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# **THE TRUTH ABOUT MARIJUANA FACT VS. FICTION**

### **FACT:**

Legalizing any controlled substance, including marijuana, will lead to increased use.

### **FICTION:**

Legalizing possession and use of small amounts of marijuana for adults won't lead to increased use among either adults or youth.

### **BACKGROUND:**

There is no question that to legalize a controlled substance such as marijuana will lead to increased use. There are a substantial number of adults and youth who don't use drugs because they are illegal. For instance, in a survey of New Jersey and California high school students, sixty percent said that fear of getting in trouble with the law was a major deterrent to drug use.<sup>1</sup> In Alaska between 1978 and 1990 when small amounts of marijuana were legal for adults, the National Household Survey (1985) showed twice as many Alaskan teenagers (51.6%) used marijuana as compared to their counterparts in the rest of the nation (23.7%), Marijuana was re-criminalized in Alaska in 1990.<sup>2</sup> In the Netherlands, the "coffee shop" legalization of marijuana use resulted in Dutch teenagers' use of marijuana nearly tripling in just eight years.<sup>3</sup> The question is how much of an increase in drug use is acceptable? The answer should be none.

### **FACT:**

Sobriety is the only safe alternative to being under the influence of alcohol.

### **FICTION:**

Being under the influence of marijuana is safer than being under the influence of alcohol.

### **BACKGROUND:**

There are numerous factors that influence intoxication including, but not limited to, the individual, the circumstances and the dosage used. The potential dangers of intoxication from either marijuana or alcohol are real. An altered state of mind and impaired physical

ability are never safe. The only safe alternative to alcohol intoxication is sobriety, not another form of intoxication.

**FACT:**

Both alcohol and marijuana can be extremely dangerous drugs.

**FICTION:**

Alcohol is dangerous whereas marijuana is relatively safe.

**BACKGROUND:**

Alcohol can be extremely dangerous but so can marijuana. One reason alcohol is so devastating to many in our country is that so many people, well over 100 million, use liquor. In fact, more people are addicted to alcohol than use marijuana (use is at least once within 30 days). The reason is simply that alcohol is legal whereas marijuana is not. Instead of trying to legalize another dangerous drug, we should be encouraging sobriety.

Marijuana and Treatment

In 1981, the THC content in marijuana was 1.83% which rose to 5.62% in 2003. The high-grade marijuana, often called sinsemilla, rose from 6.58% THC in 1981 to 14.10% in 2003.<sup>5</sup> Corresponding to increased potency of the THC content in marijuana from the 1990's to 2000 was a six-time increase in emergency room admissions because of marijuana use even though the number of users remained relatively the same.<sup>2</sup> Between 1992 and 2002, there was a 162% increase in treatment admissions for marijuana use as the primary substance of abuse.<sup>6</sup> There are over 4 million Americans suffering from marijuana dependence.<sup>7</sup> Sixty-two percent of teens in drug treatment are there for marijuana use.<sup>8</sup>

Hospital emergency admissions, drug dependence and drug treatment admissions don't equate to a relatively benign substance. Common sense would indicate that marijuana is a potentially dangerous drug, as is alcohol.

Some Psychological Dangers

- Brain scans show “holes” (decreased activity and blood flow) in areas of the brain covering language, memory, anger management, emotional control and motor coordination.<sup>9</sup>
- Marijuana is not a benign drug. Use impairs learning and judgment and may lead to development of mental health problems according to the American Medical Association.<sup>10</sup>
- Marijuana use may trigger panic attacks, paranoia and even psychosis especially if one is suffering from anxiety, depression, or having thinking problems according to the American Psychiatric Association.<sup>10</sup>

- Marijuana can impair concentration and ability to retain information during teens' peak learning years according to the National Education Association.<sup>10</sup>
- Marijuana has been known to trigger attacks of mental illness including paranoia and depression. Memory is impaired even months after use has ceased. Marijuana is known to be associated with apathy, loss of energy and motivation, moodiness and difficulty in concentrating.<sup>11</sup>

### Some Physiological Dangers

- The British Medical Association cites marijuana as being “linked to greater risk of heart disease, lung cancer, bronchitis and emphysema.”<sup>12</sup>
- Marijuana affects concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, many of the skills required in safe driving and other physical tasks. These effects can last up to 24 hours after smoking marijuana.<sup>13</sup>
- Marijuana contains more than 400 chemicals that increase the risk of cancer, lung damage and poor pregnancy outcome.<sup>14</sup>
- Darryl Inala, executive director of Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic in San Francisco during the 90's, worked with drug treatment for over twenty-eight years. He states, without reservation, that marijuana is in fact addictive.<sup>11</sup>
- Marijuana smoking during pregnancy results in an eleven fold increase in babies eventually contracting leukemia, increased infant mortality, increased risk of babies being mentally and behaviorally handicapped and increased neurological abnormalities.<sup>11</sup>
- Marijuana impairs cellular and pulmonary immunity systems according to the Assistant Secretary of Public Health Services and other medical researchers.

Which has more credibility? Groups whose primary purpose are to legalize marijuana and cannot cite any scientific studies to back their claim that marijuana is relatively safe? Or, the thousands of documented studies and research by medical and scientific professionals that demonstrate marijuana is, in fact, a dangerous drug.

#### **FACT:**

Marijuana use has been the cause of deaths from accidents, disease and recently possible toxicity.

#### **FICTION:**

There were many deaths from alcohol and no deaths from marijuana.

## **BACKGROUND:**

The first documented person believed to have died directly from cannabis poisoning was a 36-year-old man in Britain in 2004. According to British toxicologist John Henry “...it corrects the argument that cannabis cannot kill anybody.”<sup>15</sup> Six others have died in Norway from using hash. The Oslo Forensic Toxicology institute reports that “six Norwegians have died as a direct result of smoking hash in a period of six years.”<sup>16</sup> As the potency of marijuana increases, so does the risk of cannabis poisoning. There have been deaths from alcohol overdose. However, the figure 19,000 must include other deaths related to alcohol while the zero figure for marijuana doesn’t consider deaths by marijuana related causes such as cancer, infant mortality, immune system damage, pneumonia, accidents, etc.

Regarding deaths from marijuana, there have been and continues to be significant numbers of deaths caused by people under the influence of marijuana. Just a few examples include:

- Conrail train accident killed 16 and injured 107 when the engineer was under the influence of marijuana, disregarded several warning signs and rear-ended a passenger train.<sup>1</sup>
- The National Transportation and Safety Board study of 182 truck accidents causing death found 12.8% of the drivers were under the influence of marijuana and 12.5% were under the influence of alcohol. This percentage is startling since ten times more people drink alcohol than smoke marijuana.<sup>17</sup>
- A California truck driver, under the influence of marijuana, plowed into a highway cleaning crew killing five and injuring fourteen.<sup>18</sup>
- The driver of a charter bus, who crashed and killed twenty-two people, had been fired from bus companies in 1989 and 1996 because he tested positive for marijuana four times. A federal investigator confirmed a report that the driver “tested positive for marijuana when he was hospitalized Sunday after the bus veered off a highway and plunged into an embankment.”<sup>19</sup>

How can one say that marijuana doesn’t kill? The above deaths were real people with real families. Another truly alarming statistic is that research demonstrates that a high percentage of people admit driving under the influence of marijuana.<sup>13</sup> Despite higher alcohol usage by teens, approximately fifteen percent report driving under the influence of marijuana and almost an equal amount, eighteen percent, report driving under the influence of alcohol.<sup>13</sup> In a 2000 and 2001 study 28,000 high school seniors admit to at least one accident after using marijuana.<sup>13</sup> Also, Stanford Medical School research showed that tested pilots were still impaired twenty-four hours after smoking marijuana.<sup>19</sup>

**FACT:**

People are not arrested and jailed for simple possession of under an ounce of marijuana

**FICTION:**

There are people going to jail for simple possession of marijuana.

**BACKGROUND:**

Possession of less than 1 ounce of marijuana (between 56 and 84 marijuana cigarettes) is unlawful but enforced by a citation and fine. People are not arrested and jailed for simple possession of under an ounce of marijuana. In fact, nationally only .3% or 3,600 out of 1,200,000 inmates are in jail for first-time possession of marijuana which includes amounts well over an ounce. The median amount of marijuana involved in the connection of marijuana-only possession for federal offenders was 115 pounds.<sup>20</sup>

**FACT:**

Intoxication of any kind can cause a wide range of reactions – from stupor to violence.

**FICTION:**

Alcohol is associated with violence, particularly domestic, whereas marijuana is not. Marijuana makes the user mellow, not violent.

**BACKGROUND:**

Some people who are drunk resort to violence, some act happy while others are “mellow.” Some people who are intoxicated by marijuana resort to violence and some act happy while others are “mellow.” The results of any intoxication depend on a variety of factors including dosage, mood, circumstances, individuals involved, etc. Unfortunately, violence associated with intoxication is often directed at family members. There is more violence associated with alcohol because it is legal and almost ten times as many people use alcohol as use marijuana. Studies have demonstrated that marijuana is connected with violence:

- A 2002 study showed the number of young people engaging in delinquent behavior rose with the frequency of marijuana use. Forty-two percent of youth who smoked marijuana almost daily (300 or more days) took part in serious fighting at school or work whereas only 18.2% who did not use marijuana engaged in serious fighting. Similar rates existed for carrying a gun (22.2%-2.5%) or attacking someone with the intent to seriously hurt them (32.9%-5.9%).<sup>21</sup>
- Marijuana users have more suicidal thoughts and are four times more likely to report symptoms of depression than those that don't use the drug.<sup>22</sup>
- Marijuana users in their late teens are more likely to have increased risk of delinquency and more friends who exhibit deviant behavior. They also have more

sexual partners and are more likely to engage in unsafe sex.<sup>23</sup>

- Research shows a link between frequency of marijuana use and increased violence.<sup>24</sup>
- Young people who use marijuana weekly are nearly four times more likely than non-users to engage in violence.<sup>24</sup>
- More than 41% of male arrestees sampled in U.S. cities tested positive for marijuana.<sup>25</sup>
- Recent research has indicated that for some people there is a correlation between frequent marijuana use and aggressive or violent behavior, according to the National Crime Prevention Council. The Council states that this should be a concern to parents, community leaders and all Americans.<sup>10</sup>

**FACT:**

Drug use has been reduced dramatically from peak use in 1979 to the present.

**FICTION:**

This nation's drug policy has failed. It is time to try something new like legalizing small amounts of marijuana.

**BACKGROUND:**

Drug use has been reduced by 50% from its peak in 1979 to current times. Ninety-two percent of the people in our country do not use any illicit drugs. Teen use continues to decline from 11.4% to 10.9%. How one can call these significant successes a failure is difficult to comprehend. We will always have drug abuse in this country. The keys are to keep drug abuse from increasing and to try to lower the use rate which, in turn, will lower all the adverse effects of drug abuse. An example of failed drug policy can be seen with alcohol and cigarettes. Why increase the problem with legalizing a third dangerous substance? That simply doesn't make public policy sense.

## NOTES

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