

MARIJUANA AND VIOLENCE

By David G. Evans, Esq. * CIVEL

Recent science shows a clear relationship between marijuana use and violence. Violent episodes, particularly domestic violence, should be investigated to ascertain any involvement with marijuana. Marijuana use can also be a predictor of violence and thus preventing marijuana use can possibly prevent violence.

US Secret Service Report on Mass Attacks and Substance Use

According to the US Secret Service, between January and December 2017, there were 28 incidents of mass attacks, during which three or more persons were harmed, that were carried out in public places within the United States. These acts violated the safety of the places we work, learn, shop, relax, and otherwise conduct our day-to-day lives. The resulting loss of 147 lives and injury to nearly 700 others had a devastating impact on our nation as a whole. As the uncertainty they caused continues to ripple through our communities, those charged with ensuring public safety strive to identify methods to prevent these types of attacks. To aid in these efforts, the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) examined these 28 incidents, to identify key themes for enhancing threat assessment and investigative practices. Regardless of whether these attacks were acts of workplace violence, domestic violence, school-based violence, or terrorism, similar themes were observed in the backgrounds of the perpetrators including 54% of the attackers had a history of illicit drug use and/or substance abuse. This abuse, which included alcohol and marijuana, was evidenced by such factors as the attacker receiving treatment for the abuse, suffering legal consequences, or having significant problems in their personal lives stemming from the abuse. Nearly two-thirds of the attackers (64%) experienced mental health symptoms prior to their attacks. The most common symptoms observed were related to psychosis (e.g., paranoia, hallucinations, or delusions) and suicidal thoughts.¹

Marijuana Use Causes Psychosis (E.g., Paranoia, Hallucinations, or Delusions) and Suicidal Thoughts.

Marijuana use can trigger psychotic symptoms (from observable clinical studies of purified THC) in 40% of people with no family history of psychosis.²

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https://www.secretservice.gov/data/press/releases/2018/18-MAR/USSS_NTAC-Mass_Attacks_in_Public_Spaces-2017.pdf

² Bhattacharyya S, Crippa JA, Allen P, Martin-Santos R, Borgwardt S, Fusar-Poli P, Rubia K, Kambeitz J, O'Carroll C, Seal ML, Giampietro V, Brammer M, Zuadi AW, Atakan Z, McGuire PK. Induction of psychosis by Δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol reflects modulation of prefrontal and striatal function during attentional salience processing. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2012; 69(1):27-36.

Regular recreational marijuana users had psychotic disorders at a greater rate than any other recreational drug. More than cocaine, methamphetamine, amphetamine, LSD, PCP, or alcohol.³

The risk of negative mental health effects is increased about 5 times by regular use of high potency marijuana.⁴

A recent survey of the elements illustrating marijuana as a causal factor for psychosis was published in the journal Addiction.⁵

Suicide

The risk for suicide attempts has been shown to be increased 7 times in regular marijuana users,⁶ and for completed suicides an increase as high as 5 times.⁷

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Cannabis, a Significant Risk Factor for Violent Behavior in the Early Phase Psychosis. Two Patterns of Interaction of Factors Increase the Risk of Violent Behavior: Cannabis Use Disorder and Impulsivity; Cannabis Use Disorder, Lack of Insight and Treatment Adherence. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30022956>

Proportion of patients in south London with first-episode psychosis attributable to use of high potency cannabis: a case-control study Marta Di Forti, Arianna Marconi, Elena Carra, Sara Fraietta, http://www.thelancet.com/pb/assets/raw/Lancet/pdfs/14TLP0454_Di%20Forti.pdf

³ Niemi-Pynttari JA, Sund R, Putkonen H, Vormaa H, Wahlbeck K, Pirkola SP. Substance-induced psychoses converting into schizophrenia: a register-based study of 18,478 Finnish inpatient cases. *J Clin Psychiatry*, 2013; 74(1): e94-9.

Nielsen, S. M., Toftdahl, N. G., Nordentoft, M., & Hjorthøj, C. Association between alcohol, cannabis, and other illicit substance abuse and risk of developing schizophrenia: a nationwide population based register study. *Psychological Medicine*, 2017; 47(9):1668-1677.

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⁴ Di Forti M, Marconi A, Carra E, Fraietta S, Trotta A, Bonomo M, Bianconi F, Gardner-Sood P, O'Connor J, Russo M, Stilo SA, Marques TR, Mondelli V, Dazzan P, Pariante C, David AS, Gaughran F, Atakan Z, Iyegbe C, Powell J, Morgan C, Lynskey M, Murray RM. Proportion of patients in south London with first-episode psychosis attributable to use of high potency cannabis: a case-control study. *Lancet Psychiatry*. 2015;2(3):233-238.

⁵ Miller CL. The disconnect between the science on cannabis and public health campaigns. *Addiction*. 2017;112(10):1882-1883.

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/add.13918>

⁶ Risk

Clarke MC, Coughlan H, Harley M, Connor D, Power E, Lynch F, Fitzpatrick C, Cannon M. The impact of

Marijuana is the Number 1 substance now found in suicides of young people in Colorado who are 10-19 years old.⁸

Aggressive behavior

A recent article in the Journal of Addiction Research & Therapy states:

According to research studies, marijuana use causes aggressive behavior, causes or exacerbates psychosis and produce paranoid ideas. These effects have been illustrated through case studies of highly publicized incidents and heightened political profiles

These cases contain examples of repeated illustrations of aggression, psychosis and paranoia by marijuana users and intoxication.

Ultimately, without the use and intoxication of marijuana, the poor judgment and misperceptions displayed by these individuals would not have been present, reducing the risk for actions that result in senseless deaths.

Import to these assertions, is that the current marijuana is far more potent in THC concentrations, the psychoactive component. Accordingly, and demonstrated in direct studies, more potent marijuana results in a greater risk for paranoid thinking and psychosis. In turn, paranoid behavior increases the risk for paranoid behaviors and predictably associated with aggressive and violent behaviors.

Marijuana use causes violent behavior through increased aggressiveness, paranoia and personality changes (more suspicious, aggressive and anger).

adolescent cannabis use, mood disorder and lack of education on attempted suicide in young adulthood. World Psychiatry. 2014;13(3):322-323.

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⁷ Completed

Arendt M, Munk-Jørgensen P, Sher L, Jensen SO. Mortality following treatment for cannabis use disorders: predictors and causes. J Subst Abuse Treat. 2013;44(4):400-406.

⁸ Go to the below Colorado website and click on the box that lists “methods, circumstances and toxicology” and then click on the two boxes for 10-19 years olds. The marijuana data will appear.

https://cohealthviz.dphe.state.co.us/t/HSEBPublic/views/CoVDRS_12_1_17/Story1?embed=y&:showAppBanner=false&:showShareOptions=true&:display_count=no&:showVizHome=no#4

Recent illicit and “medical marijuana” (especially grown by care givers for medical marijuana) is of much high potency and more likely to cause violent behavior.

Marijuana use and its adverse effects should be considered in cases of acts of violence as its role is properly assigned to its high association.

Recognize that high potency marijuana is a predictable and preventable cause of tragic violent consequences.

Marijuana is currently a growing risk to the public in the United States. Following expanding public opinion that marijuana provides little risk to health, state and federal legislatures have begun changing laws that will significantly increase accessibility of marijuana. Greater marijuana accessibility, resulting in more use, will lead to increased health risks in all demographic categories across the country. Violence is a well-publicized, prominent risk from the more potent, current marijuana available.⁹

A recent study showed that compared with never-users, those who use marijuana and are exposed to its effects (use at age 18, 32 and 48 years) were associated with a higher risk of subsequent violent behavior, as indicated by convictions or self-reports. This effect persisted even after the study controlled for other putative risk factors for violence. The study discovered a bi-directional relationship between marijuana use and violence. Marijuana use predicted subsequent violent behavior suggesting a possible causal effect.¹⁰

There are many other studies showing a relationship between marijuana use and violence and mental illness.¹¹

⁹ Marijuana Violence and Law, Journal of Addiction Research & Therapy, January 2017, <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/marijuana-violence-and-law-2155-6105-S11-014.pdf>

¹⁰ T. Schoeler, D. Theobald, J.-B. Pingault, D. P. Farrington, W. G. Jennings, A. R. Piquero, J. W. Cold and S. Bhattacharyya, “Continuity of cannabis use and violent offending over the life course.” *Psychological Medicine* (2016), 46, 1663-1677. Cambridge University Press 2016, doi:10.1017/S0033291715003001

¹¹ Bennett T, Holloway K, Farrington D (2008). The statistical association between drug misuse and crime: a meta-analysis. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 13, 107-118.

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<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-new-brain/201603/marijuana-use-increases-violent-behavior>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297718566_Continuity_of_cannabis_use_and_violent_offending_over_the_life_course

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