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Drug use can delay college

College students who use marijuana and other illegal substances, even occasionally, are more likely to leave school than students who don't dabble in drugs, new research finds.

There's a strong link between marijuana use and "discontinuous enrollment," said study author Amelia Arria, director of the Center on Young Adult Health and Development at the University of Maryland School of Public Health. The same goes for other illicit drugs, she added.

In a recent Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs, Arria and her colleagues reported that students with high levels of marijuana use (more than 17 days a month) were twice as likely as those with minimal use (less than a day a month) to have an enrollment gap while in college. But even students who used pot less often, in the range of three to 12 days a month, were more likely to experience enrollment gaps.

"We wanted to look at whether or not drug use interferes with goals students had set for themselves," Arria said. "Our results show that marijuana use is not a benign thing."

Her team found that students who experience symptoms of depression and seek treatment for depression during college might also be at risk for an enrollment gap, especially if they use pot or other illicit drugs.

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