicity and stress levels, are more likely to predict whether young adults will use other illegal drugs.

Even unemployment appears to be more closely linked to harder illicit drug use than marijuana use, the study authors noted.

"Employment in young adulthood can protect people by 'closing' the marijuana gateway, so over-criminalizing youth marijuana use might create more serious problems if it interferes with later employment opportunities," study co-author Karen Van Gundy, an associate professor of sociology at the University of New Hampshire, said in a university news release.

The researchers based their findings on surveys of 1,286 young adults who attended Miami-area public schools in the 1990s.

Ethnicity was the best predictor of future illegal drug use, the study findings indicated, with whites the most likely to use the drugs, followed by Hispanics and then blacks.

The study findings are published in the September issue of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*.

So does early use of marijuana play a role in boosting the likelihood of later drug use? It's unclear.

"This study really doesn't answer the question," said Dr. Richard D. Blondell, director of addictions research at the University at Buffalo (UB), who was not involved in the new study. "As the authors point out, there are a lot of factors at play here. There is no one single answer to why somebody develops addiction."

In a study published recently in the *Journal of Addiction Medicine*, Blondell and colleagues at UB reported that new research suggests that many people first get addicted to drugs while using prescription painkillers.

More information

The U.S. National Library of Medicine has details on [drug abuse](#).

-- Randy Dotinga

SOURCE: University of New Hampshire, news release, Sept. 2, 2010; Richard D. Blondell, M.D., director, addictions research, University at Buffalo

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