

# Marijuana, Mental Illness, and Violence

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A review of an article by Alex Berenson in "*Imprimis*", a publication of Hillsdale College.  
(<https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/marijuana-mental-illness-violence/>)

"Marijuana, Mental Illness, and Violence provides information similar to the American College of Pediatrics statement on marijuana and reflects the College's concerns for marijuana legalization. Mr. Berenson emphasizes that we must tell our children the truth about marijuana, mental illness, and violence. He points out the fallacy of health claims for cannabis. He explains that in reality marijuana and THC have been shown to work only in a few narrow conditions. Even for pain relief marijuana is rarely tested against other drugs such as ibuprofen. In reality, like alcohol, marijuana is too weak as a pain killer to work for most people who truly need opiates. Even cannabis advocates acknowledge that they have always viewed medical marijuana laws primarily as a way to protect recreational users.

He emphasizes the psychiatric concerns for cannabis usage. He points out that a January 2018 paper in the American Journal of Psychiatry showed that "people who use cannabis in 2001 were almost 3 times as likely to use opiates 3 years later, even after adjusting for further potential risks." He also notes that the National Academy of Medicine found in 2017 that "cannabis use is likely to increase the risk of developing schizophrenia and other psychoses, the higher the use, the greater the risk."

Similar to American College of Pediatricians' concerns for marijuana legalization, he points out that the number of Americans who use cannabis "heavily" is soaring. In 2006, about 3 million Americans reported using cannabis at least 300 times a year, the standard for daily use. By 2017 that number had nearly tripled to 8 million. He notes that 7.5% of adults aged 18-25 (the heaviest use years of cannabis) met the criteria for serious mental illness in 2017, double the rate in 2008.

Relating the use of cannabis and violence, he notes that a Swiss study of 265 psychotic patients published in *Frontiers of Forensic Psychiatry* in June 2018 found that over a 3 year period, young men with psychosis, who had used cannabis, had a 50% chance of becoming violent. This was 4 times that of those with psychosis who did not use. He relates that the way cannabis fuels violence in psychotic people is through its tendency to cause paranoia. He notes that a 2007 study in the *Medical Journal of Australia* of 88 defendants who had committed homicide during psychotic episodes, found that most believed they were in danger from the victim. Two thirds of these defendants misused cannabis. He notes that the four states to have legalized recreational marijuana (Colorado, Washington, Alaska, and Oregon) have experienced a 37% increase in murders and a 25% increase in aggravated assaults, far greater than the national

increase. He also reported that cannabis is associated with a disturbing number of child deaths from abuse and neglect according to reports from Texas. He concludes that the black tide of psychosis, and the red tide of violence are rising steadily, almost unnoticed, on a slow green wave. He emphasizes the need to make sure that anyone who uses marijuana is aware of the risks.

He suggests unambiguous, well-funded advertising campaigns detailing the risks of cannabis. He laments, however, that instead marijuana is legal in some states, dangerously potent, and sold without warning everywhere. He concludes that cannabis advocates and the elite media need to come to terms with the truth about the science of marijuana and then do the right thing.