



Medical Marijuana Study: Who's Really Smoking It?

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A recent study published in the [Journal of Psychoactive Drugs](#) by a group of U.C. Santa Cruz sociologists found the average California medical marijuana user to be white, male, educated and fully employed.

As [SF Weekly](#) commented in their coverage of the study, "In other words, medical marijuana patients, they are us."

The study looked at 1,746 medical marijuana patients at nine California clinics stretching from San Diego to Ukiah. Researchers combed through each patient's standardized medical history as well as forms filled out by their doctors.

The most common symptoms driving someone to seek out medical marijuana were pain (most frequently in the back or neck), insomnia and anxiety. About half of all respondents said they were using marijuana as a substitutive for another prescription drug. Users were slightly more likely to use tobacco than the general population but less likely to drink alcohol.



Interestingly, just over 40 percent reported never having used marijuana recreationally before obtaining their medical marijuana card.

The state's medical marijuana law prohibits centralized record keeping, so the actual number of Californians participating in the program is unknown; the study estimates it to be in excess of 200,000 patients.

The study showed 75 percent of all medical marijuana patients to be male and three-fifths to be white. Compared to the state's overall population, medical marijuana users are younger, more educated and more often employed. The study found women, Latinos and Asian Americans all to be underrepresented.

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The [authors theorize](#) that women may be less likely to use medical marijuana out of "the double stigma women face in seeking...[medical marijuana]—for using an illicit drug and for violating gender-specific norms against illegal behavior in general."

They go on to speculate that the prevalence of undocumented Latino immigrants in California leads many with undocumented status to "avoid contact with government agencies for fear of apprehension by law enforcement...Such fears reduce the likelihood of Latinos accessing health care in general and...[medical marijuana] in particular."

The under-sampling of Asian Americans is largely chalked up to their comparatively low rate of marijuana usage in general.

The [study also notes](#) the cost involved with obtaining a medical marijuana card may have prohibitive to some and skewed the demographics of the sample.

Golden State voters passed [Proposition 215](#), the Compassionate Use Act, in 1996. It allowed

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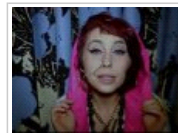
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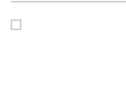
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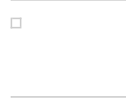
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California residents to possess and grow marijuana for medicinal use if prescribed by a doctor. California was the first state to allow medical marijuana. In the years since, 15 others (and the District of Columbia) have put similar laws on the books.

While most California law enforcement agencies have allowed medical marijuana dispensaries to operate freely, there has been a regular cycle of crackdowns at the federal level. The Justice Department under President George W. Bush ordered a [number of dispensary raids](#). Those ended when Obama Administration Attorney General Eric Holder indicated that the federal government would effectively abide by state law when it came to medical marijuana.

However, a recent memo by Deputy Attorney General James M. Cole threatened a [looming federal crackdown](#) on "persons who are in the business of cultivating, selling or distributing marijuana, and those who knowingly facilitate such activities."

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