

EAST BAY EXPRESS

Marijuana Cuts Suicides By 5 Percent, Says New Study

by David Downs

Critics of marijuana law reform argue that any increase in cannabis use is automatically a bad thing. But what if they're dead wrong?

According to new research, they are wrong. In a new brief published by the Cato Institute called "[High on Life? Medical Marijuana Laws and Suicide](#)," researchers report that the passage of a state medical marijuana law "is associated with an almost 5 percent reduction in the total suicide rate."

Researchers D. Mark Anderson, Daniel I. Rees, and Joseph J. Sabia "conclude that the legalization of medical marijuana leads to fewer suicides among young adult males."

Building on 2012 research, Anderson, Rees, and Sabia analyzed Centers for Disease Control data from 1990 through 2007.

"When we examine the relationship between legalization and suicides by gender and age, we find evidence that MMLs are associated with decreased suicides among 20- through 29-year-old males and among 30- through 39-year-old males.

"This result is consistent with registry data from Arizona, Colorado, and Montana showing that most medical marijuana patients are male, and that roughly half are under the age of 40 (Anderson et al., 2013, p. 360). Estimates of the relationship between legalization and suicides among females are less precise and sensitive to functional form."

Anderson, Rees and Sabia first reported such findings in a 2012 report for the Institute for the Study of Labor — a private, independent research institute in Germany.

Anderson is with the Department of Agricultural Economics and Department of Economics at Montana State University in Bozeman. Rees is with the Department of Economics at the University of Colorado, Denver. Sabia is with the Department of Economics at San Diego State University.

In December 2014 they published their findings as “[Medical Marijuana Laws and Suicides by Gender and Age](#)” in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Researchers speculate that the drop in young male suicides “is consistent with the oft-voiced, but controversial, claim that marijuana can be used to cope with depression and anxiety caused by stressful life events. However, the result may, at least in part, be attributable to the reduction in alcohol consumption among young adults that appears to accompany the legalization of medical marijuana (Anderson et al., 2013).”

They call the study “relevant to the ongoing debate surrounding marijuana legalization for medical or recreational purposes. Opponents of these policy changes contend that any increase in marijuana use is undesirable. Yet our research suggests the public-health benefits of legalization may outweigh the costs.”