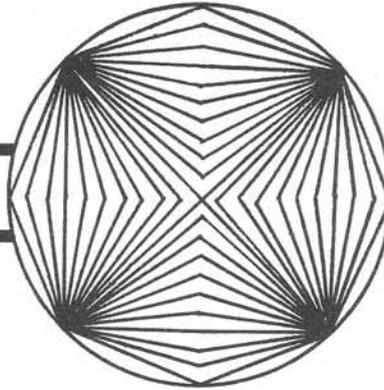


## Points of View



### Marihuana—A Signal of Misunderstanding

*Journal of Extension* Readers: How do you react to the use of marihuana? Do your beliefs fit the pattern of the general public? Do you agree with the national commission's recommendations? Did you use data about marihuana and its use in responding to the above questions or did you react as a layman rather than as a professional?

Many readers of the *Journal* know that the National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse recommended a social control policy seeking to discourage marihuana use. The commission recommended decriminalization of the possession of marihuana for personal use and also that private distribution of small amounts for no remuneration no longer be considered an offense.

However, probably only a few of our readers have read the commission's report. Like most other national commissions, this one conducted research that may be of interest to Extension professionals. Data were collected on: (1) patterns of use, (2) profiles of users, and (3) public beliefs about marihuana use.

### Patterns of Use

As a result of a national survey, the commission estimated that about 24 million Americans over the age of 11 years (15% of the adults 18 and over and 14% of the 12-17 year olds) have used marihuana at least once. Until recently, twice as many males as females had used marihuana.

Marihuana use does *not* appear to vary significantly by race; is highest in cities, towns, and suburbs, but is *not* uncommon in rural areas; and is found in all socioeconomic groups and occupations, though slightly more predominant among people with above-average incomes.

The incidence of use is greatest among young people: 20 percent of the 16-17 year olds, 40 percent of the 18-21 year olds, and 38 percent of the 22-25 year olds have tried marihuana.

Forty-one percent of the adults and 45 percent of the youth who have used marihuana reported they no longer use the drug. Of the user group, 29 percent of the adults and 43 percent of the youth reported that they're still using marihuana. For those who continue to use marihuana, the pattern is:

1. Nine percent of the adults and 15 percent of the youth use the drug sporadically, once a month or less (experimental users).
2. Twelve percent of the adults and 19 percent of the youth use the drug more than once a month but less than several times a week (intermittent users).
3. Six percent of the adults and five percent of the youth use marijuana several times a week to once daily (moderate users).
4. Two percent of the adults and four percent of the youth use the drug several times daily (heavy users).
5. A very small fraction are rarely drug-free (very heavy users).

#### Profiles of Users

Experimental users are by far the largest group and are difficult to distinguish from nonusers. They tend to be disciplined, optimistic, self-confident, conventional, responsible, goal-oriented, and as orderly as nonusers.

Intermittent users tend to use marijuana because of its socializing and recreational aspects. The use of marijuana, for the intermittent user, often contributes to the establishment and solidification of close social relations. For this group, marijuana smoking is a social activity conducted almost exclusively in groups.

This group of users, like the experimenters, is generally conventional in most respects. They're more liberal politically and socially and they tend to stress education for personal improvement rather than for recognition or high grades. Like many nonusers, these individuals are likely to be self-expressive, intellectually and culturally oriented, creative, and flexible. They often manifest a desire to search for

new experiences and accompanying their search is a sense of uncertainty about the future.

Moderate and heavy users are motivated to use not only by curiosity and an urge to share a social experience, but also by a desire for "kicks," "expansion of awareness and understanding," and relief from anxiety or boredom.

Generally, the heavy marijuana user's lifestyle, activities, values, and attitudes are unconventional and at variance with those of the larger society. These individuals are more pessimistic, insecure, irresponsible, and non-conforming. They find routine especially distasteful. Their behavior and mood are restless and uneven.

Heavy users place particularly strong emphasis on impulsive response in the interest of pleasure seeking, immediate gratification, and individual expression. They're especially indifferent to rules and conventions and are often resistant to authority. Furthermore, they tend to be curious, socially perceptive, skillful, and sensitive to the needs of others and possess broadly based, although unconventional, interests.

#### Public Beliefs

The commission summarized the social response to marijuana use with the following statement.

A general interpretation of the national survey indicates that roughly one-quarter of the American public is convinced that criminal sanction should be withdrawn entirely from marijuana use. Another fourth of the public is equally convinced that existing social and legal policy is appropriate, and will ordinarily jail possessors, with the exception of young first offenders. Approximately one-half of the citizenry is confused

about what marihuana means and ambivalent about what society ought to do about its use. This half of the population is unenthusiastic about classifying the marihuana user as a criminal, but is reluctant to relinquish formal control over him.

Extension staff members interested in the complete report should contact the Superintendent of Docu-

ments, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 and request the President's Commission on Marihuana, *Marihuana: A Signal of Misunderstandings—First Report of the National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse*, March, 1972. Price is \$1.00.

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