

Protecting Children From Drugs

The sponsors of a medical cannabis initiative appearing on South Dakota's ballot in November are suing the state Attorney General over his misleading summary of the initiative, apparently designed to encourage a negative reaction in voters. The AG must write a neutral summary of each state ballot initiative. In this case, his first act was to rename the measure.

"An act to provide safe access to medical marijuana for certain qualified persons," became "An Initiative to authorize marijuana use for adults and children with specified medical conditions."

August 2006

It's curious that the greatest - or at least the loudest - love for children is proclaimed by those who display a general distrust of progress and freedom.

Groups seeking to control individual behaviour, undermine civil rights or impose a moral code on society will frequently broadcast their own sincere desire to protect young folk from real or imaginary threats, habitually invoking 'the children' to justify each new restriction.

If the safety of children is at stake, who could possibly object to laws that curtail privacy, individual choice and basic liberty?

The need to protect the young is biological, a basic principle of survival seen in most animals. In people, the instinct is more refined; it applies to our species in general and is not limited to our own children. Because it is a rational decision based on a powerful unconscious imperative, the protective urge can be irrational in its expression and has a long and unfortunate tradition of being used to manipulate people.

As cannabis becomes more tolerated, propaganda has shifted from its traditional attack on the plant to a coordinated attempt to defend prohibition. Naturally, 'protecting the children' is the central theme of efforts to justify the unjustifiable.

- Dope-smoking dads double risk of cot death
- Marijuana may cause pregnancies to fail
- Why teenagers should steer clear of cannabis
- Alarming rise in number of child cannabis victims

It's tempting to see this as a tactic of last resort – a laughable ploy to demonise cannabis and "re-brand" it as specifically threatening to children. Perhaps the campaign to scare adults about their own use of cannabis has finally been abandoned, as it is clearly contradicted by reality?

Even so, the tactic of shifting the focus to 'the children' and playing on parents' anxieties is abhorrent. It exploits children for propaganda and is effective in distracting attention from more significant threats to the health of young people.

One example is the disturbing push to control children's mood and behaviour with powerful psychiatric drugs such as Prozac and other SSRIs, which are designed to alter levels of serotonin in the brain.

This trend endangers young people as much as it enriches drug manufacturers and its scope is unprecedented – the numbers of children being medicated, the absurdly young ages at which they're diagnosed as depressed or mentally unbalanced and the potency of the psychotropic drugs they're prescribed.

European doctors have received strong warnings against prescribing SSRIs to children, but the practice has not been banned. In the US, the country with most strident anti-cannabis propaganda and the loudest devotion to protecting 'the children', the practice of drugging the young in order to regulate their behaviour is both an industry and an epidemic.

Currently, 2% of US children aged 6-16 are taking SSRIs and up to 10% are on stimulants such as Ritalin. Despite the FDA ordering "black boxes" for SSRI packaging - the most severe class of safety warnings - around 9 million prescriptions were written for US children in 2005, with under-fives the fastest-growing segment of children using antidepressants.

An estimated 17 million children worldwide are prescribed some form of behaviour-modifying drug. Worldwide sales of antidepressants to all age-groups reached more than \$19.5 billion in 2002.

For one example of media misdirection regarding children, drugs and mental health, consider the following facts:

1. Cannabis is a powerful, effective, low-risk medicine that provides relief for an enormous range of conditions and improves quality of life for millions of people. It has an unparalleled safety record, having been used safely for thousands of years. Cannabis is effective in its natural form and can grow virtually anywhere with minimal effort, making it potentially free for anyone.

2. Conversely, the trend of medicating the young with powerful psychiatric drugs is highly profitable and unique in history. The idea of moderating children's mood or behaviour with pharmaceuticals would have been unthinkable a generation ago, yet today it is presented as a normal solution by large sections of the media.

Rather than a hypothetical and unproven risk of altering brain chemistry in sensitive individuals, as is said of cannabis, SSRIs are specifically designed to change brain chemistry in order to modify mood and behaviour.

3. The sudden increase in prohibitionist propaganda associating cannabis with danger to children amounts to a co-ordinated media campaign. The obvious intention is to heighten fears that cannabis may cause schizophrenia, depression, suicidal thoughts or general unspecified mental illness in children, despite the usual lack of evidence. The fragile, developing chemical structure of young brains is frequently mentioned, as are false claims about massive increases in cannabis potency.

'Adolescents are at highest risk for marijuana addiction ... marijuana use has been linked with depression and suicidal thoughts, in addition to schizophrenia...marijuana use among teens doubles the risk of developing depression and triples the incidence of suicidal thoughts'

- DEA Website -

4. SSRIs have repeatedly been found to pose significant risks to the mental and physical health of children.

- 2005 – The European Medicines Agency concluded SSRIs should not be used in children and adolescents ... suicide-related behaviour (suicide attempt and suicidal thoughts), and hostility (aggression and anger) were more frequently observed in children and adolescents treated with SSRIs.

- The FDA has admitted that children who use SSRIs are 180 percent more likely to have suicidal tendencies.

- British Journal of Psychiatry reports that Prozac creates "the highest risk of deliberate self-harm."

A century of attempting to prove the dangers of cannabis has yielded no results but vague hypotheses with no relation to the real world. Whatever alarming conclusions are suggested, cannabis is very widely used in most countries and causes few discernable health problems. Within a few years of their introduction, SSRIs have raised serious concerns all over the world.

Yet cannabis is relentlessly presented as a major threat to the mental health of children, while psychoactive drugs designed to change brain function are promoted as a solution.

Any sane person will agree that children should not take drugs, whether legal or illegal, but, in the mainstream media, the principle does not seem to apply to drugs made by certain powerful interests.

It is not surprising that prohibitionists exploit the need to protect children. What is unbelievable is that dire warnings about the effect of 'drugs' on developing brains can coexist in the media with the promotion of mind-altering pharmaceuticals for those same sacred children. This demonstrates either an enormous logical disconnect or an effective and coordinated campaign of diversion and misinformation.

About the Author

The author is a Cannabis enthusiast who is committed to promote the environmental and social benefits of Cannabis in general and Medicinal [Marijuana](#) in particular. Please follow the link for more information on [Cannabis and Hemp](#).

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