Colorado Probation Research in Brief

**Older Adults Driving Under the Influence: Associations With Marijuana Use, Marijuana Use Disorder, and Risk Perceptions**


**Identifying Risky Behavior in Older Adults**

As the number of states legalizing marijuana increases, there has been more interest from researchers about the impact of marijuana use on communities. One area of interest is marijuana use in older adults. The current study explored the prevalence of marijuana risk perception and DUI in older adults.

Researchers used data from the 2013 and 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) to examine substance abuse, self-reported DUI, and marijuana risk perceptions for adults. Over 55,000 surveys were collected in 2013 and 2014. The NSDUH asked individuals if they drove under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or both, if individuals use marijuana, risk perceptions of marijuana, and collected demographic data (e.g. age, marital status, depressive episodes). Researchers analyzed the data to discover if there were any factors that were unique to individuals over the age of 50 years old.

Just over 15,000 respondents over the age of 50 years old participated in the survey. Of those respondents, 10.75% of individuals between the ages of 50-64 and 4.12% of individuals over the age of 65 reported DUI. This rate increased substantially for individuals who reported using marijuana in the past year. The rate of reported DUI for the past year was 33.94% (between 50 and 64) and 26.94% for individuals over the age of 65. In all age groups marijuana users had greater rates of self reported DUI for both alcohol and drugs. Finally, older adults (50+) that use marijuana also did not perceive moderate or great risk of regular marijuana use. Only 9.42% of DUI reporters and 14.82% of non-reporters perceived moderate or great risk of regular marijuana use.

**Practical Applications:**

- Review probationers’ assessments to identify patterns of substance use and abuse.
- Ask probationers to clarify discrepancies between assessment information, self-reported information, and drug tests.
- Ask probationers about their use of marijuana in the prior year. If there has been marijuana use in the prior year, periodic drug testing may be beneficial to safeguard individuals against driving under the influence.
- Engage older adults, with a previous DUI, in conversations about the risk of driving under the influence of marijuana and other substances.
- Ask individuals with substance abuse history about their perceptions of the negative effects of alcohol and drugs. It may provide opportunities for conversations about hidden consequences of drug and alcohol use.
- When probationers continue to struggle with substance abuse despite treatment, try interventions on other criminogenic needs (e.g. peers, antisocial thoughts/behavior).
- Collaborate with treatment providers to tailor supervision and treatment plans to maximize treatment and reduce criminogenic needs.