

MARIJUANA: Medical and Health effects

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In this 4th and final installment of the 4-part series, addressing concerns of Florida's proposed “Medical Marijuana” Amendment 2, we look at medical effects of marijuana on health. The proposed state constitutional amendment to legalise 'Medical Marijuana,' will be on the ballot, this Election Day, Tuesday, November 04, 2014 – or sooner, for those who chose to vote early, at various polling locations, or vote absentee by postal mail.

Part I, addressing the 'Legal' aspects of the proposed amendment, showed clear and definite proof that even in states where “Medical Marijuana” was legalised and patients complied with state laws, ordinary citizens were sometimes arrested on Federal charges, due to the fact that Federal Law trumps all state law –even State Constitutions –something that is not a widely-known fact. Part II gave a fair and balanced, and fairly-complete Scriptural analysis, with both pro's and con's, using the Christian Bible (Old and New Testaments) as it source text. Part III looked at Portugal’s decriminalisation of all drugs to see if this model would work for America, looking at health and crime rate effects of the Portuguese criminal justice system.

(#1) – First, and very important, we ask whether marijuana is more dangerous for children? (I.e., does marijuana cause problems with brain development in children teenagers if they begin using in their youth?)

That looks to be true: “Persistent cannabis use was associated with neuropsychological decline broadly across domains of functioning, even after controlling for years of education.”

Source: “Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife,” Abstract, National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, By Madeline H. Meier, et al., Edited by Michael I. Posner, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR, and approved July 30, 2012 (received for review April 23, 2012) – <http://www.pnas.org/content/109/40/E2657.abstract> – C.f.: http://www.rjbf.com/PNAS_Meier.pdf

In all fairness, PolitiFact (formerly known as “PunditFact,” and run by the liberal Tampa Bay Times) reported that the small sample size (124 participants) and no mention of how much I.Q. was lost in some participants made the results less that reliable, but even the liberal PolitiFact rated the initial claim as “half true”: “Marcus: If teens use marijuana 'regularly,' they drop 8 IQ points,” By Jon Greenberg on Sunday, July 27th, 2014 at 4:58 p.m.: <http://www.politifact.com/punditfact/statements/2014/jul/27/ruth-marcus/marcus-if-tee-use-marijuana-regularly-the-drop-8-i>

This fact is disturbing in light of the easy availability of drugs, in general. *PolitiFact* reports that the 'Monitoring the Future study,' conducted at the University of Michigan, surveyed about 50 thousand American 8th, 10th and 12th graders, and found the following:

- “Nearly 58 percent of 8th graders said it was fairly easy or very easy to get alcohol compared with 37 percent saying the same of marijuana
- More than 78 percent of 10th graders said alcohol was fairly easy or very easy to get while just shy of 69 percent said the same of marijuana.
- Almost 91 percent of 12th graders said alcohol was fairly easy or very easy to get compared with nearly 82 percent saying the same for marijuana”

Source: “Rhode Island State Rep. Edith Ajello says studies indicate minors find it easier to get marijuana than alcohol,” By Michael McKinney, PolitiFact, Saturday, February 16th, 2013 at 12:01 a.m.: <http://www.politifact.com/rhode-island/statements/2013/feb/16/edith-ajello/rhode-island-state-rep-edith-ajello-says-studies-i>

(#2) – Second, we look at whether Cannabis is toxic and poison: The CDC (Centers for Disease Control’s National Center for Health Statistics: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>) regularly reports MANY deaths from alcohol

and other drugs, but none have been reported for marijuana use –whatsoever:
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/leading-causes-of-death.htm>

The CDC's findings (or lack thereof) are backed by hard science:

“The most toxic recreational drugs, such as GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) and heroin, have a lethal dose less than 10 times their typical effective dose...The least physiologically toxic substances, those requiring 100 to 1,000 times the effective dose to cause death, include psilocybin mushrooms and marijuana, when ingested. I've found no published cases in the English language that document deaths from smoked marijuana, so the actual lethal dose is a mystery. My surmise is that smoking marijuana is more risky than eating it but still safer than getting drunk.”

Source: “The Toxicity of Recreational Drugs: Alcohol is more lethal than many other commonly abused substances,” By Robert Gable, *American Scientist*, May-June 2006, Volume 94, Number 3, Page: 206, DOI: 10.1511/2006.3.206: <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/the-toxicity-of-recreational-drugs/3>

(#3) – Third: Likewise, we ask: Is weed addictive? *The Scientist* also reports the following: “Heroin and methamphetamine are the most addictive by this measure. Cocaine, pentobarbital (a fast-acting sedative), nicotine and alcohol are next, followed by marijuana and possibly caffeine. Some hallucinogens—notably LSD, mescaline and psilocybin—have little or no potential for creating dependence.”

Source: “The Toxicity of Recreational Drugs: Alcohol is more lethal than many other commonly abused substances,” By Robert Gable, *American Scientist*, May-June 2006, Volume 94, Number 3, Page: 206, DOI: 10.1511/2006.3.206: <http://www.americanscientist.org/issues/pub/the-toxicity-of-recreational-drugs/4>

PolitiFact, while 'liberal,' is considered unbiased and accurate. They had this to say: “We consulted three other sources, all of which agreed that marijuana is the lesser of addictive evils when compared with tobacco. In addition to a 2008 report issued by a British research foundation, both Dr. Neal L. Benowitz of the University of California at San Francisco and Dr. Jack E. Henningfield of the National Institute on Drug Abuse ranked marijuana below nicotine when it comes to withdrawal, dependence, tolerance and intoxication...A Harvard Medical School psychiatrist agreed that of the three, alcohol is the most addictive in terms of withdrawal. He and other experts we contacted also agreed that alcohol and tobacco are more difficult to give up than marijuana, and said it's easier to become dependent on alcohol and tobacco in the first place.”

Source: “Is marijuana less addictive than both alcohol and tobacco?,” By Dana Tims, *PolitiFact*, Wednesday, June 4th, 2014 at 5:44 p.m.: <http://www.politifact.com/oregon/statements/2014/jun/04/earl-blumenauer/marijuana-less-addictive-both-alcohol-and-tobacco>

**** PERSONAL TESTIMONY:** However, this author (Gordon Wayne Watts) has a close personal friend whom he has known to use marijuana for several decades, since high school. While I shall keep anonymous the name of my friend (unless he should chose to come forward), I will go on record as stating that my friend has reported to me that he has stopped smoking marijuana and been free of it since the 15th of August, over a month ago. My friend reports that not only has his memory improved by “a hundred (100) times,” but also he states that weed was very addictive for him: To clarify, he claims that, while weed helped him with anger-management issues, this benefit was temporary, and that even after 3-4 days (of no weed: he ran out of money and/or could not find a supplier), he had horrible withdrawal symptoms, and that he was cranky and had rebound effects with his temper and anger. (Caveat: Not all people are affected the same.) He also reported that many of his friends claims that they “could quit” any time they wanted, but did not – because, he claims, they were addicted.

So, marijuana is probably both toxic (poison) and addictive, even if less so than alcohol. But some of the addiction is psychological, even if not physiological. And, ANY addiction –with its requisite withdrawal symptoms – can be bad. Even when the toxicity is less than sufficient to kill, marijuana does affect motor skills. (I hope I don't have to cite a scientific study for this: This should be a well-known fact, and “driving impaired” is illegal – no matter the drug – even if it is a prescription drug, impaired driving is dangerous and illegal.)

(#4) – Fourth and last, we look at Polk County, Fla., Sheriff Grady Judd's claim: “If you thought the medical marijuana initiative was intended to truly help those debilitated by serious diseases, think again.

Authors of the amendment have included a truck-sized loophole in the definition of debilitating diseases [which would allow] ...people who alleged minor ailments such as muscle spasms, neck pain, back pain and even menstrual cramps have qualified for government sanctioned pot smoking.”

Source: “Grady Judd: Medical marijuana is a sham,”|By Grady Judd, Sun-Sentinel, November 19, 2013: http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2013-11-19/news/fl-viewpoint-medical-marijuana-20131119_1_accepted-medical-use-medical-marijuana-marijuana-abuse

(This claim, by Sheriff Judd, while technically not a “Medical and Health effect,” but rather a legal loophole in the proposed amendment, was an important concern I overlooked in the legal and political analyses in prior installments, so I shall insert it here, in this medical analysis.)

Is Judd correct? I have looked at the language of the ballot (posted on the Fla. Supreme Court's website in this ruling: <http://www.floridasupremecourt.org/decisions/2014/sc13-2006.pdf>), and I agree this is quite plausible. Also, even the liberal PolitiFact rates his claim as “Mostly True”: “Judd said that people with "minor ailments" could get access to marijuana if Florida’s proposed amendment passes...[because]...compared to most other states, Florida’s ballot language is flexible because it allows for physicians to determine whether a patient’s condition qualifies for a license. We rate Judd’s statement Mostly True.”

Source: “Medical marijuana easy to get under proposed Florida law, sheriff says,” By Julie Kliegman on Monday, November 25th, 2013 at 6:16 p.m.: <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2013/nov/25/grady-judd/medical-marijuana-easy-get-under-proposed-florida->

They also rated as “Mostly True” the following claims by the 'Don't Let Florida Go To Pot' anti-pot group, on Tuesday, May 20th, 2014 in the group's website, when the group is quoted as claiming: ““Less than 5 percent of registered users in states allowing medical marijuana have cancer or AIDS.”” – The liberal PolitiFact reported that: “But the available evidence does suggest fairly strongly that the people who use medical marijuana for cancer or AIDS is a small percentage of all users. We rate the statement Mostly True.”

Source: “Less than 5 percent of medical marijuana users have cancer or AIDS, opposition group says,” By Joshua Gillin on Thursday, May 29th, 2014 at 10:41 a.m.: <http://www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2014/may/29/dont-let-florida-go-pot/less-5-percent-registered-users-states-allowing-me>

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