

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

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

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**Key Words:** Marijuana, cannabis, marijuana use disorder, substance use, risk perception, DUI

### Summary/Conclusions

In the present study, researchers utilized two years of National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) data to determine the connections between older adults, substance abuse, and driving under the influence. Analysis revealed that adults over the age of 50 that reported use of marijuana in the past year were more likely (32.97%) to report driving under the influence (DUI) than nonusers (7.97%). Another interesting discovery was the risk perception of older adult marijuana users of regular marijuana use. Only 9.42% of DUI reporters and 14.82% of non-DUI reporters perceived moderate or great risk from regular marijuana use.

### Limitations of Information

The present study uses self report data, which may contain personal bias and could be limited by memory. It is unclear how many individuals older than 50 possess driver's licenses. The data presented in this study is national data, it may not be representative of Colorado's population. Not all states have legalized marijuana, which may impact the reported frequency of marijuana consumption.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

### 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 adults over 50 years of age. 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 previous 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.