

Factsheet: Cannabis legalization

The myth of the "gateway drug"

The **"gateway drug hypothesis"** was popular in 1970s/80s and was disseminated under the administration of U.S. President Reagan (Kleinig, 2015)

Use of "soft drugs" (e.g. cannabis) leads to use of "hard drugs" (e.g. cocaine) and serious drug addiction (Government of Canada, 2016)

The theory has already **been refuted several times in scientific journals** (Drug Policy Alliance, 2017)



Cannabis is indeed used by individuals who also use hard drugs (Drug Policy Alliance, 2017),

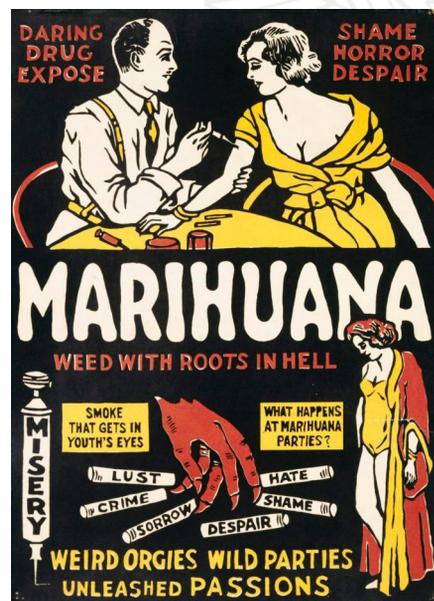
However, correlation does not equal causation

(Drug Policy Alliance, 2017)

Users' contact to harder drugs, e.g. the "dealer", exists due to the illegality of cannabis

Most common legal "gateway drugs" are alcohol and nicotine, which are usually used before reaching the age of majority and before the first use of cannabis (Drug Policy Alliance, 2017)

Drug abuse, dependence and addiction depend on **complex interactions** between various individual/predisposing factors and environmental factors (e.g. peer pressure, family influence, availability of drugs, opportunities to use drugs) (Government of Canada, 2016)



Billboard advertising the anti-marijuana film: The Weed with Roots in Hell 1936 (Forbes, 2021)

Drug users tend to have underlying tendencies towards drug frenzy that are not specific to a particular drug (RAND Drug Policy Research Center, 2002; Tarter et al. 2006)

Cannabis is more of an "end drug" or "exit drug", because the vast majority of cannabis users do not switch to other illicit drugs. Moreover, cannabis can help to reduce/stop the use of more harmful drugs because it relieves withdrawal symptoms (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2015; Drug Policy Alliance, 2017)

Sources

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- Government of Canada (2016): Towards the Legalization, Regulation and Restriction of Access to Marijuana, Discussion paper <https://healthycanadians.gc.ca/health-system-systeme-sante/consultations/legalization-marijuana-legalisation/alt/legalization-marijuana-legalisation-eng.pdf>
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- RAND Drug Policy Research Center (2002), "Using Marijuana May not Raise the Risk of Using Harder Drugs." Available at http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB6010.html
- Tarter et al. (2006): "Predictors of Marijuana Use in Adolescents Before and After Licit Drug Use: Examination of the Gateway Hypothesis," American Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 63, No. 12, December 2006, p. 2139.