

Understanding and Addressing Adolescent Marijuana and Tobacco Co-Use

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Trace
Teens Report on Adolescent
Cannabis Experiences



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Qualitative Health Research (2014)

Article

The Influences of Health Beliefs and Identity on Adolescent Marijuana and Tobacco Co-Use

Qualitative Health Research
2014, Vol. 24(7) 946–956
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DOI: 10.1177/1049732314539854
qhr.sagepub.com



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Abstract

Among youth, the co-use of marijuana and tobacco is highly prevalent, yet a considerable gap remains in the drug-prevention literature pertaining to such co-use. In particular, the prevention field lacks research exploring how adolescents understand the health implications of smoking these two substances in combination. In this article, we draw on qualitative interviews with adolescents from three communities in British Columbia, Canada, and describe the health beliefs and social identities that they associated with smoking marijuana and tobacco. We argue that smoking prevention and cessation initiatives targeting adolescents must address both marijuana and tobacco. Such initiatives must also be designed to identify and address how adolescents frame the potential health harms associated with smoking these substances.

Keywords

adolescents / youth; research, qualitative; smoking cessation; tobacco and health

Background

- In Canada, rates of tobacco use among young people are lowest in the province of B.C. yet cannabis use among youth remains high.
- Early initiation of cannabis is linked with tobacco use.
- The practice of co-use of cannabis and tobacco is common for many young Canadians.
- Youth perspectives regarding co-use is lacking.

TRACE Project

An ethnographic study exploring the culture and context of frequent cannabis use among youth in British Columbia.



Purpose

To explore:

- 1) The health implications of smoking both substances together
- 2) Decision-making about co-use of both substances.

Data Collection

- 5 year ethnographic study exploring the culture and context of frequent cannabis use among youth in three B.C. communities (2006-2010)
- KT research projects (ongoing)



The Vancouver Context



Marijuana in Canada

- Medical marijuana: a political rather than “health” policy issue?
- The scientific evidence on health effects is still emergent and incomplete.
- Approaches to youth prevention and education are archaic and ineffective.
- The need for a public health approach to addressing marijuana use



Physicians *for a*
Smoke-Free Canada

Competing Discourses

- ACÉTALDÉHYDE
- ACROLÉINE
- ACÉTONE (dissolvant)
- DIMETHYLNITROSAMINE
- NAPHTALÈNE
- NICOTINE
- NAPHTYLAMINE
- MÉTHANOL (carburant de fusée)
- PYRÈNE
- CADMIUM
- MONOXYDE DE CARBONE
- BENZOPYRÈNE
- CHLORURE DE VINYLE
- MERCURE
- ACIDE CYANHYDRIQUE
- TOLUIDINE
- AMMONIAC (détergent)
- URÉTHANE
- PHÉNOL
- BUTANE
- DIBENZACRIDINE
- TOLUÈNE (solvant industriel)
- ARSENIC (poison violent)
- POLONIUM 210
- STYRÈNE
- DDT (insecticide)
- GOUDRONS
- PLOMB



KINDGREENBUDS.COM

443,000 DEATHS / YEAR

0 DEATHS / YEAR

CAUSES CANCER

CURES CANCER

TOBACCO TAX REVENUE
2009 - \$17,157,014

ENFORCEMENT COST
\$7.6+ BILLION / YEAR

HAS NO MEDICINAL VALUE
CAUSES MANY HEALTH PROBLEMS

USED MEDICINALLY
THROUGHOUT HISTORY

EXTREMELY ADDICTIVE

NOT ADDICTIVE

LEGAL?

**NOT
LEGAL?**

*Worried about
the risk of
cancer*

*from
smoking cigarettes?*

*Switch to
Marijuana*

It's Cancer Free!

A public service message brought to you by
U.S. Health and Human Services and
the American Cancer Society

LEGAL?

TOBACCO
5 million deaths per year

ALCOHOL
2.5 million deaths per year

ILLEGAL?

MARIJUANA
No Deaths EVER Recorded
Known Medicinal Qualities

Food for thought.

Findings

- **The Purists** – smoked cannabis only
- **The Mixers** – smoked cannabis in combination with tobacco
- **The Cigarette Smokers** – smoked tobacco when not smoking cannabis

Purists



- Tobacco was viewed as “gross,” “unattractive,” “dirty,” “addictive” in contrast to cannabis that was considered “natural.”
- Tobacco was “pointless” and “a waste of money” unlike cannabis that *did* serve a purpose, “to get high.”
- Only tobacco was associated with negative health consequences with many “disgusting” chemicals.

“I’ve never heard of anybody getting cancer from it, like weed, that’s the reason why I’ve done it.”
[Girl, 13 years]

Purists

I tried [mixing] but I think it's just, it tastes awful. Like marijuana has a bad taste but I think, I just wouldn't do it....Yeah, that's why the head rush people say it give them a better head rush. I'm like, "Well it only gives you a head rush for thirty seconds and you'd want another one right away, you'd get addicted to cigarettes."

[Boy, 14 years old]

Purists

One of the biggest reasons [for not smoking tobacco] is I want to save my lungs for weed. I love smoking weed. It's like a really fun pastime. But cigarettes, it would just make my lungs worse and enable me, make me smoke less weed.....

[Boy, 15 years old]

Purists

And like parents that smoke when they have their kids and some of them, most of them turn out to be smokers themselves....I don't like it at all. I told [my mom] to do it outside because I was finding it hard to like, I'd go for a run and just, it's a lot harder to breathe because it's worse. And ever since I told her to go outside it's, I'm fine now.

[Boy, 17 years old]

Mixers

- Engaged in the practice of combining tobacco and cannabis, typically in joints and bong; blunts, cigarettes dipped in cannabis oil, hookahs and chillums were less frequent





SMOKE, IN MY EYES

Me and my friends smoke weed often and every time we do we put some tobacco in it. It tends to make it burn better especially if it is damp. [Caitlin, 18]

Mixers

- Co-use served the purpose of extending cannabis when supply was limited.
- Entailed identity maintenance for some (e.g. *“I’m not a smoker at all.”*)
- Some expressed cautious confidence that continued co-use was possible.
- Enjoyed the “rocker” effect (“head rush” from co-use).

“Say I had not very much weed and you had not very much tobacco, I could be, okay, we could both take a bong toke if you give me a little bit of your rocker, and I’ll give you a bit of my weed.” [Girl, 15 years old]

Mixers

I've had cigarettes. I have a really strong belief in myself so I can't get addicted to cigarettes. Like I could smoke one right now and then not have any cravings or anything towards it. I have really good self control. I do mix though once in a while, I don't want [to mix] all the time because I don't want to get addicted.

[Boy, 17 years old]

Mixers

Bong tokes because, I don't know, that's pretty much how we smoke them here...through bongos with tobacco....it's just not as harsh on the throat, it's more like smooth and easier to enjoy. I guess it's a habit you start with. I've never smoked a cigarette and I doubt I ever will. The biggest reason I want to quit smoking [cannabis] is because I realize that I'm more addicted to the tobacco that we mix with it.

[Boy, 18 years old]

The Cigarette Smoker

- Regular tobacco use yet differing patterns.
- Some engaged in co-use which extended a limited supply of both substances.
- Some actively avoided co-use.



The Cigarette Smoker

It's because in pot, you've still got your, a little bit of nicotine, right? But in cigarettes, you're just adding more nicotine to it and more tar and then you're adding battery acid and the rat acid and you're adding more stuff to your pot. I'd rather have my pot as clean and pure as possible than adding things to it.

[Girl, 16 years old]

The Cigarette Smoker

- Some preferred having a cigarette separately after smoking cannabis, the “after token smoke” as it increased “the high.”
- Cigarettes were camouflage for cannabis (hid the smell) and joints stored in cigarette packs.
- Cigarettes were substituted for cannabis when necessary.

“I always have a cigarette after I smoke a joint, always, habit, you just want one, it’s like after eating.” [Boy, 16]

Engaging with Purists, Mixers and Smokers

- Need to better understand context-based smoking identities.
- Listen to youth perspectives and integrate these into program delivery.



What about pot instead?

You're not doing your health any favours by replacing cigarette smoking with pot. It reduces your short-term memory, making it harder to learn, and interferes with your ability to concentrate. Pot may not be as addictive as tobacco, but marijuana smoke contains some of the same ingredients as tobacco smoke that can cause cancer and lung disease.

I might need some help....

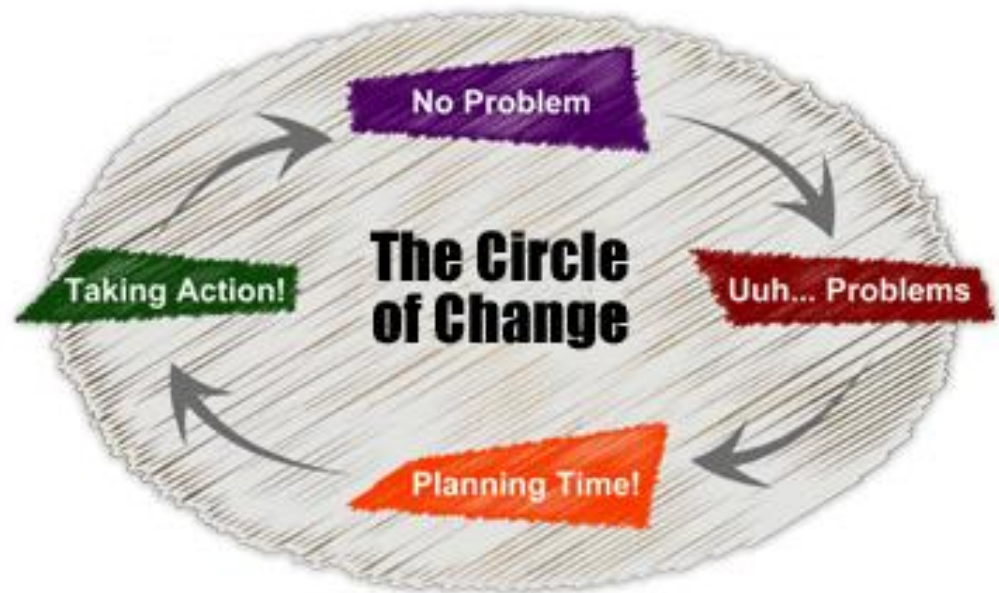
You're not alone. It's easier to say "I'm going to quit on my own" than actually do it. Check out some of these supports:

whatswithweed.ca

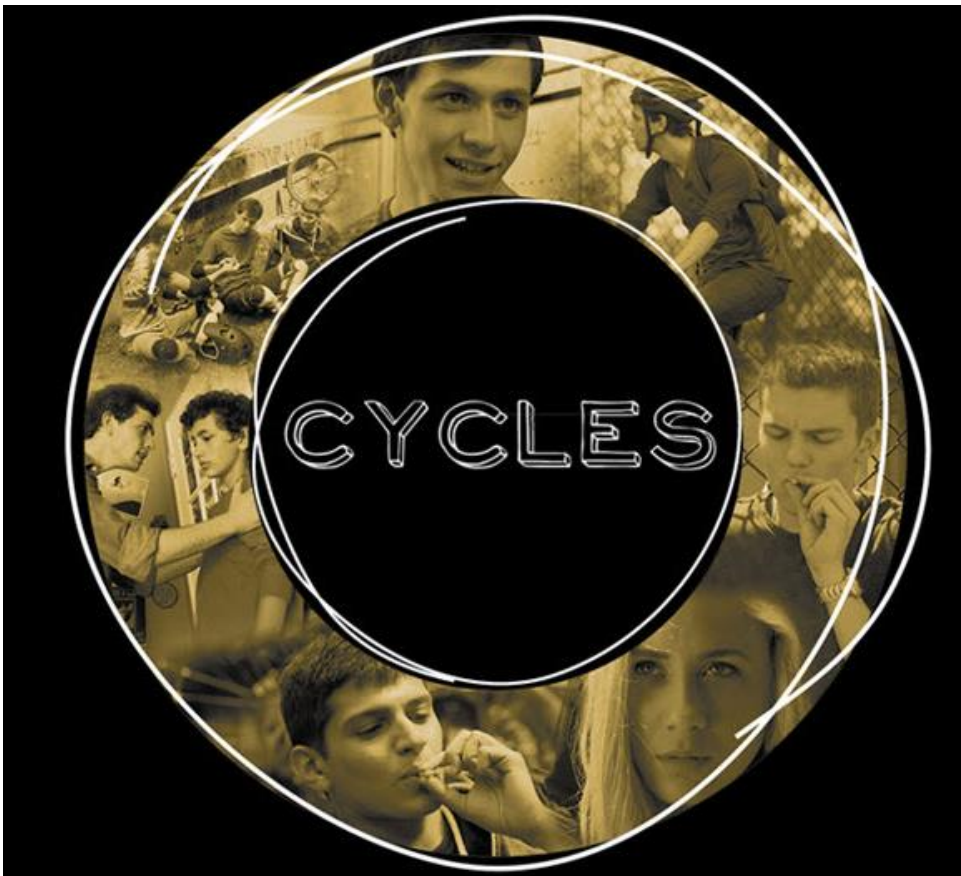
BEFORE YOU START

This site is for users and concerned friends of users. WHAT'S WITH WEED will not tell you how to run your life. It will not say weed is bad or good.

It will give you information on how it affects different people, and help you avoid or reduce the harm connected with use.



cyclesfilm.com



If I were Olin, what would I do now?

- a) Continue to smoke the joint while Lisa stays in the car.
- b) Apologize and put the joint out immediately.
- c) Ask Lisa why she's not into smoking marijuana.
- d) Suggest that she leave the car, smoke my joint, and then go back to the party.
- e) Other _____



http://youtu.be/RjuY_YVfnal

Conclusions

- Tailored health messages are indicated to address the subtleties across all types of smokers.
- Credible messaging is warranted and sorely needed to address misinformation regarding co-use, specifically potential harms related to smoking cannabis.
- Missed opportunities: Tobacco prevention and intervention programming miss subgroups of smokers.
- How to build on the successes of anti-tobacco campaigns and policy measures?

Study Publications

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