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50 Years Ago in *THE JOURNAL OF PEDIATRICS*

Adolescent Drug Use 50 Years Later: Marijuana's New Morbidity and Opiates Still Omnipresent

Litt IF, Cohen MI. Drug use among adolescents. *J Pediatr* 1970;77:195-202.

From 1967 to 1969, Litt and Cohen studied drug use among adolescents in a juvenile detention center as well as hospitalized adolescents. A history of drug abuse was established by a combination of personal report, physical signs and symptoms, and urine toxicology screening.

They found that the majority of drug-using adolescents were male. Heroin was the most common drug of abuse among both groups. The authors reported that 56% of drug-using adolescents from the detention center used heroin, and 32% sniffed glue. Nearly all adolescents who were hospitalized for a drug-related illness were heroin users with hepatitis. Marijuana use was relatively rare (5%) among adolescents in detention as well as in hospitalized adolescents.

Fifty years later, illicit drug use remains a significant health concern among adolescents, with marijuana eclipsing heroin as the most common drug of abuse. The 2019 Monitoring the Future Survey of High School Students¹ found that 36% of 12th graders used marijuana in the past year; 22% used in the past month; and 6% use daily. In the 50 years since Litt and Cohen's analysis, heroin use has fallen significantly, with less than 1% of adolescents reporting use. Opioids other than heroin grew in popularity from the 1990s to early 2000s but are now declining, with less than 3% of adolescents reporting such use.

In the early 2000s a phenomenon, cannabis hyperemesis syndrome, was described in which patients who were chronic marijuana users developed cyclic nausea and vomiting, with a learned behavior of hot bathing to relieve symptoms. It is now widely recognized throughout emergency departments and inpatient units and, in our experience, is the most common drug-related complication (not related to suicidal behavior) among hospitalized adolescents. Nationwide, hospitalizations for cannabis hyperemesis have nearly tripled in recent years, with a disproportionate impact on patients who are teens or young adults; female; and African-American or Hispanic.²

As laws and societal attitudes toward marijuana change, the medical community should stay vigilant in protecting the health of young people.

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