

Pot smoking: to neither dramatize, nor trivialize

Topic:
cannabis

Cannabis prevention. The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) believes in providing objective information which neither trivializes nor dramatizes cannabis consumption. However, it does clearly emphasize the health risks associated with regular cannabis use. The aim of the FOPH's cannabis prevention action plan for 2004–07 is on the one hand to offer support to at-risk young people, and on the other to provide support to schools, communities and companies that train apprentices in dealing with cannabis-related issues. Networking of the various players and reference persons involved is an important part of this plan.



Cannabis sativa, a pretty plant at the heart of much debate.

Cannabis prevention action plan

At the same time as it adopted the message on the amendment to the drug law, the Federal Council decided to take steps to strengthen prevention in the field of cannabis use. The FOPH's cannabis prevention action plan is a way of making a visible contribution to alleviating the health and social problems associated with cannabis. The plan has an annual budget of CHF 1 million.

Three problems

- Cannabis consumption has soared in the last few years, especially among young people.
- A minority of cannabis users go on to develop problematic consumption patterns which can negatively affect their psychological, physical and/or social development.
- Teachers and companies that train apprentices are feeling increasingly overwhelmed by the situation and need support.

Three objectives

- To cut cannabis consumption in Switzerland, especially among young people.
- To identify young cannabis users with regular or out-of-control consumption patterns at an early stage and to refer them to the relevant advisory and treatment facilities.
- To offer schools and companies that train apprentices concrete forms of support.

Three measures

- Primary prevention and information.
- Early detection and intervention in schools, training environments and communities.
- Counselling for adolescents and young adults, parents and other reference persons.

Central to the planned amendment to the Narcotics Act (BetmG) was the desire to strengthen both youth protection and prevention. Although the amendment was rejected in June 2004, the FOPH has continued to pursue these two important goals. In its cannabis prevention action plan, the Office is prioritizing early identification of at-risk young people.

Bans and punishments alone are not enough. For prevention to be effective and for intervention to occur at the right time in cases of problematic cannabis consumption, it is vital for everyone involved – parents, schools, employers, sports clubs, etc. – to adopt a clear position and assume their part of the responsibility.

Primary prevention projects

The FOPH has been running national prevention programmes in various settings for several years. *Education + Health – Swiss Network* aims to contribute to quality development in school settings and to promote healthy schools. In the domain of public youth work, the FOPH has been supporting the Dachverband offene Jugendarbeit (DOJ), the umbrella organization for such work in Switzerland, since 2003. The projects hitherto supported by the FOPH in youth centres (Fil rouge) and youth work associations (voilà) are now being carried forward independently.

All these programmes follow a broad preventive approach and aim to promote young people's health and support their development. The idea is to prevent harmful behaviour patterns from developing in the first place. Education regarding the risks of cannabis consumption and training for people in positions of responsibility are also integral to all projects.

Teachers

Road map: «School and cannabis»
With the aim of helping schools

and teaching staff to deal with cannabis-related problems, the FOPH collaborated with the Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Problems to develop the «School and cannabis» road map, which was sent to all lower and upper secondary schools in early February 2004. This document contains concrete tips and instructions for creating control systems and early detection and intervention measures within schools, as well as assistance for teachers in dealing with common problem situations involving individual students.

Continued on page 2

Swiss AIDS memory bank

The mobile exhibition «No fun without one. 20 years of AIDS work in Switzerland» is currently in Liestal. Most of the material on display comes from AIDS Documentation – an unassuming archive in the basement of the Federal Office of Public Health. The archive is home to an extensive collection of ten thousand documents representing a kind of memory bank on the subject of HIV/AIDS in Switzerland. » Page 4

Gender and dependency

«Men are strong(ly at risk of addiction)». This is the finding of the «Addiction and Masculinity» study led by Michel Graf, Director of the Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Problems. His report finally sets out scientific bases and recommendations for dependency work geared to men's needs. These were presented at FRAU SUCHT MANN – MANN SUCHT FRAU – Switzerland's first-ever national conference on gender and addiction, which was held on 2 February 2006. » Page 4

Continued from page 1

Interactive Internet platform for young people

Young people often turn to their peers or to media intended specifically for them when they need information. The Internet plays a key role in this process. The FOPH supports the interactive Internet platforms for German-speaking (www.tschau.ch) and French-speaking young people (www.ciao.ch), which offer information and advice tailored specifically to a young audience on the full gamut of personal questions relating to cannabis. Users can submit questions anonymously and quickly receive accurate answers from expert sources. The scope of the platforms also covers other topics relevant to young people such as sexuality, stress, tobacco and alcohol.

Information on FOPH projects

The FOPH issues an electronic newsletter three to four times a year which reports on the current status of projects in the field of cannabis prevention. The newsletter can be accessed or subscribed to via the www.cannabis.bag.admin.ch homepage. The FOPH uses this Internet platform to disseminate information on its cannabis prevention projects.

Early intervention in school settings

An important aspect of cannabis prevention is professional and prompt handling of problems in schools in order to support young people in their development and alleviate the burden on teaching staff. Key to this process is optimizing cooperation between schools, parents, specialists and other reference persons in the area of early detection and intervention.

At the core of the nationwide



«Early detection and intervention in school settings» project lies tandem training of schools and specialists so that they can work together to develop and implement an early detection and intervention concept tailored to each particular school. The FOPH's partners in this project are the Swiss Network of Health Promoting Schools (SNHPS; a centre of excellence of the *Education + Health – Swiss Network*), the Lucerne School of Social Work (HSA) and the «Haute Ecole fribourgeoise de travail social» (Fribourg social work college, HEF-TS).

With this national early detection and intervention project, the FOPH is doing its part towards efficient problem management for young people whose development is seen to be at risk. Specialists will work together with a school over a two-year period, assisting the latter with the development of an early detection and intervention system. The project was launched on 30 August 2005 with 14 «school/specialist» tandems. On 14 January 2006, a first joint meeting took place, organized by the SNHPS and HSA Lucerne. The meeting was attended by a good 200 participants.

In French-speaking Switzerland, a variety of project development meetings have taken place, and the first information workshop for interested specialists was held on 9 June 2006 in Lausanne.

Early intervention in the community

The FOPH is currently working on a community-level scheme to strengthen youth protection, early detection and support for young people identified as being at risk. The aim of this project is to assist participating communities with needs assessments, analysis of the services they provide and the introduction of an early detection concept. The FOPH has commissioned Prognos AG to develop an appropriate real needs-based road map for communities.

This tool is intended for use by cantons and medium-sized to large communities and can now be ordered as a CD-ROM. In addition, participating communities will receive technical and financial support in implementing an early detection concept adapted to the realities of their situation.

Observe and Act

Using the slogan Observe and Act, the 2003–05 promotional phase successfully popularized the concept of early intervention at community level throughout Switzerland. «Observe & Act – the strategy for early intervention at community level» is now being further developed by RADIX on behalf of the FOPH. The next step, in collaboration with five pilot communities from all over Switzerland and a broad-based panel of experts, is to develop quality standards for early intervention at community level by November 2007. These real-life standards will then form the basis of a national government programme at a later date. From 2008 onwards, communities all over Switzerland should have access to a programme that will support them in developing and implementing a communal early intervention strategy.

Intervention

Up until now very few counselling or therapy programmes have specifically targeted cannabis dependency. The binational «Realize it!» pilot project, a newly developed brief intervention strategy for 15–30 year old cannabis users, is now being tested. The project's participants comprise 14 information centres in German-speaking Switzerland and Southern Germany. (see box on this page)

The *supra-f* programme represents a new departure for the FOPH, an

in-house intervention research programme focusing on addiction prevention and health promotion for at-risk youngsters at community level. It currently comprises 12 outpatient *supra-f* centres in German- and French-speaking Switzerland. Its aim is to use school, social and community work and psychological interventions to support young people going through difficult periods in their lives with a view to stabilizing their situation at school or at work. At the same time, it seeks to improve psychological health and reduce drug usage.

Group intervention: ViVA

ViVA is a programme for adolescents and young adults aimed at improving psychological health and the ability to cope with daily life. It comprises nine weekly group sessions with one further session after three months. *ViVA* was developed by the University of Fribourg's Centre for Rehabilitation and Health Psychology on behalf of the FOPH and has been undergoing scientific testing in both German- and French-speaking Switzerland since autumn 2005. The modular structure of the programme means that it can be adapted to the specific profiles of the young people involved. The scheme is run by trained psychologists and can be easily incorporated into existing frameworks such as *supra-f* centres or «semos» (motivation semesters). The aim of *ViVA* is to improve young people's ability to cope with stressful situations as well as to improve their general well-being and help them get a grip on or reduce drug use.

Early detection and intervention models

Early detection and intervention have yet to become firmly established in practice. In many places the interfaces between prevention, counselling and other aspects are not clearly defined. In order to determine what needs to be done to improve the situation, a preliminary study on the subject is to be carried out. This study will explore which measures are likely to result in an increase in efficiency and optimization of real-life early detection and intervention, and the steps needed to implement these measures. A first step will be to take stock of the existing and planned projects in the early detection and intervention field. The Fachverband Sucht (an association of experts and organizations working in the field of substance dependence) is currently compiling a systematic inventory of successful projects at the request of the FOPH. This inventory will be available by October 2007.

Cannabis research

The FOPH regularly commissions research projects, the scientific results of which form the basis for the development of preventive measures. A major cannabis-related project is the Cannabis Monitoring study. This study was commissioned by the FOPH in late 2003 and will follow the development of the cannabis problem in Switzerland until the end of 2008.

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«Realize it!» Succeed in giving up

Traditional drug-counselling facilities are attracting an increasing number of cannabis users. As yet, however, there is no scientifically based, well-evaluated therapy concept for this target group.

The binational «Realize it» project is designed to fill this gap. The aim of this programme is to achieve a considerable reduction in the amount of cannabis consumed by participants. «Realize it» is being offered



by 14 drug-counselling centres in the German-speaking part of Switzerland and southern Germany. The short-intervention programme for cannabis abuse and dependence developed for «Realize it» will be tested and evaluated during this project and will subsequently be systematically introduced into the range of services provided by counselling centres in Germany and Switzerland.

The «Realize it» project is being sponsored by the Federal Office of Public Health, the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Security (Berlin), the Cantons of Basel-Stadt, Basel-Landschaft and Aargau and

the Regional Association for Prevention and Rehabilitation in Baden (southern Germany).

«Realize it» targets cannabis users in the 15 to 30 age bracket who want to reduce their consumption or stop using the drug altogether. The intervention programme comprises five structured individual counselling sessions tailored to the participant's objectives and situation plus one group session, all of which are held over a period of about 12 weeks. The programme kicked off in September 2004 in six counselling centres and has since been expanded to a total of 14 centres.

Participants seem to be responding well to the project: the most recent interim report shows that most of the more than 200 participants to date have considerably reduced their consumption. «Attendant psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety have also clearly improved,» comments Walter Minder, the project leader at the FOPH. He describes the start-up phase of «Realize it» as «successful and encouraging».

www.realize-it.org

Popular initiative and a staged change in the law

The cannabis initiative and the revision of the Narcotics Act. Current legislation on cannabis consumption and its actual implementation in practice are unsatisfactory. Two initiatives have been proposed to help find a way to break the logjam, each in its own way: the «cannabis initiative» filed in January, and the relaunched proposal for the amendment of the Narcotics Act.

In June 2004 the proposed amendment of the Federal Narcotics Act (BetmG) failed when the lower chamber, the National Council, rejected it for a second time, by 102 votes to 92 – despite the fact that the upper chamber, the Chamber of Cantons, had twice voted to accept it. The Federal Office of Public Health regrets this decision. The drawbacks of current legislation continue to exist, especially with regard to cannabis (overstrained enforcement authorities, inconsistent prosecution of cannabis consumption from one canton to another, the lack of legal protection for young people etc.). The generally unsatisfactory situation with regard to cannabis is also a matter of concern to the politicians. The people and the parliamentarians are now having their say.

The cannabis initiative

The popular initiative «For the Protection of Children and Young People from Drug Crime» was filed with the Federal Chancellery by its organizing committee on 13 January 2006, with 105,994 valid signatures. Proposing «a sensible cannabis policy with effective protection for young people», the popular initiative calls for the consumption of psychoactive substances derived from the cannabis plant to be decriminalized, and for the possession, acquisition and cultivation of cannabis plants for personal use to be permitted. The federal government, it says, should promulgate regulations on cannabis cultivation,



production, imports and exports, and trading – taking appropriate measures to ensure that young people are protected. The initiative was launched in the summer of 2004, after the attempt to amend the Narcotics Act had failed. That amendment would have liberalised the situation with regard to cannabis consumption. The organising committee of the popular initiative «For the Protection of Children and Young People from Drug Crime» includes representatives of all the major parties.

On 3 May 2006 the Federal Council rejected the popular initiative «For a Sensible Cannabis Policy with Effective Protection for Young People», making no counterproposal of its own. The Federal Council now has until 13 January 2007 to lay before parliament its message and voting recommendation, and parliament must decide on its own recommen-

dation on the initiative by 13 July 2008 (or by 20 July 2009 if there is an alternative Bill). The referendum will then be held at the beginning of 2009 or 2010 at the latest, unless the initiative is withdrawn or parliament grants an extension. The acceptance of a popular initiative requires a majority of both the popular vote and the cantons.

Revision of the Narcotics Act in stages

In February 2005 the Health Commission of the National Council (SGK-N) accepted a commission initiative that would first enshrine in law the undisputed points of the failed proposal to amend the Narcotics Act, then – in a second stage – reconsider the cannabis issue. The Health Commission of the upper chamber approved this procedure in May 2005. The SGK-N formed a seven-member subcommittee on drugs policy, which has drawn up a proposal. The SGK-N approved the draft directive and the report on 4 May by 18 votes to 6, with one abstention. The next step will be for the Federal Council to state its position on the draft, and the National Council is expected to consider the draft directive and the report in the winter session of 2006.

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At first hand



The submission of the cannabis initiative for a referendum to decriminalize cannabis and for greater protection of young people has triggered little in the way of a response from the media. This is not such a bad thing perhaps, because it creates an opportunity for an objective, less emotional debate on the health risks involved. And thanks to current research, we are now in a better position to assess the dangers and risks than was the case a few years ago.

The use of cannabis is widespread among young people. Most of them use it only from time to time and then give it up completely after a certain time. There is, however, a smaller group that uses cannabis regularly, even every day. Many of these habitual users suffer from emotional, social and also physical problems. A number of studies and our own supra-f research programme on the prevention of drug abuse in approximately 1,500 at-risk young people show that risk patterns can be reliably defined.

While young people who experiment with cannabis to the extent of consuming very small amounts for a limited period generally exhibit normal, well adjusted psychosocial development, with more intensive and prolonged consumption patterns we are increasingly finding problematic development associated with serious developmental disorders, social disintegration and subsequent addiction. Many of these high-risk individuals begin using tobacco and alcohol in early youth and then progress to cannabis and often other drugs as well. Improved protection of young people from the risks of smoking and drinking is therefore also an effective strategy in efforts to combat cannabis use.

The FOPH's prevention efforts focus on the early identification of adolescents and young adults at risk and on early intervention in such cases. The supra-f programmes, which have already been established in seven cantons, make it easier to identify at-risk young people at an early stage and ensure that they receive appropriate help. The supra-f youth programmes offer young people an opportunity tailored to their specific needs to develop their social and school-related skills for a period of about six months. The first evaluation findings have been encouraging.

As far as the public debate is concerned, it is to be hoped that a greater distinction will be drawn in future between occasional use of cannabis and intensive, problematic consumption. The FOPH continues to believe that the existing threat of sanctions against cannabis use cannot prevent the problematic kind of consumption. Stepping up efforts to protect young people, systematic implementation of a ban on smoking in public spaces and efficient early identification and intervention promise to be more successful in this respect.

Thomas Zeltner
Director, Federal Office of Public Health

Global approach to controlling the tobacco epidemic

Tobacco control. The FCTC is the first worldwide health convention to have been prepared under the lead of the World Health Organization (WHO). Unanimously approved by the World Health Assembly, the WHO Tobacco Convention was signed by almost 170 countries in 2004. Switzerland was among them, but before our country can ratify the WHO Convention, national law must be amended in a number of respects. The Federal Council will prepare a ratification message by the end of 2007.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, or FCTC, constitutes a global approach to controlling the tobacco epidemic, devised over a period of several years with the involvement of representatives of a large number of governments. It was conceived as a package of measures, based on the latest scientific standards, to successfully bring tobacco under control in the long term. Year after year the tobacco epidemic causes millions of deaths and costs national economies billions, and the global community is agreed that this is the only way of combating it.

The FCTC lays down mandatory rules for handling a dangerous product in what was hitherto a relatively unregulated market. In order to bring tobacco successfully under control in the long term, there is an urgent need to intervene on both the demand side (e.g. price, consumer in-

formation, advertising) and the supply side (e.g. smuggling, availability).

Ratified by 131 states

As of June 30, 2006 the framework tobacco convention had been signed by 168 states and ratified by over 131, the EC among them. The states that have ratified the WHO Tobacco Convention meet at what are known as Conferences of the Parties, COPs, to discuss its implementation, modification and further development. Switzerland can only attend as an observer. At the first COP, held in February 2006 in Geneva, working groups were formed to draft protocols on cross-border advertising and the illegal trade in tobacco products. In order to assist states in protecting their citizens from passive smoking, proposals are to be submitted by the time the next conference is held in 2007 for guidelines on the creation of smoke-free areas.

No Swiss ratification yet

Switzerland signed the WHO Tobacco Convention in June 2004, but before we can ratify it the law must be amended in a number of respects – such as the regulation of tobacco advertising and tobacco sponsorship, and the introduction of a ban on the sale of tobacco products to children and young people. Switzerland already meets the requirements of the Convention regarding tobacco tax, smuggling and consumer information on tobacco products. The Federal Council intends to prepare a ratification message, with proposals for changes in the law, for submission to parliament by the end of 2007.

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A memory bank focusing on AIDS

AIDS Documentation. An archive held by the Federal Office of Public Health contains an extensive collection of documents – and forms a kind of memory bank on the subject of HIV/AIDS in Switzerland.

All kinds of documents connected with HIV/AIDS (particularly in Switzerland). The AD does not actively seek out documents to archive; it is a place where documents relevant to AIDS can be sent to make sure they are preserved and remain accessible. Current information on HIV/AIDS is available from the Swiss AIDS Foundation (AHS), which offers a comprehensive range of material through its online shop.

Most of the AD's holding – some 13,000 documents – originates from the material taken over by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) at the end of 2003 when the AIDS Info Docu (AID) office was closed down. The AIDS Section at the FOPH started reorganizing the AID material in early 2005 with the aim of making it available to the public.

A considerable part of the AD's holding consists of literature: monographs, journals, brochures and, above all, grey literature. One category of material contains about 1,000 videos, mostly recordings of television films, discussions and documentaries, as well as all the Swiss campaign spots and some commercial videos. Almost all the campaign material on HIV/AIDS in Switzerland

– and some international material as well – is available in the AD.

The mobile exhibition «No fun without one. 20 years of AIDS work in Switzerland» was put together largely from documents in the AD and is the first time this collection of material has been used publicly. The exhibition premiered in the Bären-gasse Museum in Zurich and is currently on display (until 3 September 2006) in the Baselland Cantonal Museum in Liestal. It will later move to the Kornhausforum in Berne.

Posters in the National Library

The AD does not store any business files, as these are all passed to the Swiss Federal Archives after they have been used. Neither does the AD contain posters: all the campaign posters have been given to the Swiss National Library for safekeeping and documentation. The SNL's aim is to make all the posters in the Swiss catalogue available on the Internet; so far there are about 250 different posters in the collection.

Help with research

It is hoped that it will soon be possible to consult the materials in the AD on the Internet using the Alexan-



A thousand videos and tens of thousands of documents. The Aids Documentation and its Head, Yves Niederhäuser.

dria online catalogue. The team at the AD is happy to help people search in the archive. The holdings can only be consulted at the AD itself, as documents are not lent out. The documents are archived in book stacks not accessible to the public and must be ordered through the staff of the AD. According to Yves Niederhäuser, the head of the AD, a large volume of material still needs to be classified. For safety reasons original videos are copied onto DVDs which can then be consulted.

In the longer term, the aim is to en-

able all the different types of documents to be consulted at a workstation (literature and audiovisual material alike). A photocopier is available. It is always necessary to make an appointment, as the AD does not have fixed opening hours and a convenience copy of certain documents needs to be made before they can be used.

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Men are strong – strongly at risk of addiction

Addiction and masculinity. Men drink more alcohol, smoke more and use cannabis much more frequently than women. In spite of this, however, only a few investigations and concepts have hitherto dealt specifically with tackling male addiction. A new report from the Swiss Institute for the Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Problems (SFA) fills this gap. Produced on behalf of the Federal Office of Public Health, the publication combines key basic research findings with recommendations on prevention and therapy.

In matters relating to addiction, men are frequently in the driver's seat: in therapeutic institutions, specialized entities and hospitals, the positions of power are mainly held by men and the majority of drug addicts are also men. This could lead one to assume that current preventive and therapeutic offerings are tailor-made for men. The reality, however, looks somewhat different: while a large number of preventive and therapeutic programmes aimed at women have grown up over the last 15 years, corresponding programmes for men are largely lacking. «The development of gender-specific approaches

has more or less completely bypassed the concerns and difficulties of the male population», says Michel Graf, Director of the SFA. On behalf of the Federal Office of Public Health, Graf authored the report «Addiction and Masculinity», which contains both basic research findings and recommendations. The report aims to spark a rethink in this domain whereby men will cease to be regarded and treated as the norm and women as the exception in connection with dependency disorders.

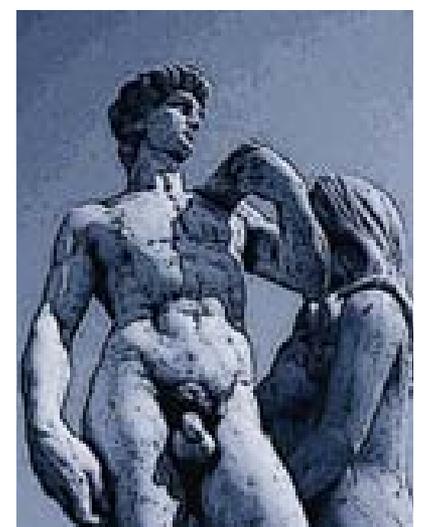
Graf points out that men treat their bodies and health neglectfully: men drink more alcohol than women,

smoke more tobacco and use a great deal more cannabis. 85 of every 100 people found in contravention of the Narcotics Act are men, and a majority of men state that their work is more important to them than their health. «The stereotype of the strong male who knows no limits and feels no pain constitutes a risk factor for men's health», explains Michel Graf. Problematic drug use, he believes, is one of the preferred ways for some boys and men to demonstrate their masculinity and conform to social expectations.

This situation is further aggravated by the fact that men are less adept at reading signals from their bodies, discuss personal matters less often and are reluctant to accept help, which means that men with dependency disorders seek treatment later than women, and often only as a result of considerable pressure on the part of their employer or the law.

Broadening our image of men

What does all this mean in terms of prevention and therapy? «There is an urgent need for specific prevention programmes aimed at boys and men who adhere to typically male risk and dependency behaviour patterns and reflect the stereotypical male image, in order to analyse this image and broaden our view of it», says Michel Graf. In addition, he feels that consideration of gender issues (gender



mainstream) should be solidly incorporated into the therapeutic concepts of all institutions, and that gender-specific treatment of dependency issues should become a matter of course.

Source: *Addiction and Masculinity*, Michel Graf, with Beatrice Annaheim and Janine Messerli, SFA, Lausanne, 2006
Supplier: SFA, P.O. Box 870, 1001 Lausanne, tel. 021 321 29 35, buchhandlung@sfa-isp.ch
The report is also available as a free download from the SFA's website: www.sfa-isp.ch

Credits

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