

Middle class relaxing with marijuana

A variety of middle-class people are making a conscious but careful choice to use marijuana to enhance their leisure activities, a University of Alberta study shows.

A qualitative study of 41 Canadians surveyed in 2005-06 by U of A researchers showed that there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ marijuana user, but that people of all ages are selectively lighting up the drug as a way to enhance activities ranging from watching television and playing sports to having sex, painting or writing.

“For some of the participants, marijuana enhanced their ability to relax by taking their minds off daily stresses and pressures. Others found it helpful in focusing on the activity at hand,” said Geraint Osborne, a professor of sociology at the University of Alberta’s Augustana Campus in Camrose, and one of the study’s authors.

The study was published recently in the journal *Substance Use and Misuse*.

The focus was on adult users who were employed, ranging in age from 21 to 61, including 25 men and 16 women from Alberta, Quebec, Ontario and Newfoundland whose use of the drug ranged from daily to once or twice a year. They were predominantly middle class and worked in the retail and service industries, in communications, as white-collar employees, or as health-care and social workers. As well, 68 per cent of the users held post-secondary degrees, while another 11 survey participants had earned their high school diplomas.

The study also found that the participants considered themselves responsible users of the drug, defined by moderate use in an appropriate social setting and not allowing it to cause harm to others.

The findings should open the way for further scientific exploration into widespread use of marijuana, and government policies should move towards decriminalization and eventual legalization of the drug, the study recommends.

“The Canadian government has never provided a valid reason for the criminalization of marijuana,” said Osborne. “This study indicates that people who use marijuana are no more a criminal threat to society than are alcohol and cigarette users. Legalization and government regulation of the drug would free up resources that could be devoted to tackling other crime, and could undermine organized crime networks that depend on marijuana, while generating taxes to fund drug education programs, which are more effective in reducing substance abuse,” Osborne added.

Source: University of Alberta

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