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## Marijuana Use Prevention High Risk Populations: Greek Life Students

*What is the prevalence of marijuana use among students in fraternities or sororities?*

- One nationally representative longitudinal study found members of fraternities and sororities report higher annual marijuana (as well as alcohol, tobacco and other illicit drugs) use patterns than nonmembers, with male fraternity members showing higher levels of use.<sup>5</sup>
- A study of nearly 1,600 young college students (52% freshman and 32% sophomores) found higher lifetime and past 30-day marijuana use among Greek students compared to non-Greek students.<sup>7</sup>
- One study of first-time freshman at a Midwestern university was unable to find an association between past-month use and Greek affiliation.<sup>6</sup>

*This document is part of a series designed to support Minnesota's Partnership For Success grantees working on marijuana use prevention on college campuses. More resources from this series can be found in the Toolbox at [SUMN.org](http://SUMN.org)*

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*What are the consequences of marijuana use among students, including those in fraternity or sororities?*

Evidence suggests the use of marijuana is associated with an increased likelihood of the following problems:

- **Poor academic performance and school attendance.** One study showed 14% of first-year students that used marijuana five times or more during the past year reported oversleeping and missing class as a result of their use.<sup>2</sup> Another study<sup>4</sup> of incoming first year college students found among students with any past marijuana use, 42.6% reported at least one academic consequence from their use.
- **Reduced cognitive functioning.** In one study of first-year students, 40% of those who used marijuana five times or more during the past reported having trouble concentrating.<sup>2</sup>
- **Increased risk of using tobacco.** There is evidence of a strong association between marijuana and tobacco use. See *High Risk Population Tip Sheet No. 11: Tobacco Users* for more information.

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## Greek Life Students, continued

*“...Greek members exhibit higher rates of a constellation of alcohol, cigarette and drug use, which suggests that targeted substance use prevention interventions should be broadly focused within this community.”*  
Scott et al., 2008

### Consequences, continued...

- **Driving a vehicle after using marijuana.** Nearly one-in-five (19%) of first year students that used marijuana five times or more during the past year reported driving a motor vehicle after using marijuana.<sup>2</sup>
- **Adverse health effects of marijuana use.** Health effects of marijuana use include increased heart rate, respiratory problems, reduced cognitive functioning.<sup>4</sup> See *Guidance Tip sheet No. 4: Adverse Health Effects* for more information.

### What explains the relationship between students in fraternities and sororities and marijuana use?

- **Little is known.**<sup>7</sup> The majority of studies examine the relationship between Greek member status and alcohol and/or alcohol and other drugs with few looking at the relationship between Greek status and marijuana use.
- **Selection and socialization.** McCabe and colleagues argue that effects of *selection* and *socialization* help explain the relationship between fraternity or sorority membership and marijuana use (among other substances).<sup>5</sup> The theories of selection and socialization argue students with certain behaviors, like heavy alcohol use, *before* entering college are more likely to select environments, like fraternities or sororities, which support those behaviors. Scott and colleagues argue that alcohol and/or other substances play a central role in socialization and bonding processes within many Greek organizations.<sup>7</sup> Other studies have shown young adults substance use behaviors are often driven by their environments.<sup>1</sup>
- **Individual differences.** Park and colleagues found Greek members differed from nonmembers on individual factors, as well as substance abuse patterns.<sup>6</sup> In addition to higher substance use rates, freshman Greek members showed higher extraversion, party and sports college motivations, and poorer high school academic performance than nonmembers.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, differences in substance use were not found with late-joiners to the Greek system, suggesting the timing of the affiliation may be significant.<sup>6</sup>



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## Greek Life Students, continued

*“The selection effects found in the present study indicate that greater substance use precedes entrance into college for those who become members of fraternities and sororities as undergraduates in the United States. These selection effects are more powerful for young men than women.”*

*McCabe and colleagues, 2005*

### Potential Prevention Strategies

Little research exists on strategies for addressing cannabis use among fraternity/sorority students; however, the following may provide ideas for potential prevention efforts:

- Targeting prevention efforts at high school students interested in joining fraternity and sororities *before* they arrive at college<sup>5</sup>
- Targeting prevention efforts at fraternity and sorority members<sup>5</sup>
- Mandatory Greek campus disaffiliation as disciplinary action for dealing with extreme cases of risky substance use<sup>6</sup>
- Working with the national offices of Greek organizations on campus to develop guidelines, resources and/or policies related to wellness and substance use

### Citations

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