

# Why We Need A Revolution

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*By Calvina Fay, guest columnist, Executive Director, Drug Free America Foundation, Inc., [www.dfaf.org](http://www.dfaf.org)*

The word on the street is that marijuana is not addictive and not harmful. Frequently, you will hear people justify its use by claiming that it is safer than alcohol. That's like saying it is safer to slug someone in the face with a boxing glove, instead of with a bare fist. Both techniques of hitting hurt and they are both wrong!

These dangerous allegations that marijuana is non-toxic and non-addictive are harming our children and their chances for healthy, successful futures. They are pure propaganda, sorely lacking in evidence to support them. In fact, science tells a very different story.

Science has clearly shown that the human brain continues to develop into the early 20s. Thus, introducing any toxic substance into the brain impairs its normal development. Some of this impairment has been shown to be permanent and life-altering.

## **Mental Illness**

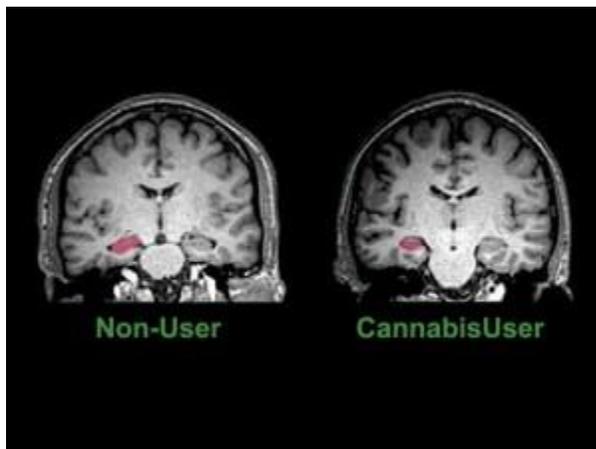
A plethora of research shows the linkage of marijuana use and mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, and anxiety disorder. A Dutch study of 4,000 people from the general population found that those taking large amounts of cannabis were almost seven times more likely to have psychotic symptoms three years later. Research has shown marijuana use to be linked with both the onset of psychotic symptoms and the worsening of symptoms. Rebecca Kuepper led a research team that found "Cannabis use is a risk factor for the

development of incident psychotic symptoms. Continued cannabis use might increase the risk for psychotic disorder by impacting on the persistence of symptoms. There is particular concern about the association of schizophrenia with those who initiate marijuana use at an early age.

### **Memory and IQ Shrinkage**

Last month, scientists from Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne, Australia, proved the long-held suspicion that persistent heavy marijuana use damages the brain's memory and learning capacity. Their research showed that the earlier people develop their cannabis habit, the worse the damage. They reported a reduction in the volume of white matter, the brain's complex wiring system, of more than 80 percent in the marijuana users studied. They concluded that this reduction was linked to memory impairment and concentration and that the users will have trouble learning new things and remembering things. Their findings added to previous evidence showing that the hippocampus, the area of the brain involved in memory, shrunk in heavy users.

Another significant research finding released in August adds to concerns about marijuana. A long-range study cohort of more than 1,000 New Zealanders, led by Madeline Meier, a post-doctoral researcher at Duke University, involved individuals who initiated use of cannabis in adolescence and used it for years afterward. The research results showed an average decline in IQ of 8 points between ages 13 and 38. Quitting pot did not appear to reverse the reduction of IQ.



New evidence confirms that the hippocampus shrinks in heavy pot users. Those who develop cannabis habits early have more reduction in the volume of white matter, linked to memory, concentration and ability to learn new things.

### **The Shift in THC Levels**

Most parents also do not realize how potent marijuana has become over the years. They think it is still the weak stuff of the 60s and early 70s, when the average

THC level was below 1%. THC is the compound in marijuana that gets you high and triggers hallucinations and other psychotic-like experiences.

According to world-renowned marijuana expert, Dr. Mahmoud El Sohley who heads up the Marijuana Project at the National Center for Natural Products Research, School of Pharmacy at the University of Mississippi, the average rate of THC was .74% in 1975 and increased to 10% by 2009, with some samples exceeding 30%. Several years ago, he predicted the average rates to reach 15% by 2019.

Based upon recent reports from other sources, we are now seeing average rates at 14%, with some samples showing THC levels as high as 38%. This has a profound impact on the impairment level and hallucinatory properties of the marijuana that is being used today! It has resulted in a surge in impaired drivers on our highways and in our workplaces. According to the Colorado Department of Transportation, drivers who tested positive for marijuana in fatal car crashes doubled between 2006 and 2010.

These increased THC levels are extremely troubling when you realize that we currently have a major drug epidemic in the United States, especially with our youth, and marijuana is the preferred drug of choice by most. High school students are now more likely to use marijuana than to smoke cigarettes.

### **Recent Surveys**

According to the national survey results on teen drug abuse released this month by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), 2012 is the sixth year in a row that 60 percent or more of high schools teens reported that their schools are drug-infected. The survey also revealed:

- Every six in ten high schools and one in three middle schools are drug-infected.
- Nearly nine out of ten high school students indicated that they knew classmates who were drugging, drinking or smoking during the school day.
- Fifty-two percent of the surveyed high school students reported a known place on or near the school grounds where students go to use substances.
- Forty-four percent knew of a student who sold drugs at their school, and of those who did, 91 percent knew someone who sold marijuana.

So, one must ask "How can students do their best with their studies if their brains are impaired with drugs and/or alcohol?"

Contrary to public belief, this insidious drug epidemic is not just affecting "bad" or "marginal" kids. It reaches into all segments of our youth population including high achieving students and athletes.

The National Collegiate Athlete Association's anonymous survey of more than 20,000 athletes in 2009 found that 22.6% admitted to using marijuana the previous year. Among men's sports, lacrosse led with almost half (48.5%) of surveyed

players admitting to using pot and in women's sports, field hockey saw more than a third (35.7% ) of its players using the substance.



Surveys show that 24 percent of high school students, all ages, have used marijuana versus only 15 percent who have tried tobacco. Why aren't parents and national leaders alarmed enough to push back when roughly one-quarter of our high school students have been introduced to pot?

Perhaps the lack of concern over this issue is due to the fact that most of the public simply do not understand how harmful marijuana really is. Perhaps part of this trepidation deficit is because so many people have bought into the baloney that marijuana "a crude toxic weed" is medicine and, therefore, cannot be all that harmful.

### **The Case of Medical Marijuana States**

Reports coming from states that have legalized marijuana under the guise of medicine tell us that the marijuana is being diverted to youth and to adults who are not registered as so-called patients, as well as being diverted to other states. A 3-week cursory assessment by the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area in Colorado revealed that 23 states were identified receiving Colorado's "medical" marijuana. The report indicated that the assessment is suspected of reporting only a small sample related to diversion.

In a study of teens at two adolescent substance abuse treatment programs in Denver led by Stacy Salomonsen-Sautel, the researchers found that 74 percent of the teens used marijuana that was recommended for someone else on average of 50 times.

According to Wall, et al. in *Adolescent Cannabis Use from 2002 to 2008: Higher in States with Medical Cannabis Laws, Cause Still Unclear* (2011), among youths age 12 to 17, marijuana usage rates are higher in states with "medical" marijuana laws (8.6 percent), compared with those without such laws (6.9 percent). According to Cerde, et al. in *Medical cannabis laws in 50 states: Investigating the relationship*

*between state legalization of medical cannabis and cannabis use, abuse and dependence, residents of states with “medical” marijuana have marijuana abuse/dependence rates almost two times higher than states without such laws.*

With a shifting public attitude towards tolerance of marijuana use and laws that label it as pseudo medicine, is it any wonder that we are seeing a surge in the use of marijuana? The real question is, however, when will our leaders, policy makers, parents, and all of our citizenry wake up and realize that we must reject any form of marijuana use and we must proactively push back against those who seek to normalize its use and down-play its harmfulness.



In this time of a national election, we hear a lot of talk about “change” from both political parties. We need change for sure; or more accurately, we need a revolution “one that involves a responsible rising up against drug use, cultivation, and trafficking!

[The Uprising, Honore Daumier, 1848](#)

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