DOES DIVERSION TO TREATMENT IMPROVE TREATMENT OUTCOMES: THE CASE OF MARIJUANA

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BACKGROUND

Motivation: In recent years, marijuana-related admissions to publicly funded treatment facilities have been on the rise. Many have attributed this rise to marijuana-related treatment options as increased reliance on the criminal justice system. Indeed, national data from the Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) show that more than half of the patients admitted to publicly-funded treatment facilities for marijuana-related offenses were referred by the criminal justice system.

Research Questions:

- Is the probability of referring an individual to treatment greater in a state whose laws mandate or allow diversion to treatment for low-level marijuana offenses?
- Do criminal justice referrals bias evaluations of treatment outcomes because of the influx of individuals who are in need of treatment or less dependent upon marijuana?

Data Sources:

- Treatment admissions data: TEDS, 1997-2010 (SAMHSA, 2011). Data reflect only cases where marijuana was the primary substance of abuse at time of treatment admission.

Legislative data: Original legislative data collected by The MayaTech Corporation as part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported impactTEEN project, and as a subcontractor to the RAND Corporation for grants from RWJF and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

RESULTS

The odds of being referred to marijuana-related treatment through the criminal justice system are higher in states that allow for treatment as part of a penalty for first time offenders. Logistic regressions computed using robust standard errors adjusted for clustering at the state level.

CONCLUSIONS

- The odds of a low-level marijuana offender being referred to treatment through the criminal justice system are higher in states that allow for treatment as part of a first offense penalty.
- Criminal justice referred marijuana-related treatment admissions are less in need of treatment than non-criminal justice cases (regardless of the state policy allowing for treatment as part of a penalty scheme).

CONSIDERATIONS & LIMITATIONS

- Exploratory analysis
- Need to account for treatment facility variables in future analyses

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