Youth Perspectives on Marijuana Use
Themes from Youth Listening Sessions

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Overview

1. Context
2. Youth listening sessions
3. Themes from youth
4. Opportunities for prevention
5. Next steps for KC-YMPEP
King County, WA

2+ million residents
600,000 children & youth

Legalization of retail MJ: 2012
Youth marijuana use in King County

Average youth use rate: 15%

10th & 12th grade use is declining

Fewer youth perceive regular use as risky
Marijuana use can have long term effects on the developing brain

Other risks include:

- Poorer school performance; negative impacts on memory, attention
- Mental health issues (depression, anxiety, & more)
- Referrals to criminal justice system
- Addiction (1 in 6 people who begin using prior to age 18)
- Crash risk (particularly when combined with alcohol)
Goal: Reduce underage marijuana initiation & use

King County Youth Marijuana Prevention & Education Program

8/8/2018
5 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN
SPRING 2018

- Input from community partners
- Healthy Youth Survey data
- Information from youth listening sessions
Youth listening sessions
Purpose

Learn about youth knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs around marijuana use

Gain insights on what information youth want and how to deliver it

*Youth were asked to not disclose their personal use or the personal details of other youth who may use marijuana.
Implementation

- Focused on key demographics or priority populations
- KC-YMPEP: funding, training, & technical assistance
- Partners: session recruitment, facilitation, & transcription
- Coding and analysis conducted through NVIVO
- 2 additional sessions with young adults; similar findings
Participant snapshot

- 202 youth participants
- 8 average # youth/group
- 15.2 average age (years)
- 9.6 average grade
Demographics: Geography

- North King County: 5%
- Seattle: 29%
- East King County: 15%
- South King County: 48%
- No Response: 3%
Demographics: Race/Ethnicity & free/reduced lunch

- Multi: 29%
- Black: 27%
- Latino/a: 16%
- NHPI*: 14%
- Asian: 9%
- White: 2%
- AIAN**: 0%
- Other/No Answer: 2%

*Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
**American Indian/Alaska Native

- Yes: 51%
- No: 37%
- Not Sure: 10%
- No answer: 2%
Demographics: Gender & sexual orientation

- Female 48%
- Male 45%
- Trans 1%
- Non-binary 1%
- Other 1%

- Straight/Heterosexual: 84%
- Bisexual: 4%
- Gay/Lesbian: 3%
- Questioning: 1%
- Other: 4%
- No Response: 4%
Themes from youth
Disclaimer

These sessions were meant to be an initial exploration of youth perspectives with the goal of informing further inquiry.

They were not meant to produce definitive conclusions.

Instead, they will serve as a starting point for future KC-YMPEP activities around understanding youth perspectives.
Attitudes toward use

Most youth do not think marijuana use is a problem & have little concern for its risks

- Less concerned with the risks of marijuana use, more influenced by perceived popularity
- Marijuana is normalized
- Marijuana is not as bad as other substances, & has some benefits
Perceptions of use

Youth believe that many of their peers use marijuana

- Peer use rates estimated between 80 & 100% -- far above the HYS King County average of 15%
- Social media makes use seem common
- Rates of use are different for social versus regular users
Youth think that marijuana is easy to get

• From personal connections: peers, siblings, person who sells
• Social media facilitates access
• Occasional access through parents
"I think it’s just so popular nowadays, especially with our age group. So, even if you’re not close with anybody, you can just ask around and one out of three people are gonna have it."
Motivations for use

Youth use marijuana to follow social norms & to self-medicate

Other motivations: easy access, lack of protective factors, rebellion
Motivations for use, continued

Social norms:
• Peer pressure, curiosity, everyone else is doing it
• Social media & pop culture

Self-medication:
• Escape
• Forget
• Relieve pain
• Deal with anger

"[Youth] smoke marijuana for 2 reasons: either ‘cause others are doing it so they want to be cool and fit in. Or to relieve pain. There’s people going through struggles."
Motivations for avoiding use

Personal values & protective factors may help prevent marijuana use

- Personal values: family, religious beliefs, sports, school, future goals
- Protective factors: engaged parents, non-using friends, involvement in activities, knowledge of risks
- Desire to avoid potential discipline, addiction, and other negative consequences
Sources of information

Youth mostly rely on media, peers, school, & parents for information on marijuana.

- Common sources: Internet searches, social media, articles, advertisements, music
- Concerns of distrust and bias in all messages, especially those from:
  - Marijuana industry
  - Health educators
  - People who have never used marijuana
Opportunities for prevention
Information youth want

Youth want more unbiased information about marijuana

- How does marijuana work?
  - Long-term personal effects
  - Short-term effects
- Research & evidence about marijuana risks & benefits
Does it really help with stress?  
How long does it stay in my body?  
What are the before and after effects?  
What does it do to my body and brain?

How does it make you feel?  
Why is it so addictive?  
Is cancer a side effect?  
What will it do to my lungs?
How to share risk messages

Youth want risk messages about marijuana shared in non-lecture formats

- Give unbiased information so that youth can decide
- Engage youth in open discussions
- Present messages where youth will see them (magazines, social media)
- Provide personal testimonies from former users
- Do not impose shame or rely on fear tactics
Adults have kind of exaggerated effects of marijuana to the point where teens want to exaggerate it in the other direction and say it’s harmless... which isn’t entirely true either. There aren’t a lot of people who are very realistic about what it can and can’t do.”
Youth proposed strategies

- Invest in youth who self-medicate: provide opportunities & help develop long-term goals
- Broaden consequences beyond youth:
  - Penalize adults who sell
  - Increase prices and restrictions on marijuana advertisements
They don’t have nothing else to do ... they don’t have somebody in real life, somebody to be there for them to actually do things [with]. That can be their gateway. So, you need things in that community, where a kid could feel like he’s wanted or something like that.”
Limitations

• Themes are not generalizable
• Results were analyzed as a whole, not by specific demographic groups
• Varying facilitation styles
• Social desirability bias among youth participants
The listening sessions were one step towards understanding and taking action on youth perceptions of marijuana use:

- Follow up with communities to confirm findings
- Test messages around marijuana prevention & education
- Determine what is needed for regional education efforts
- Disseminate infosheet of results (**Coming soon!**)
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