

CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Editor:

Kandel and Chen do a nice job of stratifying marijuana use groups (Kandel and Chen, 2000). Several of their points are very significant as we consider marijuana to be a serious drug of abuse. Of their total using population, 45% had at some time used marijuana on a near-daily basis. More significant is the fact that 23% were still using marijuana by age 34-35, suggesting a clear pattern of persistence of use.

The authors' comment that "by itself, early onset of marijuana will not lead to problematic use or rapid progression into the use of other drugs" is a bit misleading. For instance, their Group 2, which is termed early onset-light use, had "only" 44% of users who became near daily users and "only" 10% with persistent use by age 34-35. Those levels of use are low compared to the other groups. Another way to look at the data, however, is that 44% of *even* these "light" users *did* become daily users and, even though they were light users, 10% *did* demonstrate use persisting to age 34-35.

Most professionals in the field of addictive diseases recognize that coexistent psychological or social dysfunction places patients at risk for higher use. We cannot, however, understate the importance of marijuana use among the "good kid" population. All of us can give examples of otherwise minimally at risk young people who have become seriously dependent upon marijuana.

Reference

KANDEL, D.B. AND CHEN, K. Types of marijuana users by longitudinal course. *J. Stud. Alcohol* **61**: 367-378, 2000.

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The authors respond:

We are most appreciative of Dr. Voth's comments on our article. He correctly points out that a substantial proportion of early onset-light marijuana users (Group 2) had ever used marijuana (near) daily and a minority were still using it in their mid-thirties. However, we were struck by the fact that these individuals' drug-using behavior reflected a much less chronic and extensive pattern of use than the other group of early initiators (Group 1). Among the latter, 100% became (near) daily users and almost half were still using marijuana in adulthood. Members of Group 1 had used marijuana (near) daily for 11 years compared with slightly more than 2 years for members of Group 2. In our discussion, we emphasized the differences between the groups rather than their absolute statuses. The label "early-moderate" for Group 2 might perhaps have been more appropriate.

This interchange illustrates that there are alternative interpretations of data. One can only hope that a rigorous scientific publication will present the data in sufficient detail that readers can evaluate the evidence and reach their own conclusions.

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