Marijuana Use Among Adolescents in Jackson Mississippi Henry C. Thompson Jr. B.A. and Velesha P. Williams B.S., M.A., CP



THE FACTS

What is Marijuana?

Marijuana is a mixture of dried, shredded flowers and leaves of the hemp plant (Cannabis Sativa). It's also called, among other names, pot, dope, weed, grass, ganja and chronic. There are more than 200 slang terms for marijuana. Sinsemilla, hashish and hash oil are stronger forms of marijuana which come from the same plant.

The main ingredient, and the main cause of intoxication, is Tetra hydrocannabinol (THC). Hashish (hash) is made from the concentrated resin, or sap, of the hemp plant. Its THC content is higher than marijuana. It's generally smoked from a pipe or bong but can also be added to a joint or a regular cigarette. The THC content in marijuana has been increasing since the 1970's.

What Does Marijuana Do to the Body?

All forms of marijuana are mind-altering. That is, they change how the brain works. Marijuana's effects on the user depend on its strength or potency, which is related to the amount of THC it contains. Marijuana affects the central nervous system as a hallucinogen and as a depressant. THC is rapidly absorbed by fatty tissues in various organs. You then feel "high" which can range from feelings of calm and happiness to feeling silly and giddy or paranoid and anxious. When taking high doses, it's possible to experience hallucinations. The "high" usually lasts for 2-4 hours, but your perceptions can be affected for many hours afterwards, even when you no longer feel "high". Generally traces of TCH can be detected by standard urine testing methods several days after a smoking session. However, in chronic heavy users, traces can sometimes be detected for weeks after they have stopped using marijuana.

Short-Term Effects

Marijuana affects people in different ways depending on: User's previous experience; How strong the marijuana is (how much THC it has); How the marijuana is taken; What the user expects to happen; Where the drug is used; Whether the user is drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

Possible side-effects are:

Altered perception of time, distance, space, sights, sounds and touch; impaired judgment and decision making; loss of coordination and slowed reaction time ; disorientation; red eye; dry mouth and throat; increased appetite ("the munchies"); sleepiness; racing heart rate; may suffer feelings of anxiety and have paranoid thoughts or temporary psychosis; problems with memory and learning; trouble thinking and problem solving. The effects are greater when mixed with alcohol or other drugs.

Long-Term Effects

»Regular use of marijuana can cause:

- »*Increase risk of cancer.* The amount of tar, carbon monoxide, and cancer causing chemicals inhaled in marijuana smoke are three to five times greater than that inhaled from the same amount of tobacco smoke.
- » **Damage to lungs and airways.** Just like cigarette smokers, people who smoke marijuana often develop breathing problems coughing, wheezing. They tend to have more chest colds as non-users and are at greater risk of getting lung infections like pneumonia.
- » *Weakened immune system.* Studies have shown that THC can damage the immune system the cells and tissues in the body that help protect against disease. When the immune cells are weakened, you are more likely to get sick.
- » Difficulty remembering things and concentrating.
- »*Lack of motivation*. You could lose interest in school, work and activities that you enjoy.
- »*Risk of mental health problems* depression, anxiety, schizophrenia
 »*Risk of addiction.* Today, more teens enter treatment for marijuana dependency than for all other illicit drugs combined.

Marijuana and the Brain

Heavy or daily use of marijuana affects the parts of the brain that control memory, attention, and learning. A working short-term memory is needed to learn and perform tasks that call for more than one or two steps. Smoking marijuana causes some changes in the brain that are like those caused by cocaine, heroin and alcohol. Scientists are still learning about the many ways that marijuana can affect the brain.

Marijuana and driving

Marijuana and driving do not mix. It has serious harmful effects on the skills required to drive safely: alertness, concentration, coordination, and reaction time. Marijuana use can make it difficult to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road. The effects on driving can last for at least four to six hours after smoking a single joint. Studies have shown that while smoking marijuana, people have shown the same lack of coordination on standard "drunk driver" tests as do people who have had too much to drink.

Addiction

Marijuana use can lead to addiction in some people. Unfortunately, there's no way to predict who is at risk. If addicted, people cannot control their urges to seek out and use marijuana, even though it negatively affects their family relationships, school performance, and recreational activities. Regular marijuana users can develop tolerance, which means they need more of the drug to feel the same effects. People can experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop using marijuana. They include sweating, shaking, upset stomach, loss of appetite and trouble sleeping.



ISSUES

Marijuana use can lead to increased anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and other mental health problem, particularly among young people. One study linked social withdrawal, anxiety, depression, attention problems, and thoughts of suicide in adolescents within the past year of marijuana use. Heavy marijuana users generally report lower life satisfaction, poorer mental and physical health, relationship problems, and less academic and career success compared to their peers who came from similar background. Marijuana is the illicit drug most likely to be used by teens in the U.S. According to the 2012 Monitoring the Future (MTF) Study, 45.3% of U.S. 12th graders reported having used marijuana once or more in their lifetime, with 22.9% reporting use in the previous 30 days. Nationally, while the proportion of students using marijuana decreased from 2011-2012, use was still relatively widespread among secondary school students, particularly older males, and more students are using marijuana daily than they were five years ago (daily use among 12th graders increased from 5.1% to 6.5%). Per the Mississippi Youth Behavior Risk Survey, 17.5% of Mississippi students have used marijuana one or more times during the past 30 days, compared to 23.1% nationally. Also, in the state Mississippi the general public has used marijuana one or more times during the 30 days (before the survey) on the average of 17.5% in comparison to the United Sates with the average percent of 23.1%.



DESCRIPTION

Metro Jackson Community Prevention Coalition (MJCPC) works to, first reduce the onset of marijuana use and secondly to reduce the use of marijuana among young people ages 13-26 years of age by provides age-appropriate, culturally relevant, evidence-based and/or best practice for marijuana prevention in the Jackson Metropolitan area. The strategies utilized are designed to build participant's capacity to address risk factors associated with marijuana use/abuse through information dissemination, education, and alternative programs. The expected outcome is systemic change that will be evident by the delayed onset and reduced use of Marijuana.

LESSONS LEARNED

Within the last 5 years several state governments have changed their position to either legalize or decriminalize the use of marijuana for medical use and in few cases recreational use. Mississippi's general public is challenged with the legalization verses the criminalization of marijuana use. While this battle wages,

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LESSONS LEARNED (cont.)

our prevention efforts are jeopardized by the fact the young people as well as the general public are not convinced that marijuana is a harmful addictive substance. Prevention professionals have to work overtime and use effective strategies to combat the aforementioned misconceptions.

RECOMMENDATION

Maximize marijuana prevention efforts via strong social media messaging, particularly through the use of radio and television messaging; continued information dissemination and educational seminars that distinguish myths from fact; implement Anti-Marijuana Rally and advocate against marijuana legalization legislation. In addition to the aforementioned strategies, MJCPC is making plans for a television program to air on Jackson State University's TV station that will focus on hot topics of interest to young people such as marijuana use in our community.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- »The Facts section on marijuana was taken from Alcohol and Drugs (AD) Education Service website: http://ades.bc.ca/Drug_facts/ marijuana.html
- »Images show on the poster were taken from Google Images website: ttps://www.google.com/search?biw=1024&bih=635&site=imghp&tbm =isch&sa=1&q=marijuana%27s+effect+on+the+brain&oq=marijuan a&gs_l=img.1.0.0l2.4635034.4635034.0.4637926.1.1.0.0.0.0.296.296.2-1.1.0...0..1c.1.38.img.0.1.295.snAnu8gFZNU
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