

FOLLOW THE SCIENCE: Dangers of Marijuana Use

1. “Decriminalisation of possession/use of “small amounts of ganja/marijuana”

In the October 3, 2024 issue of the Cayman Compass, Minister Bryan was quoted as saying that there had also been “widespread” support in Parliament for a public vote on whether marijuana in personal-use amounts should be decriminalised.”

A duty of leaders is to lead responsibly, rather than devolving major, consequential decisions to the electorate—this would be especially true of the elected government. Government has the resources to reference scientifically conducted research on virtually any issue it wishes to explore or pursue. Do we follow the science or follow the wishes of the uninformed?

Do you think that the emancipation of slaves would have occurred when it did if the decision were based on a public referendum? What about the various civil rights gains in America? Would a referendum in the American South have achieved the same results? In addition to Wilberforce and Martin Luther King Jr., every major positive social and political advancement has come about through leaders, compelled by a moral imperative, doing the hard work of leadership.

Ideas have consequences; bad ideas have victims.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS/CONCERNS:

1. The question that electors are supposed to respond to with reference to the marijuana issue is “**Do you support the decriminalisation of consumption and possession of small amounts of cannabis?**”
 1. Proponents of the inclusion of this issue and question among referendum issues have given facile or oversimplified answers or rationale.
 1. They—by implication—treat ganja as a neutral substance—despite the scientific evidence that establishes ganja’s health risks.
 2. They have not done due diligence in informing voters of scientific evidence about the health-related dangers of ganja/cannabis consumption—especially to younger persons—those most likely to experiment with its use.
 3. They do not appear to understand how a “Yes” vote on this issue incentivises possession of “small amounts” of ganja by removing some legal consequences.

4. They appear to have a moral or intellectual blind spot as to how a “Yes” vote would further Incentivise the continued illegal growing and importation of marijuana.

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SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE OF HEALTH DANGERS OF GANJA CONSUMPTION:

There is documented research on the dangers of marijuana use to children and young adults.

JAMA Paediatrics, (an international peer-reviewed journal and... the oldest continuously published paediatric journal in the United States) in 2021 published a study of nearly **205-thousand young persons with mood disorders** that make this sobering conclusion in its Abstract: “**Cannabis use disorder (CUD) is a common comorbidity and risk marker for self-harm, all-cause mortality, and death by unintentional overdose and homicide among youths with mood disorders.** *These findings should be considered as states contemplate legalising medical and recreational marijuana, both of which are associated with increased CUD.*”

A CNN Health article of January, 2021:

(a) “Research shows cannabis use is associated with early onset of mood disorder, psychosis and anxiety disorders, so it can lead to the onset of severe mental illness...”

(b) “Experts say that number will have grown due to a rise in potency in today’s varieties of weed, along with the legalisation of recreational marijuana for adults in 15 states and medical use in 36 states.” (CNN Health)

(c) Analyzing medical data from 6 million people, researchers in Denmark found that up to 30% of schizophrenia cases among young men could be linked to marijuana use.

(d) The author of the study published by JAMA Paediatrics in January of 2021, Cynthia Fontanella, an assistant professor in the department of psychiatry and behavioural health at the Ohio State University's College of Medicine made this cogent reminder of the reality surrounding marijuana use: **"The perception is that marijuana is safe to use, but we need to tell parents and kids that there are risks involved, particularly with heavy and high potency cannabis use."**

(e). Of huge importance is the fact that the health benefits of cannabis is being seriously questioned by medical authorities. A January 2023 article in ***National Geographic*** stated the following: *"Reputable studies so far have not found that cannabinoids sufficiently reduce pain, which led the International Association for the Study of Pain in 2021 to decline to endorse these drugs."*

The same National Geographic article pointed to the fact that many media outlets have touted the medical benefits **in spite** of the lack of evidence. The NG author noted that **"JAMA Network "open analysis found that positive articles appeared in the media even when the research conclusions being reported were neutral or negative."**

One of the researchers behind the JAMA study, Karen Jensen made this indicting observation: *"The media seem to be fact-resistant in this case, because no matter what a trial says the media will report with a positive angle. So it's a no-brainer why people keep asking for these medications," Jensen says.*

(f). Other studies also have shown a clear link between marijuana use and psychosis. For example, according to a report at CBS News, "People who smoked marijuana on a daily basis were three times more likely to be diagnosed with psychosis compared with people who never used the drug. For those who used high-potency marijuana daily, the risk jumped to **nearly five times.**"

(g). The author's of a Colson Centre Breakpoint article also highlighted the matter of safety concerns after a NBC news report noted that "legalized marijuana [is] linked to a sharp rise in car crashes" in the USA, noting that **in the four states that had legalised marijuana auto accidents had risen by 6 percent.**

(h). Also in the US context, legalising ganja also correlates with a rise in property and violent crimes. This fact is documented in a study published in the Journal of Criminal Justice, (January-February 2021) and reports evidence

from the state of Oregon. Also, despite the fact that this is now a multibillion-dollar industry, legalising pot has grown rather than reduced the black market (Breakpoint, January 2021).

It is “not the government’s job to incentivise risky behaviours for financial gain.”

Aware of the increased incidents of persons arriving in Grand Cayman from overseas with small amounts of marijuana in their possession, presumably coming from jurisdictions where cannabis possession is legal. “This might account for the MP’s proposal to decriminalise small amounts (whatever that means) of ganja,” he noted, but added, “We have a duty to do what is right and good for our people, not just what is financially expedient. I hope that our government will find a solution that does not exacerbate an already serious problem among our youthful population.”

(Quote from Breakpoint author): Ideas have consequences; bad ideas have victims.

Alson: Some have suggested that it is an uncompassionate position to criminalise possession of small amounts of ganja, noting that having an arrest for such possession would adversely affect the future of young persons to obtain overseas education or employment with a criminal record stemming solely from possession or consumption of ganja.

The rhetorical question is “What about the possible consequences of mental health issues, suicide and road accidents that are known to be directly related to cannabis consumption?” Is it compassionate to promote these possible tragic outcomes?

Non-referenda item: Parliament’s recently decided to remove credible scientists from the National Conservation Council and replace them with former legislators and other non-scientists. This would obviously allow Parliament to act with reduced resistance in areas where outside expertise is needed for quality decisions to be made. What message does this send to our children regarding the value of education—especially in the sciences? In this context, we are reminded of Lord Acton’s famous quote: “*Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*” (Lore Acton)

In plain English, unless we know ourselves to be infallible, we will welcome other points of view that will help contribute to the best quality decisions and best practices.