

The Relationship between Crime and Medical Marijuana Dispensaries

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Neighborhoods that contain medical marijuana dispensaries are no more likely to experience violent and property crime than neighborhoods without these establishments, a recent study found. The study, carried out by the University of California, Los Angeles and the Prevention Research Center of the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, examined the location and density of marijuana dispensaries in 95 census tracts in Sacramento, California in 2009. The researchers compared the rates of violent and property crime in neighborhoods with high density of dispensaries to rates in neighborhoods with low densities of dispensaries. The researchers found that violent and property crime rates were positively associated with percentage of commercially zoned areas, percentage of one-person households, and the unemployment rate in the neighborhood. Higher violent crime rates were associated with poor and disadvantaged neighborhoods. Property crime rates were positively associated with the percentage of population 15–24 years of age. Density of medical marijuana dispensaries, however, was not associated with violent or property crime rates.

Lead study author, Nancy Kepple, stated, “It’s possible that these results mean that marijuana dispensaries don’t have any effect on crime. It may also be possible that the kinds of security that dispensaries routinely use, such as doormen or video surveillance, prevent crimes that might otherwise occur around these dispensaries.” More research is being conducted to determine why dispensaries were not related to crime.

The full paper can be seen in the *Journal of Studies on Alcohol Drugs*, 73, 523–530, 2012 p. 523-530.