Attitudes and Beliefs of Successful Adult Illicit Drug Users: A Qualitative Analysis of Drugnet Survey Respondents

Kathryn Steward
Western Kentucky University

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ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF SUCCESSFUL ADULT ILLICIT DRUG USERS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DRUGNET SURVEY RESPONDENTS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Public Health
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Public Health

By
Kathryn Steward

July 2002
ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF SUCCESSFUL ADULT ILLICIT DRUG USERS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DRUGNET SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Date Recommended 7/15/2002

Director of Thesis

Dean, Graduate Studies and Research Date
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ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF SUCCESSFUL ADULT ILLICIT DRUG USERS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DRUGNET SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Kathryn Steward July 2002 75 Pages

Directed by: John White (Chairperson), Thomas Nicholson, and Richard Wilson

Department of Public Health Western Kentucky University

America is a drug-oriented society. For many years people have used drugs for recreational purposes. However, there has been ongoing controversy regarding drug abuse and drug use. The purpose of this study was to assess attitudes and beliefs of successful adult drug users as it relates to drug reform, effectiveness of current drug laws, and problem experiences that they may have encountered as a result of their drug use. A qualitative study utilizing three open-ended questions regarding the aforementioned areas was conducted to analyze the 156 individuals’ responses. The respondents were found to be in agreement on the ineffectiveness of current drug laws and for reform of these laws. Thirty-eight (62.3%) respondents also were in favor of marijuana, specifically, being legalized. Lawmakers should give careful consideration of reform of drug laws, especially as it relates to proper education about drugs and drug use as well as refining the rehabilitation programs and sanctioning of drug abusers. They should also consider the evidence that drug use does not always lead to drug abuse and that some recreational drug users can live normal, happy and successful lives in spite of their drug use. Future research should explore in greater detail and with larger samples adult drug users’ attitudes, beliefs and behavior stemming from their use.
America is a drug-oriented society. Drugs can be taken for the simplest of reasons (i.e., ease of a headache with acetaminophens or stimulation for waking up in the morning with caffeine from coffee) to more serious reasons (i.e., ease of depression with cocaine or alcohol, or for the ease of stress with cigarettes). According to the latest survey of the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA) conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2000a) there are about 14.0 million Americans who have used some illegal drug in the past month. This estimate represents 6.3% of the population of twelve year olds and older. In 2000, 104 million Americans age twelve and older used alcohol in the past month (SAMHSA, 2000b). About 12.6 million (5.6% of the population age twelve and older) were heavy drinkers (five or more drinks per occasion on five or more days in the past month). There was an estimated 65.5 million Americans who were current tobacco users during 2000 (SAMHSA, 2000c). According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2000a), the 2000 National Household Survey of Drug Abuse showed that there were no major changes in illicit drug and alcohol use from 1999 to 2000. The survey also showed that there was a slight decrease in tobacco use among 12-17 year olds by 1.5% and 18-25 year olds by 1.4%. Adults aged 26 and older remained relatively the same from 24.9% in 1999 to 24.2% in 2000 (SAMHSA, 2000a).

For many years people have used drugs for recreational purposes. There has, however, been an ongoing controversy regarding drug abuse and use (Clifford, 1992). According
to Irwin (1973), drug abuse is taking a drug to such an extent that it greatly increases the
danger or impairs the ability of a person to adequately function or cope with his/her
circumstance. For example, a person who takes four Valium pills a day, more than what
his/her physician prescribed, may be misusing this drug if it interferes with his/her life.
Irwin suggests drug use is taking a drug in such a manner that sought for effects are
attained with minimal hazard. An example of drug use would be for the adult to take
only one Valium pill in one day as prescribed by his/her physician. For years both
experts and lay people have believed that all illicit (illegal) drug users were by definition
drug abusers, and that nearly all who use these drugs will eventually lose control to the
point of “addiction” (Waldorf, Reinarman, & Murphy, 1991). These widespread beliefs
began to lessen in dominance in the 1970's with the findings of Lee Robins and
colleagues in 1973 when they discovered, surprisingly, that the Vietnam veterans who
used heroin in Southeast Asia were able to stop their use when they came back to the
United States (Waldorf, 1991). Blackwell (1983) found that twenty-two (44%) of fifty-
one heroin users employed a wide variety of self-regulation strategies and another eleven
(22%) used heroin for a time, but showed no commitment to the drug or the life-style and
simply drifted away from heroin (p. 142). Other studies followed to help dispel the myth
that heroin and other drugs could not be used in a controlled manner (Zinberg, Harding,
Stelmack and Mablestone, 1978).

Another major issue regarding the drug problems of America is current drug policies
and the War on Drugs. A 1995 Gallup Poll reported that ninety-four percent of those
surveyed viewed drug abuse as a crisis for the United States, more serious than health
care, welfare, or the federal budget deficit (Dilulio & Koch, 1996). As reported in The Economist (1998), a survey conveyed that of those polled 82% felt that illegal drug use was a serious problem for society. However, only 27% felt that it was a serious problem in their own communities and only 29% stated that it had ever caused a problem in their own families. This survey result shows a general confusion among Americans regarding how bad the drug problem in the United States really is. In response to the growing issue regarding the efficacy of the War on Drugs, President Bill Clinton announced a “new” war on drugs (Rosenbaum, 1996). This “new” war called the National Drug Control Strategy (Ehlers, 1996) is designed to encourage abstinence. Ehlers states this strategy emphasizes new prevention and treatment measures to tackle the youth drug problem. However, even with all of the rhetoric about prevention and treatment, most of the money since the induction of this new strategy has still been spent on supply reduction or law enforcement. As reported by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) in February of 2002 President George Bush proposed an estimated $19.2 billion for Fiscal Year 2003 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002). This proposal fully supports the National Drug Control Strategy. Of the $19.2 billion, 67% is for enforcement, 12.9% is for prevention and 19.9% is for treatment (ONDCP, 2002).

Controversy has occurred over the effectiveness of these policies. In a national report from the United States Bureau of Justice (1992), public opinion polls showed that Americans feel that putting drug users into treatment programs is more effective than punishing them. These polls also showed the fluctuation among public opinions regarding whether to restrict the supply of drugs or implement harsh punishments. In
1989, these polls showed that the public supported decreasing drug supply first, then providing harsh punishment for the criminals as more effective. This sequence was the opposite eight years earlier (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). Throughout the years, more people have become less supportive of the war on drugs because they feel it has not been effective. Those who oppose current legalization strategies are divided on what to do. Some people ask for harsher penalties; others propose different strategies to curtail the problem (Buckley, 1996). Many fear that if legalization occurs, then drug abuse will increase (Dilulio & Koch, 1996). Those who are for the legalization of drugs feel that the war on drugs has cost billions of dollars and has still not reduced the use of drugs. In a speech by William F. Buckley, as stated in the National Review (1996), “more people die each year as a result of the war against drugs than die from what we call, generically, overdosing. These fatalities include, perhaps most prominently, drug merchants who compete for commercial territory, but include also people who are robbed and killed by those desperate for money to buy the drug to which they have become addicted.”

Nicholson (1992) argued that many of the drug problems in the United States today are the result of our drug policies rather than drug consumption. The possibility of legalizing drugs has become a heated issue. Many feel that legalizing drugs and addressing the causes that lead into drug abuse and dependency will help diffuse the drug problem. A study conducted by Wilson and Nicholson (1989) compared alcohol consumption among teens in dry counties versus wet counties in Kentucky. Findings showed that 69.3% of teens in wet counties and 61.7% of teens in dry counties had ever consumed alcohol. This small difference in abstinence of alcohol consumption suggests that county alcohol
prohibition has very little effect in discouraging adolescent drinking (Nicholson, 1992). Nicholson feels that more money should be spent in primary prevention and education techniques because they will have a greater chance of helping curtail drug abuse more effectively than laws and prisons have been able to do so far.

Dilulio and Koch (1996) argue that legalization would not end crime. They feel that legalization would increase the use of hard drugs. If people of respected authority say people who participate in drug use should not be punished, then “we can expect some young people and others to conclude that society has no right to inhibit their behavior” (p.22). In 1990, the Gallup Poll determined that 80% of the public felt that legalization of drugs is a bad idea (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). Most people in the survey felt that if drugs were legalized, drug use in the public schools would increase, and the number of drug addicts and drug overdoses would increase; about half felt that the amount of drug-related crime would increase.

On the other hand, James P. Gray, U.S. Superior Court Judge (1994), feels that with legalization of drugs there will be no incentive to “push” drugs, they would never be advertised or on sale, and free samples would never be given to anyone, including non-users in order to get them addicted. Judge Gray feels the use would not be above the present rate, and probably, after a possible initial surge, would be materially reduced. In short, the United States does not know what will happen if illicit drugs are made legal.

Due to the illegality of the use of certain drugs, it has been difficult to conduct studies on adult recreational drug users. The adult population is hard to reach because, unlike teenagers, they are not in a classroom setting where they can be given a written
survey to answer. Thus they often cannot and/or will not answer written surveys for fear of discrimination, prosecution, or loss of their jobs. Most of the literature today focuses on teenage use and attitudes. One of the main avenues for determining drug use among Americans is through the previously mentioned National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA). The problem with the numbers estimated from this study is that the survey is conducted through a telephone survey. With the increasing penalties of illicit drug use, it is hard to get an entirely honest answer regarding illicit drug use from people. They cannot feel that they are being protected over the phone (Schaffer, 1996). Many of the people in this group do not want to risk losing their jobs, losing their friends or families, or going to jail. These people may fear they will be put under drug surveillance, and that they could be branded as drug abusers. In short, they have a vested interest in remaining hidden. However, their opinions need to be considered as an important factor when contemplating how to address drug issues.

To help reach this population and hopefully combat some of the fears of exposure, Nicholson, White and Duncan (1998) have developed a study titled DRUGNET that was conducted over the Internet. This survey method will not eliminate all fears, but it is hoped that it will help to eliminate some of the fears associated with taking a survey regarding illicit and licit drug use. The DRUGNET study has been sent out over the Internet to try to reach people, as previously mentioned, that are recreational drug users. The information obtained from the DRUGNET survey will be used as the data set of this. This study will focus on the answers to the written feelings and attitudes of individuals who responded to the DRUGNET survey. It specifically addresses their attitudes and
feelings regarding their personal problem experiences, their thoughts on the effectiveness of the current drug laws and enforcement in dealing with America's drug problems, and other general comments they have made. The DRUGNET Survey is aimed toward "self-described non-deviant, adult, occasional, recreational drug users" (Nicholson, White, & Duncan, 1998).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the written feelings and attitudes of individuals who responded to the DRUGNET Pilot Survey. It specifically addresses their attitudes and feelings regarding personal problem experiences, their thoughts on the effectiveness of the current drug laws and enforcement in dealing with America’s drug problems, and other comments they have made.

Need for the Study

A small number of studies have been conducted on the attitudes of recreational drug users. Efforts need to be made to understand their perceptions of the war on drugs and about drug use in general. Their responses, answers and/or suggestions may provide insight on how to address the issue of drug use. This study will offer a different avenue, the Internet, to reach recreational drug users that previous studies have not used.

Because of the nature of questions (asking respondents if they have ever used illicit drugs) on the survey, there is a need for anonymity. Nicholson, White, and Duncan (1998) have developed an instrument that can fill this need for an anonymous survey. They hope respondents will feel more secure answering a survey on the Internet rather than the way previous studies have been conducted (i.e., over the telephone or in person).
This study has hopefully ensured more honest responses from successful adults to determine their attitudes regarding the current drug policies. It has also tried to assess how recreational drugs effect adults and their mental, physical, and social well-being.

**Research Question**

Will recreational drug users be for a change in drug policy (i.e., decriminalization or legalization of drugs, more efforts toward education and treatment versus enforcement) and will they have negative feelings toward the War on Drugs?

**Delimitations**

This study was delimited to those individuals with access to the Internet between February, 1996 and August, 1997 who read UseNet news groups on the Internet.

**Limitations**

This study has the following limitations:

- Generalizability to the entire population cannot occur due to the use of only subjects that have access to or membership to the Internet and subjects that use the Internet will only represent a certain segment of the population;
- Because the subjects are self-selected, they cannot be assumed to be representative of either the drug-using population or the population among Internet users;
- Some subjects may falsify their answers due to personal bias toward drug use.
- It is not known upon analysis of this study what the respondents’ residence is. Their citizenship is known, but not whether they are currently living in the United States or in a different country.
Assumptions

The following assumptions will be made in this study.

- It is assumed that individuals participating in this study will answer questions openly and honestly and to the best of their ability;
- It is assumed that the individuals will be able to understand how to take the survey and complete all sections pertaining to them or they will seek the help of the tutorial provided at the beginning of the survey.

Definitions

The following are definitions of terms used throughout this thesis.

1. Drug - Any substance that, by virtue of its chemical nature, alters the structure or functioning of any of the tissues of a living organism (Duncan & Gold, 1982).
2. Drug Use – Taking a drug in such a manner that sought for effects are attained with minimal hazard (Irwin, 1973).
3. Drug Abuse - Taking a drug to the degree that it greatly increases the hazard or impairs the ability of an individual to adequately function or cope with their environment (Irwin, 1973).
4. World Wide Web (WWW)- The universe of network accessible information, the embodiment of human knowledge (W3C, 1992). It has many different files linked to each other, so that you can look at a file that has a link to another file and then follow that link to read the next file.
5. War on Drugs - Known as the government’s prohibition on drugs and its attempt to curtail the drug problem in America (Drug War 101, 1995).
6. **Data Analysis** - The process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, Pg. 111)
Drug use has been around for many years, and has had many different uses. Humans have been using plant-derived drugs for as long as we have recorded history (Nicholson, 1992). A Neanderthal burial site in Iran contains flowers that are still recognized as folk medicines (Nicholson, 1992). The earliest samples of recorded history contain references to the regulation and distribution of mead, beer, and wine. Ancient Egyptian mothers would feed colicky babies a mixture that included opium to help them sleep (Nicholson, 1992). The Chinese emperor Shen Nung recommended cannabis for a number of ailments including gout and malaria. In the Book of Genesis, the hallucinogenic mandrake root is mentioned in association with sexual activity (Genesis 30:14-16).

American history is also saturated with the production and usage of drugs. From the founding of the American Colonies until the Civil War, marijuana was an important cash crop, yielding the raw materials needed for the production of canvas, clothing, and rope (Szasz, 1997). The colonists, including George Washington, grew marijuana. Tobacco was a major crop in early America used for both medicinal and recreational purposes (Nicholson, 1992). In the late 1800's cocaine was a common ingredient in medicines and cola drinks.

However, the more drugs were consumed, the more concerned the public became about the problems that developed from this consumption. Americans began to grow less tolerant of substance use and abuse due to the rising awareness of the health impacts from abuse and the association among alcohol, illicit drugs, and the nation's concern about
crime (Institute for Health Policy, 1993). This rising awareness of health concerns led Americans to desire restrictions on the use of cigarettes, alcohol, etc. (Institute for Health Policy, 1993). With all of this public influence, drug abuse became a political issue and was then escalated further by a joint effort of politicians and the media. Some of the problems that were perceived from the abuse were turned into racial issues, because of the fear of the rise of immigrants. Schaffer (1997) explains that in the 1850's, newspapers across the country proclaimed sensational stories of the horrible things that illicit drugs did to racial minorities. They further intensified the issue with stories regarding horrors that people of racial minorities inflicted on innocent white people while under the influence of drugs. In fact, the first American anti-drug law was an 1875 San Francisco ordinance, which outlawed the smoking of opium in opium dens. It was passed because of the fear that Chinese men were luring white women to their “ruin” in opium dens. “Ruin” was defined as associating with Chinese men. This law was followed by other laws that were similar, including Federal laws in which trafficking in opium was forbidden to anyone of Chinese origin, and restrictions on the importation of opium.

In the 1930's, cocaine was outlawed because of fears that superhuman “Negro Cocaine Fiends” or “Cocainized Niggers” were taking large quantities of cocaine which would cause them to go on a violent sexual rampage and rape white women (Schaffer, 1997). Marijuana was outlawed in 1937 (the Marijuana Tax Act) as a direct measure against Mexican workers who crossed the border seeking jobs during the Depression. In the 1950's, one study found that public concern about drug consumption was directly related
to the number of stories about drugs in newspapers and magazines and on television
(Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992).

Schaffer’s (1997) continues to explain that the government argued that marijuana
should be outlawed because of the supposed violent “effect on the degenerate races.”
The American Medical Association (AMA) adamantly opposed this law, but during
congressional hearings supporters of the law lied and stated the AMA was in favor of it,
because the law would have never passed without their support. The Harrison Narcotics
Act of 1914 that “outlawed” these drugs was, seemingly, a simple licensing law which
required sellers to get a license if they were going to handle the opiates and cocaine.
However, it is doubtful that most of the members of Congress would have thought they
were passing what would later be regarded as a general drug prohibition. The key to this
act was that the bureaucrats who were authorized to issue the licenses never did, and if
anyone was found without a license, heavy penalties would follow. A snowball effect
began to occur where the bureaucrats asked for more staff to penalize offenders as the
number of offenders increased. The court rulings continuously supported these
restrictions and penalties. Arguments of the Federal Government’s ability to control
what drugs Americans consumed stemmed from this continuous cycle. As a result of the
media and political influences regarding illicit drug use, many people began to fear them,
and the basic assumption that anyone who was using illicit drugs was abusing them. This
assumption has brought on the controversy of drug use versus abuse.
Drug Use Versus Abuse

Psychoactive drugs are consumed by many Americans. These include such commonly used products as alcohol, coffee, tobacco, tea, chocolate, and certain prescription psychoactive drugs (Nicholson, 1992). These drugs, along with illegal drugs, have potent CNS effects if abused and can be extremely harmful to the person's body. The suggestion is that the legal status of the different drugs is not based on their pharmacological effects nor on their potential harmful effects (Nicholson, 1992). As reported in the July 1996 issue of the National Review, Dr. Thomas Szasz has written several books arguing two positions (Buckley, 1996). The first position is that there is much variation with the abuse of drugs. For example, it is easy to determine those who can tolerate five drinks and those who cannot even tolerate one, the same is evidently so with cocaine. Dr. Szasz does not make the point that it is a good idea to use cocaine, because it does have detrimental effects to so many people. However, he feels that it is clinically incorrect to make the assumption that everyone is equally affected by the drug (Buckley, 1997). Dr. Szasz' second point is that to enforce legal actions against someone solely because he has been found to use the drug is an infringement on human rights. Nicholson (1992) and others feel that the legal status of a drug is not determined due to its ability to cause individual harm. It is more the result of how long a drug has been in circulation, who brought it in and uses it, and how its consumption and distribution fits into society.

The consumption of drugs is usually categorized as either drug use or drug abuse (Nicholson, 1992). As previously stated, Irwin (1973) defines drug use as "taking a drug
in such a manner that sought for effects are attained with minimal hazard.” He defines drug abuse as “taking a drug to such an extent that it greatly increases the danger or impairs the ability of the individual to adequately function or cope with their circumstances.” The negative health consequences of drug consumption are the result of the abuse of these substances. These drugs are generally not harmful if consumed in a moderate way. There is the problem that a small portion of people cannot use them in moderation. Studies such as the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse and the Monitoring the Future Study disclose that there are millions of Americans who consume illicit drugs that never present themselves for treatment or become involved with the criminal justice system (Nicholson, White, & Duncan, 1998). Neither study makes a distinction between use and abuse therefore they correlate all use with abuse. Other studies that have been conducted to determine the amount of drug consumption among Americans result in a wide variation of numbers. Also, the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse has figures that are two times lower than other surveys conducted (Schaffer, 1996). Some of the problems with the figures derived from the Household Survey, explains Schaffer (1996), is that it is conducted over the telephone. This technique allows the surveyors to reach only those people who have a telephone, or people that answer the telephone. It is also not representative of the public because it requires that the survey crew, who are complete strangers to the respondents, ask if anyone in the household has committed a felony by using drugs. With the increase of penalties for this particular crime, it is very doubtful that the people will give an accurate response.
Szasz (1997) feels that the drug problem is compiled of a set of interrelated phenomena that are the results of personal temptation, choice, and responsibility, combined with a set of laws and social policies generated by our reluctance to face the issue head on. The problem of drug abuse cannot be addressed if lawmakers and the public are not willing to look at all possible causes of the abuse. One issue that has been the central focus in trying to curtail the drug problem is to try to limit the supply of drugs. This effort raises the question of how effective supply reduction has been and what other methods might need to be used to fight what has been coined "the war on drugs."

The War on Drugs

In a 1990 Gallup Poll, the American public favored both supply restriction and demand reduction to combat drugs (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). Teaching youth about the dangers of drugs was the approach Americans favored most by forty percent. Supply reduction, however, has been the primary strategy in the American drug policy since the passing of the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914 (Duncan & Nicholson, 1997). According to the Institute for Health Policy (1993), a poll showed that fifty-one percent favored stopping the drug flow from other countries or arresting pushers or users; another poll showed that fifty-seven percent of the adult population favored using treatment programs to help drug users while thirty-three percent favored punishing them.

In 1993, the public consistently agreed that we spend too little on treatment (Institute for Health Policy, 1993). In 1994, more than thirteen billion dollars were spent, which more than double the amount spent in 1989 (Clifford & Nicholson, 1997). Even with the billions of dollars spent on restriction of drugs, The National Survey on American
Attitudes on Substance Abuse revealed that teenagers aged twelve to seventeen felt that it was easiest to buy cigarettes, then marijuana, and the most difficult to purchase was beer (Lepsch & Kempner, 1997). Schaffer (1997) feels that the War on Drugs could be won if the United States could only be successful in at least one of these three areas: stop drug production in other countries (which some think is hopeless), stop drugs at the border (which has proven a very costly and ineffective measure), or stop the sale of drugs within the United States (this causes an increase in prison crowding, and the number of dealers increases at a higher rate than arrests are made).

It is apparent that the current efforts to curtail the drug problem are not effective because tens of millions of Americans still become addicted to alcohol or tobacco, and illicit drugs are widely available despite decades of law enforcement efforts (Nicholson, 1992). Also, the worldwide production of cocaine, opium, and other drugs has continuously increased despite the current drug policy efforts (Clifford & Nicholson, 1997). In a poll done through the National Review, results showed that all participants agree that the drug problem is acute, and no one argues with the fact that the drug war is being lost (Buckley, 1996). This apparent failure raises the question of whether currently illicit drugs should be legalized. In a 1990 Gallop Poll, most people do not favor the legalization of drugs; eighty percent felt that it would be a bad idea (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992). Those who oppose legalization are divided on what then to do, one half asking for harsher penalties and the other proposing different strategies (Buckley, 1996). These conflicting views leave the problem of what to do in place of or in addition to the law enforcement strategy.
One way may be a strategy of harm reduction or harm minimization. Harm reduction is a way of “preventing the potential harm related to drug use rather than trying to prevent the drug use itself” (Duncan & Nicholson, 1997, p. 3). This policy can perhaps be described as “a compromise between legalization and the war on drugs” (p. 3).

One strategy that is highly favored by the public (79%) according to the Harris Poll in 1989 is an education campaign to convince young people and others not to use drugs (Bureau of Justice and Statistics, 1992). They feel that the education campaign along with teaching harm reduction might be effective. Others feel that it will not totally eliminate the drug problem. Duncan and Nicholson (1997) feel that the elimination of drug use is not an achievable goal and that as long as it remains the primary focus of drug policies very few benefits will develop in terms of improved health and safety. One way to help the government see that there are other alternatives, besides law enforcement, to reducing drug problems in America is to develop studies to assess the public’s attitudes/opinions on this issue. Studies have been conducted to determine why people abuse drugs (i.e., marital problems, physical and/or emotional abuse, neglect, etc.), but there have been very few studies conducted on why people choose to use them on a recreational level without becoming addicted. A better understanding of why people use drugs for recreational purposes and opinions on how they believe the reduction of drug use can be achieved will help in the development of more effective methods for curtailing the drug problem. This study was developed to help understand a segment of the American population’s (adult Internet drug users who participated in the survey)
opinions/attitudes regarding this issue. This information can then be used to reach a goal of harm reduction with the use of drugs, and possibly lead into a reduction of drug abuse.
Chapter 3

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to describe the written feelings, beliefs, and attitudes of individuals who responded to the DRUGNET Survey. The section of the survey used for this study is the short answer/open-ended questions regarding past legal experiences and opinions concerning drug policy efforts. The researcher will determine basic underlying themes of the responses of the sample population by conducting an extensive qualitative analysis (with the aid of a computer software program).

Population

The population of interest was adult users (not abusers) of recreational, psychoactive drugs.

Sample and Procedures

The sample to be studied was a total of 156 individuals who completed all or part of the DRUGNET survey and who provided at least one comment to an open-ended item on the survey. A sample of convenience was accessed via the world wide web (WWW) of the Internet. Internet users, at the time of data collection, as described by marketing surveys are as follows:

(a) more likely to be college-educated than the general public, (b) possess median household incomes of approximately $60,000 (i.e., notably above the $42,000 median for all U.S. households in 1994), and (c) number between 15 to 30 million and are rapidly increasing both in and outside of the United States (Tedesco, 1996).
The procedures as described by Nicholson, White and Duncan (1998) are as follows. Between February 1996 and August 1997, Internet users were solicited to participate in an anonymous on-line survey. The survey could be found on the World Wide Web at http://www.illicit-drugs.org, and on the home web page for the DRUGNET survey which was registered with the major search engines. Solicitation of respondents was also conducted by electronic mailing lists and through announcements posted on USENET News Groups.

Through these solicitations users could click on the web address (http://www.illicit-drugs.org) and, if they wanted, could participate in the survey. Because of the fear of disclosure of this data, participants were offered a link to a service that would increase their anonymity (www.anonymize.com). Respondents were assured privacy. Users were assigned a random number using their IP address striped of all non-numeric characters as a seed value. This number was used to identify the different sections of responses that came to the researchers (only one part of the survey at a time was shown to the users).

Instrumentation

The section of the survey used for this study is the short answer/open-ended questions regarding past legal experiences and opinions concerning drug policy efforts (see Appendix A for the text of the survey). A qualitative research method was used to examine the data. To retrieve the responses from the survey, the researcher analyzed data collected from a program written in C computing language that handled the administration of the survey, coded and stored the data for analysis. The use of the Common Gateway Interface (CGI) made this process invisible to the respondents. Thus,
data were available almost as soon as subjects completed each section of the survey (Nicholson, White, and Duncan, 1998).

Analysis

The statistical tests and procedures that were utilized in this study for the analysis of the responses are Chi Square and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Chi Square was used to determine differences between gender, marital status, legal problems, and citizenship as it relates to rating respondents’ personal health status. ANOVA was used for determining differences among gender and citizenship as it relates to importance of religion. To analyze the qualitative data more efficiently and reliably, a computer program to help handle qualitative research was used. The computer program, called Approach, is a component of Lotus SmartSuite 97. Approach is a relational database which can aid researchers in handling data collected for qualitative analysis, by supporting processes of querying data (i.e., searching text or searching patterns) to test multiple conditions and finding only those cases that match, thus providing the researcher a means to theorize about the data (Eddy, 1997). Campbell (1997) states that the use of computers during data analysis increases efficiency and may also lead to greater depth and consistency in exploring issues or themes. The author supports computer use by stating that the process of using computer-analyzing software requires the researcher to clarify thinking and carefully attend to coding decisions.

According to Eddy (1997, pp. 550-551), the researcher develops a database for the survey used. The database is a collection of records. Within each record is a collection of fields. For the purpose of this study the fields contain demographics of the sample
population and their answers to the open-ended questions from the survey instrument. The researcher labels fields to describe their contents. For the purpose of this study, the field types used are text, memo and numeric. Next the researcher used these labels to assist in identifying the information the field contains (Eddy, 1997). The main characteristics used to develop these labels were marital status, citizenship, and legal problems. An example of a field label for this study is as follows: any person who is married, does not have legal problems as a result of their drug use and is a United States citizen. The field label for this example would be “citizen, married, not busted.”

The researcher then determined an indexing system made up of the fields. Within these index categories are information determined by the researcher such as the title and definition of the category, a memo of ideas about it and references to the parts of documents coded at the field. This information documented will help the researcher to verify the classification of data.

One indexing format that was constructed by the researcher is a tree-structured indexing system. For example the main fields are values of the respondent, with subcategories income (i.e., subcategories underneath: less than $10,999; $11,000 to $29,999; etc.) and marital status (i.e., subcategories: married, not married, widowed, divorced, living together). These categories and subcategories are called fields. Through analyzing this data the researcher was able to manipulate the indexing database in various ways during the development of categories. These categories are created to help define and explore research ideas, support the ideas, pursue guesses of any kind, keep the relevant guesses, and formulate and test themes and/or emulating theories.
The researcher recorded several indexing categories based on the respondents' demographic qualities, for example age, gender, marital status, citizenship, etc. were all used by the researcher. Next, the researcher assigned values to these variables (making subcategories), for example, the subcategories for age will be 20-25, 25-30, 31-35, etc. The assignment of values to variables allows for the combination of aspects of variable analysis and qualitative analysis (Richards & Richards, 1991). As the researcher analyzed the data, the appropriate indexing system(s) were determined and discussed in the results section of this thesis. The assigning of categories, determination of values for sorting, and the determination of boundaries of text segments in the data is known as coding (Campbell, 1997). Multiple coding (a single portion of the data is placed within a larger portion) was also determined, and codes were altered in successive rounds of sorting as themes or patterns continued to emerge or were refined.

The type of qualitative research that was used for this study was Descriptive/Content Analysis. Marshall and Rossman (1998) state that qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data, and from that search emerges a theme or grounded theory (pp. 111). The analytic procedures used during qualitative research fall into five modes: organizing the data; generating categories, themes and patterns; testing the emergent hypotheses against the data; searching for alternative explanations of the data; and writing the report. Marshall and Rossman (1998, pp. 113) explain that each phase of data analysis requires "data reduction" as the amount of collected data is brought into manageable pieces. Interpretation is necessary in
all phases of data analysis, to bring "meaning and insight into the words of the participants."

There are two basic phases to the descriptive/qualitative analysis that the researcher used: (1) analysis (coding and indexing of data) by the computer and by hand and (2) the retrieval of the data. The first step of this type of analysis is to sort responses of the three open-ended questions into different categories. The responses were first sorted into three different categories according to the main research questions of this study (each of the questions will be one category). Several different fields were defined (as previously mentioned: gender, age, race, income, religion, marital status, etc). Once these fields were determined, the researcher sorted them into their appropriate sub-categories (i.e., for reform or not, for legalization or not). As new categories emerged through the researcher’s analysis, they were added to the indexing system.

While developing categories and conducting the analysis process, it is necessary to be able to retrieve data so that the indexing system (determined by the researcher) can be altered and reshaped when needed. According to Richards and Richards (1991), retrieval of data also helps to incorporate new ideas in searches, and to interrogate patterns of the data to test pre-existing and developing theories. Interrogating patterns of data can be achieved in three ways. One is by introducing new fields. A second is by building on the results of previous retrievals. The third is by reshaping the existing system of fields.

One way the retrieval of all data stored can be conducted is by Boolean combinations, meaning that there is a domain of features that can be retrieved. The researcher can then request to retrieve all entities that have feature A and feature B, or feature A, or feature B,
or feature A but not feature B (Richards & Richards, 1991). This type of retrieval is more useful for theory-construction. Another retrieval method is overlapping or the point at which the researcher asks for all passages about A and B that overlap. The third occurs when the researcher excludes or restricts searches to documents indexed by a field. In the fourth method, the researcher utilizes tree-structured indexing (as previously mentioned), which will be used for the purpose of this study along with a combination of the aforementioned methods. This method is the main method of data retrieval used by the researcher. The use of matrices is very beneficial for the researcher in understanding the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). They argue that the displaying of the reduced data in a structured way requires the researcher to think about the research questions and the parts of the data needed to answer these questions. It requires full analysis from the researcher, disallows the ignoring of relevant information, and focuses and organizes the information logically. Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 239) also state that matrices “essentially involve the crossing of two or more main dimensions or variables (often with subvariables) to see how they interact.” Colleagues will be asked to look at the format developed to detect the assumptions being made, and to suggest alternative ways to display the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The use of a matrix (along with the analytic text) will better aid readers in testing and confirming the researchers conclusions. The researcher continuously wrote notes while analyzing the data, to help show the thought processes that occurred throughout the analysis. This procedure will help the researcher and colleagues determine if there are any biases unknowingly entering into the analysis. Upon analysis of the data, common
themes did emerge. The researcher will report and discuss these in chapters four and five.

Limitations

There were several perceived limitations regarding this study. One limitation was that the data being used from the DRUGNET Survey is from the pilot study which has a small sample size. There may be need for using data from the revised versions of the survey for future studies due to larger samples being used in these versions. However, for a qualitative analysis, smaller samples are more desirable. Some of the data being analyzed is in word form rather than numerical form. Words usually have multiple meanings, making them harder to maneuver around and work with (Miles & Huberman, 1994). They argue that numbers are usually less obscure and can be processed more economically. Thus the analysis of word data would be more time consuming. The more subjects you have, the more word data there is to analyze. Due to time and financial restraints, the pilot study will prove more efficient for the researcher. Another limitation is the reliability of honest answers from the respondents, the assurance of total anonymity will hopefully reduce this problem.

On a positive note, Nicholson, White and Duncan (1996) did find that respondents were willing to write the long essay responses to the open-ended attitude questions. The responses were very impassioned, which may indicate a strong need for this sub-sample of the population being studied to be heard. Nicholson, White, and Duncan’s (1996) analysis of “the range of responses to questions and response patterns also seem to indicate that the responses provided were honest and possibly more frank than what
people will say face-to-face with an interviewer or with a researcher in the room.” (pp. 120).

Using the methods outlined previously, themes will be identified that are an accurate account of the sub-sample’s attitudes and feelings regarding recreational drug use and current drug policies. The DRUGNET Survey provides an effective means of reaching this sample of recreational drug users. Also the use of the Lotus SmartSuite - Approach program will allow for a more reliable analysis, thus helping the researcher develop representative themes of the respondents’ beliefs and attitudes. The information obtained from this study will hopefully be the beginning of many studies of this kind, and will help to contribute to the growing need for information regarding adult recreational drug use.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Description of Study Sample

The total sample size for this analysis was 156. This sample came from the original pilot sample size of 276. The responses that were omitted from the original sample are due to duplicate records, blank responses and blank demographics. More than one-third of the original sample failed to answer certain questions, primarily in the demographics component. The mean age of the respondents was 32.69 (SD = 9.55 Range = 18 to 62 years) (n = 2 missing data). The gender composition was 80.1% (n = 125) male and 19.9% (n = 31) female. The majority of the respondents were Caucasian (n = 146 or 94.2%) and 1.3% (n = 2) were Other, 1.9% (n = 3) were Latino, 1.3% (n = 2) were Black, 0.6% (n = 1) were Asian, and 0.6% (n = 1) were Native American (n = 1 missing data). The marital status of the respondents were: (a) 39.7% (n = 62) married, (b) 36.5% (n = 57) never married, (c) 17.3% (n = 27) living together, (d) 5.8% (n = 9) divorced, and (e) 0.6% (n = 1) widowed. Respondents were also asked if they were happy with their marital status. A significant majority - 91.3% (n = 136) responded yes (n = 7 missing data). These responses seem to indicate positive marital functioning from the subjects. There were one-hundred and seventeen (76.0%) respondents who were United States citizens/legal residents and 37 (24.0%) were non-American and came from predominantly English-speaking countries (n = 2 missing data).

All of the respondents had no lower than a high school diploma or GED certificate. Three percent (n = 4) had a high school diploma or GED, 5.2% (n = 7) had an Associate
degree, 4.5% (n = 6) had a Vocational degree, 55.2% (n = 74) had a Baccalaureate degree, 20.9% (n = 28) had a Master’s degree, 3.0% (n = 4) had a Law degree, 5.2% (n = 7) had a Doctorate degree, 3.0% (n = 4) had a Post-doctoral degree (n = 22 missing data). One hundred and twenty (77.4%) were employed with full-time jobs while thirty-five (n = 22.6%) were unemployed (n = 1 missing data). Seventy (69.3%) had working spouses, and thirty-one (30.7%) had non-working spouses (n = 55 missing data or had no significant others). Types of employment were broken down into: (a) 68.9% (n = 102) white collar, (b) 19.6% (n = 29) self-employed, (c) 6.8% (n = 10) blue collar, and (d) 4.7% (n = 7) unemployed (n = 8 missing data). Job titles were also given by 149 of the respondents. Computer-related occupations (i.e., computer engineering, programmer, etc.) made up the largest proportion of respondents. The other portion was filled with a wide range of occupations (CEO, physician, homemaker, business owner, electrician, teacher, scientist, physician, nurse, salesperson, etc.). The median household income (including college students) was between $50,000 to $70,000 (n = 2 missing data). Several (n = 17) of the respondents made comments that, despite their drug use, they were able to maintain a normal life, (see Table 1). One hundred and twenty-six (82.4%) answered yes to the question of whether their household income was enough to satisfy their needs, and twenty-seven (17.6%) answered no (n = 3 missing data).

Health and Behavioral Indices

Items in this category were designed to determine the respondents self-perception’s of their health status and measure behaviors generally accepted as normal or appropriate for
non-deviant, functional, social individuals. There were also two questions asked regarding religion that were for descriptive purposes only.

Respondents were asked to rate their perceived physical health status. Responses were as follows: (a) excellent – 32.7% (n = 51), (b) good – 47.4% (n = 74), (c) average – 12.2% (n = 19), (d) fair – 5.1% (n = 8), (e) poor – 1.3% (n = 2), (d) very poor – 1.3% (n = 2). This indicates that over 90% of the sample felt their physical health status was average to excellent. Upon a Chi Square analysis, there were no differences by gender ($\chi^2 = 4.6, df = 5, p > .05$), legal problems ($\chi^2 = 4.4, df = 5, p > .05$), marital status ($\chi^2 = 29.4, df = 20, p > .05$), or citizenship ($\chi^2 = 8.9, df = 5, p > .05$) for perception of health.

Individuals were asked the question - - do you vote regularly. A strong majority 84% (n = 131) answered yes (n = 0 missing data). This percentage is notably above the voting level in the United States national elections which ranges from 39.7% to 69.8% (Statistical Abstract of United States, 2001). One hundred and fifty (96.2%) respondents stated that they regularly engage in non-drug related recreational activities (i.e., hobbies). Of those who responded to the question of regularly attending community organizations such as the PTA, Elk’s Lodge, Lion’s Club, etc. 43.5% (n = 67) responded yes and 56.5% (n = 87) responded no (n = 2 missing data). Also, individuals were asked to give their current overall college GPA or their final GPA if they have already graduated from college. The mean reported GPA was 3.44 (SD = .84; Range = 1 to 9), which represents an A/B performance, implying high academic achievement.

The survey also included two purely descriptive questions related to religion. The first asked whether individuals regularly attended church services. An overwhelming
majority, 91.4% (n = 139), responded "no" (n = 4 missing data). The indication is that the percentage of this sample that regularly attends church services is substantially lower than the United States national 44% attendance rate (Statistical Abstract of United States, 2000). Respondents were also asked a Likert scale question on how important religious beliefs were to their lives with a response range of 0 (no importance) to 10 (central focus of life). The overall mean score for the importance of religion was 3.91 (SD = 3.53, n = 154), implying very little religious orientation. Religion was rated significantly less important by males than females (Males: \( \bar{x} = 3.48 \) [SD = 3.46], Females: \( \bar{x} = 5.61, \) [SD = 3.35] \( F = 9.536, df = 1, 152 \)). Responses to these two questions correlate and appear to imply that this sample is less religious than the general population as a whole (see Tables 2 and 3). When conducting a cross-tabulation of the two religious questions and citizenship, there was noteworthy difference in responses of citizens versus non-citizens (see Tables 2 and 3). Noncitizens rated importance of religion very low and of the question for attending church regularly, none attended on a regular basis. Of note, however, some of the respondents indicated that they were “spiritual.” A few examples are listed below:

- “My use of the stronger drugs during college as experimentation. I feel I grew as a result. Now they are used for spiritual endeavors.”
- “I consider drugs a tool for self discovery and spiritual advance. My use of them tends toward ritual, not recreation.”
- “... Other than this, I would use pot for relaxation and mushrooms or LSD as a tangent to my spirituality.”

Legal History and Attitudes

Respondents were asked several questions regarding any previous drug or violence-related encounters with the judicial system. Twenty-four percent (n = 38) reported yes to
having legal problems related to their drug use while 75% (n = 117) did not have any legal problems related to their drug use (n = 6 missing data). Respondents were also asked if they had ever been convicted of a drug-related (i.e., possession or trafficking) felony offense. Of those who responded, 6.4% (n = 10) said that they had, while 93.6% (n = 146) said they had not. Individuals were also asked if they had been convicted of a non-drug related felony. One person (.6%) said yes, while one hundred and fifty-three respondents (98.1%) stated that they had not been convicted (n = 2 missing data). One hundred and fifty-five (98.1%) of the respondents had not been convicted of a violent felony (n = 1 missing data). A question was also asked regarding their support of “major drug reform, which includes strategies such as legalization and/or decriminalization of currently legal drugs?” A significant majority of respondents 93.5% (n = 144) said yes they would support such a reform, and only 5.2% (n = 8) stated no (n = 2 missing data) (see Table 4). Within the text of the responses, 22 people expounded on their support for reform. See examples of these comments specifically as it relates to legalization of drugs in Table 5.

Essay Responses

Respondents were also asked three essay questions detailing their legal experience and attitudes to United States drug policies. There were three questions that were asked. They are as follows: (1) We would like for you to briefly describe your problem experiences with drugs and the law, (2) Do you think that the current laws on drugs and/or the war on drugs is effective, (3) Are there any other comments you would like to add. A few of the individuals (n = 7) who responded to the first question regarding
problem experiences also commented that most of their problems were with harassment from law enforcement officers. See Table 6 to view these comments. Many of the other responses (n = 31) to this question were details or confirmations regarding their arrests or convictions for possession of drugs or for drug use. See Table 7 for examples. On another note regarding the respondents problems with drugs, several (n = 10) made comments that the fear of getting caught was their biggest problem with their drug use. See Table 8 for these responses. For those respondents who answered if they thought the current laws were effective, an overwhelming majority 95.5% (n = 149) said that they did not believe the laws were effective. Four percent (n = 6) were not sure if the laws were effective. Several of these respondents were from another country and were unsure of some of the United States’ laws. There was only one respondent (0.6%) (a female, married citizen who had no legal problems) that felt the laws were effective. Within many of the individuals’ responses comments were made regarding whether to legalize drugs or not. Thirty-nine percent (n = 61) felt drugs should be legalized, 1.9% (n = 3) indicated that they did not think drugs should be legalized (see Table 9), 53.8% (n = 84) did not make a comment on legalization, and 5.1% (n = 8) were not specific with their comments. Upon cross-referencing demographic data with the legalization of drugs, there appear to be no consistent patterns related to gender, citizenship, marital status or previous legal problems: gender (n = 152; $x^2 = 1.522; df = 1; p > .05$); citizenship (n = 150; $x^2 = .001; df = 1; p > .05$); marital status (n = 152; $x^2 = 4.499; df = 4; p > .05$); or previous legal problems (n = 151; $x^2 = .006; df = 1; p > .05$). Because the question about legalization of drugs was not directly asked, people were ranked as no comment rather
than missing data. There were 149 (95.5%) respondents who stated the laws were ineffective; see Table 10 for examples of these comments.

Those who were ranked nonspecific made comments about drug laws (n = 8), effectiveness and legalization and they seemed to “hint” at pro-legalization but to state that they had a positive answer for legalization would only be speculation. They did not truly specify for certain whether they were for or against legalization. See Table 11 for examples. Of the sixty-one persons (39.1%) who were for legalization, twenty (32.8%) were for legalization of all drugs, thirty-eight (62.3%) were for legalization of marijuana, and 3 people (4.9%) did not specify which drugs should be legalized.

About half of the individuals did not make a comment about legalization. Of those who were for legalization of drugs a significant amount were for legalization of marijuana (62.3%). Many of the participants (n = 25) felt there were no major differences in effects of use of marijuana versus alcohol and/or cigarettes, as indicated in the Table 12. Several individuals also made comments that marijuana (considered a “soft” drug by many of the respondents) should be legalized, but not necessarily “harder” drugs (i.e., heroin and cocaine). Others stated that marijuana should be legalized and that research should be conducted on “harder/other” drugs to help determine legalization possibilities of those drugs. See Table 13 to review responses concerning hard drugs versus soft drugs (n = 14). Some individuals used marijuana for health reasons and felt it should be legalized for that purpose. Some respondents suggested dealing with drugs as medical problems. Some examples are listed below:
• “Policy refuses to address the problem as a the medical problem that it is. I see my drug use now merely as medical maintenance for a disease I either had all along or acquired early in life.”
• “I feel cannabis, as a plant, is a gift from god to the people of the earth and the drug policy makers are making fools of themselves by outlawing a naturally occurring medicinal plant.”
• “Current drug laws do not differentiate between recreational or self-medicating uses and abuse.”

Others suggested having drugs regulated by the medical profession rather than the legal profession. For example, one person explained how he had severe migraine headaches. He researched marijuana as a possible treatment and decided to use it. Soon after he started using marijuana his headaches stopped. To eliminate the possibility of some other element being the cause of the headache cessation he stopped using it for a while. His headaches came back. He started using marijuana again and his headaches ceased. He claims it is because of marijuana and he will continue to use it even if it is illegal. There were definite strong, impassioned comments made by respondents that marijuana is a relatively safe drug and it is extremely rare if not nonexistent to hear of someone dying of marijuana, but there were many problems and deaths associated with alcohol and tobacco, which are legal.

The most strident of responses was individuals’ answer to the question “Do you believe the current drug laws and enforcement are effective in dealing with America’s drug problem?” An overwhelming majority (95.5%) of respondents felt the laws were ineffective. Only one person (.6%) felt they were effective (3.8% is missing data). Much of the sample population stated that the War on Drugs was causing more problems than it was ameliorating. Some of the respondents (n = 14) referred to the issue of prohibition not working for alcohol and it will not work for these other drugs. See Table 14 for
examples. Elaborating on the last quote in Table 14 ("Just like in the prohibition people died because they had no control over the quality of what they were imbibing."), several respondents made similar comments that having certain drugs be illegal helps contribute to organized crime. They suggested that while drugs are kept underground there can be no quality control. Several people suggested that the government should legalize and then tax drugs to take some of the profit from organized crime. Some felt regulation of some kind over drugs was necessary. For example, they made the suggestion to "legalize marijuana for small-scale cultivation, possession and use so that resources can be aimed at larger, organized suppliers."

Several people felt education was a key component in answering some of the drug problems in America. Some felt the government should legalize drugs and take the money to educate users and/or abusers on proper use and look at why they use. Some respondents stated it would be good to take the money that is already being invested into law enforcement and spend it in drug treatment and research to develop better prevention programs. Many of the respondents also stated that more effort should be spent on rehabilitation for those people who were abusing drug use. See Table 15 for examples of responses (n = 28) suggesting education, prevention, and rehabilitation.

A few of the respondents commented that upon getting arrested for drugs, they were put in jail. While in jail these people learned more about how to get drugs or sell them. They felt this was very counterproductive and inappropriate punishment based on the action. Respondents also stated that getting busted for a drug-related crime it made it extremely difficult to find a job that paid well because of their legal problems, thus
making it desirable for them to seek “employment” as drug dealers which provides them a more lucrative income. Many people did state that they probably use illegal drugs less because of the risk associated with their use and legal ramifications. This theme seemed to be the common one among respondents regarding any legal problems that they had experienced. Respondents who had encountered legal problems mainly faced issues of being stereotyped as a “druggie,” abuser, loser, etc., some respondents were harassed by police because of these stereotypes. The common theme regarding problem experiences for individuals was the struggle with the issue that they could smoke a little marijuana every once in a while in their own home and cause no harm to themselves or others. However, because it is illegal they were at risk of losing their jobs and/or going to jail. Several of the respondents (n = 21) felt they were who they are today (identified usually as more open-minded, creative, etc.) because of their drug use. See Table 16 for examples.

There were no notable findings regarding respondents’ past legal experiences except for the general consensus that the harassment and fear was their major problem and that any arrests experienced were counterproductive. The final observation of the responses regarding legal problems was that of those who had legal problems about half commented that they still use drugs in some way (i.e., daily, occasionally, rarely). The indication is that for some respondents their legal problems with drugs did not seem to deter their use of them. See Table 17 for examples of comments of those who continued to use drugs (n = 41). The other half did not comment on whether their use is still current or how often they use.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study looked at the open-ended question section of the Drugnet pilot study that was conducted via the World Wide Web. The study analyzed the attitudes and feelings of respondents regarding their personal problem experiences as it relates to their drug use, their thoughts on the effectiveness of the current drug laws and enforcement in dealing with America's drug problems, and additional comments regarding these issues. As suggested in the research question, the majority (95.5%) of the respondents were in agreement that the current drug laws are ineffective and some type of change needs to be implemented. Respondents elaborated on what these changes might be, i.e., legalization of some or all drugs, education of proper use, treatment or rehabilitation for users/abusers versus imprisonment. For respondents who were pro-legalization of drugs, many separated marijuana use from other drugs and stated that marijuana was no more harmful and in some cases less harmful than the legal drugs - tobacco and alcohol. Comparisons of demographic data were also made to determine any significant differences among age, race, and sex.

Summary of Results

The results from this study provide preliminary data on a broad demographic and behavioral profile of the study sample. This sample has only been analyzed in very few scientific studies. Based on the results, and considering the limitations of this study, several things can be suggested from this sample. These respondents are normal, healthy and happy individuals who use illicit and non-illicit drugs without abusing them. Many
of these individuals are well-educated, employed, are generally happy with their income, marital status and physical health. Their recreational drug use does not seem to be the main focus of their daily lives nor does it seem to interfere with their daily living, (i.e., able to keep jobs, if they are in school they are able to maintain good G.P.A.’s, and able to have positive social functioning).

Listed below are the themes that emerged upon analysis of the survey results. These themes will be expanded on within this chapter.

- The survey adults who use illicit drugs recreationally still have a successful life despite their drug use.
- Respondents (93.5%) were for reform of drug laws and of those 39.1% of the respondents were in favor of legalization of drugs and 62.3% were in favor of legalization of marijuana.
- Respondents saw no difference in marijuana versus alcohol or tobacco.
- Respondents ranked the severity of drugs into the categories of soft drugs and hard drugs (i.e., heroin and cocaine). Marijuana was always classified as a soft drug.
- Respondents (95.5%) felt that current drug laws were ineffective.
- Respondents felt that efforts in education, prevention and rehabilitation should be increased.
- The major problem the respondents faced with their drug use was not from their use, but from their fear of getting caught for their use. Problems stemmed more
from the illegality of use versus any deviant or violent behavior they may or may not incur from their use.

These findings cannot be generalized to the entire population of recreational drug users. Nor can generalization of these findings be made to those individuals who are non-abusive drug users who utilize the internet. The findings can only be representative to those individuals who participated in the survey. Respondents from this survey shared characteristics similar to internet users from marketing surveys. As indicated in the surveys, internet users are more likely to be college-educated than the general public. Eighty-seven percent (n = 117) of the respondents from this study had a Baccalaureate degree or higher. Respondents also had a median household income of approximately $49,000, which is just under the approximate median household income of $60,000 for internet users. This data adds validity to previous studies that provided evidence that considerable numbers of individuals are able to use illicit drugs in a safe or minimally hazardous way and maintain a normal, healthy lifestyle. This point is further supported by respondents’ comments in Table 1 that they are living normal lifestyles and are successful despite their drug use. The fact that respondents were forthcoming with their successes despite their drug use without being directly asked shows that they have a desire for this issue to be known. These adults are successful and can use drugs recreationally without any harm to their success, minus the issue that the drugs are illegal.

Discussion

One surprising finding was the level of agreement among answers from the respondents. Upon reviewing the responses to the open-ended questions and specific
questions regarding making drugs legal, effectiveness of current laws and enforcement, etc., many of the individuals responded with very similar answers. Cross-tabulations were also conducted to determine any differences with gender, marital status, citizenship, and if they had legal problems. These comparisons confirmed evidence that many of the respondents had similar opinions on these issues regardless of the aforementioned characteristics.

There were some small differences, however, that emerged. Respondents were asked to rank importance of religion in their lives, and very few ranked it to be important (see Table 3). They were also asked if they attend church regularly (see Table 2). Their responses were notably lower than the national average. Ninety-one percent did not attend regularly. However, as noted in Chapter 4 page 29, several of the respondents felt that they were spiritual, but not religious. The spirituality that these respondents commented on having is based on their experiences with their drug use. There is no question to measure the level of spirituality that they have, so it is difficult to determine how spiritual this sample population is. In future studies it would be good to ask the respondent to define what spirituality means to them because their comments seemed to indicate their spirituality was based more on their inner-self understanding versus a relationship with a being higher than themselves. Despite the respondents’ low level of religious importance, some of them felt their drug experiences were positive and helped them to be more open-minded, focused, and relaxed (examples are in Table 16). Based on these responses, it could be viewed that maybe these people are less religious because they seem to sometimes gain from their drug use what others gain from their religious
beliefs and practices. The researcher feels that this viewpoint would be important to explore because so many people are always looking for answers to meaning in life questions, and they are also looking to obtain peace, focus, relaxation, self-awareness, etc. These are all areas that religious and spiritual people sometimes feel they get with their beliefs, practices and fellowships. Further comments regarding religion and future studies are discussed in the Conclusions section of this chapter.

Of major significance in this study was the high number of respondents' who were for reform of the drug laws (see Table 4 for statistics and Table 5 for comments). The reform question also included strategies such as legalization and/or decriminalization of currently illegal drugs. The overwhelming response to this question (93.5% for reform) seems to indicate that major reform is necessary. The type of reform that 39.1% (n = 61) of the respondents were in favor of was for legalization of drugs (see Table 5). Even out of the three people that commented to not legalize drugs (Table 9), only one stated he/she was not sure about the effectiveness of the laws and thought that the punishment should be increased. The other two respondents stated that it was either too late to legalize or that radical reform of the drug laws should be conducted. The researcher also felt it was important to look at respondents who seemed in favor of legalization of illicit drugs but did not specifically state that they were (Table 11). These people made comments that marijuana was not any worse than alcohol or cigarettes and that it is big business for the government to keep drugs illegal, etc. These people show that it is important for future studies to directly ask the question of whether respondents are for legalization of drugs (separating marijuana from the other drugs). Because some people probably would have
said they were for legalization, but did not directly say it or maybe address it because they were not asked.

One major theme that emerged from this study is that many of the respondents saw no difference in marijuana versus alcohol and/or tobacco (see Table 12), thus supporting the common belief that marijuana is no more harmful than alcohol or tobacco. The fact that many of the respondents use marijuana and have indicated that they have healthy, normal and successful lifestyles seems to support that belief even further. It was interesting to find that the respondents made good arguments regarding marijuana not causing the same problems as alcohol. For example, typically people are less violent with marijuana use than alcohol. The fact that alcohol and tobacco and not marijuana are legal does seem to imply some bias on the part of lawmakers. However, that does not mean that legalization of marijuana would make things right either. The researcher also noticed that upon analysis of the problem experiences, not one respondent stated that they had any medical or violent problems related to their marijuana use, except for the illegality of it.

One other major theme that developed was that respondents seemed to rank the severity of drugs (i.e., soft drugs versus hard drugs). Of those who commented about this ranking (see Table 13 for examples), they all seemed to agree that marijuana is a soft drug. Moreover, they felt that because marijuana was a soft drug and less harmful than hard drugs (i.e., heroin and cocaine) it should be legalized, but not necessarily the hard drugs. This viewpoint further supports the belief in legalization of marijuana and that there are few differences between it and alcohol and tobacco. Based on this separation of marijuana versus other illicit drugs, in future studies it would be good to directly ask
respondents if they are in support of legalization of marijuana, and include a separate question about other drugs. To further support legalization of marijuana comments were made regarding its medicinal uses. Some of the respondents seemed to support the idea that marijuana has therapeutic advantages. With the increase in studies regarding marijuana as a medicinal plant, these responses are important to help support these studies.

One anticipated theme was that respondents seemed to emphatically support the notion that the current drug laws and enforcement, i.e., the War on Drugs, are not effective (Table 10). This finding came as no surprise to the researcher because of the continued drug arrests that occur. Some respondents commented that the ineffectiveness is parallel to the prohibition efforts with alcohol (Table 14). Maybe lawmakers and law enforcement officers need to look at past history and learn from those mistakes. When something is denied to a person, natural human curiosity and defiance sometimes emerges and no threat of punishment will deter them. It is very similar to the concept of a person under twenty-one years of age still taking the risks to drink alcohol and wanting to continue that use. Part of the “fun” of the use is the prohibition of it. Once they turn twenty-one and it is legal to them, some of the fun wears off. Also, naturally for most recreational drinkers, they tend to use less as they age and mature. Many of the respondents expanded on their legal problems as it relates to their use (Table 7). A lot of those comments centered around their arrest and eventual dismissal of charges, which some commented was a “waste of taxpayers money.” It seems that the law enforcement efforts have no effect because they are spending money and time on people who are
recreationally using drugs and harming no one in the process (except for the driving under the influence and the potential harm of that). As these respondents stated, their use continues. The ineffectiveness is further compounded when law enforcement officers harass the people they perceive as drug users (Table 16). These issues support the recurrent theme that reform of the current laws needs to be considered.

Respondents had interesting, impassioned and thoughtful comments regarding ideas for addressing these problems (Table 15), i.e., legalizing and taxing drugs and increasing/improving education, prevention, and rehabilitation. Based on responses, another theme that the researcher determined was that regardless of whether all or some drugs should or should not be legalized, efforts in education, prevention and rehabilitation should be increased. Given that a lot of money has been expended on law enforcement efforts and there is still drug use, there has to be education on use, proper use and effects of use. This need follows the same concept as the safer sex model (and safer drinking). People may feel that others should not have sex with multiple partners, but the fact remains that even if they do there are ways to make their sexual behavior safer. It may not be one hundred percent effective, but it is better than no safety measures. In the same respect, the use of drugs may not be ideal to some, but teaching people to be responsible with their use and educating them about realistic use [i.e., positive and negative effects and true statistics of use (a concept of social norming)] is better than no safety measures.

Another emerging theme was the major problem that many respondents seemed to deal with regarding their drug use: the fear of getting caught using the illegal substance (Table 8). Their problems stemmed more from the illegality of their use versus any
deviant or violent behavior that they may or may not incur from their use. This problem further supports the notion that they can utilize drugs recreationally and have normal and successful lives, but because it is illegal that perception is tainted. This notion is also not seen by the public because these people are too worried about legal ramifications of making their successful, recreational use known. They do not want to tell their co-worker, boss, etc., that they use drugs and are still okay for fear of being reported. The researcher found it interesting that despite their paranoia or past legal problems, many of the respondents directly stated that they still use drugs (Table 17). The risks were not enough to stop their use. They may curtail their use because of the risks, but not necessarily stop their use altogether. From their comments it was indicated that several of them stopped their use or utilized periodically just because they wanted to, not because of the laws. This cessation of use may be due to age and/or less fascination with use of drugs.

Limitations

With this research being a pilot study effort, there were some study limitations with this study that were encountered by the researcher and by the respondents. The lessons learned from these limitations have been applied to a revised larger Drugnet survey. A major limitation experienced by the researcher was a 30% non-response rate for many of the items, specifically with the demographic and behavioral sections. Initial pilot testing of the survey showed that it could be completed in 15-30 minutes, depending on the person's drug history and familiarity with computers. The test may have seemed too long and by the time respondents came to the demographic and behavioral sections (which
were at the end of the survey) they may have decided to quit, determining these items of less interest. It would be more beneficial to place these items at the beginning of the survey. These items are very important for use in cross-referencing of data and determining if there are any major differences due to demographics.

An important limitation suggested by respondents was that the survey did not address changing patterns of drug use through an individual’s life. It did not allow for people to indicate whether or not they still use a certain drug, especially regarding drugs they had used only once or have not consumed lately (the past five or six years). Their present drug use may be very different from their drug habits when they were younger. The only way their history use, as it relates to these issues, could be determined depended upon their stating anything about it in the essay questions section. That source does not allow for accuracy when analyzing whether people still use because they were not specifically asked that question, so the information supplied in the essay section is strictly self-initiated.

Respondents also stated that another limitation was the survey did not include newer recreational drugs (i.e., MDMA (Ecstacy) and Dextromethorphan Hydrobromide). Some of these “newer” drugs could be placed in already designated categories within the study (i.e., MDMA as a hallucinogen). Respondents, however, felt MDMA should be in it’s own category. Newer drugs, as they become increasingly popular, should be included in future Dragnet studies and other research.
One other limitation was that the residence of the respondents is not known in this analysis. The citizenship of the respondents is known, but it is not known where the respondents were living at the time they completed the survey.

Of positive note, however, was the respondents' willingness to answer the open-ended essay questions. The responses were very impassioned and showed a desire and need to be heard. The fact that they supplied more information than requested also shows their need to be heard. Their responses and willingness to respond shows that this study was necessary and beneficial.

Conclusions

Within the defined limitations of this study, one of the major themes that emerged from the results was that a strong majority (95.5%) of this sample population of recreational drug using internet users were in complete agreement that the current laws and efforts to curtail the drug problem in America are ineffective. As previously discussed, even though some of the respondents experienced legal problems as a result of their use, half of them continued to use drugs recreationally. Some indicated that their use had slowed down due to their legal problems, but they did not indicate that it ceased because of any legal problems. A true measurement of the respondents' use could not be obtained in this study, but there is a strong need for future studies regarding this issue. Based on this result it can be concluded that, according to this survey sample, there is a need for legal efforts to be changed and newer methods need to be researched.

A related theme that emerged was that reform of current drug laws is needed. The general consensus among respondents was that either all drugs or some drugs (i.e., soft
drugs which includes marijuana) should be legalized or some type of change needs to be made with the current laws (i.e., lessen some of the penalties for use and possession of small amounts). Another important theme that was found was the separation of marijuana as a soft drug (and legalization of it) versus other illicit drugs as hard drugs (i.e., cocaine and heroin) and whether or not to legalize these hard drugs. As previously mentioned on page 39, future studies need to directly ask the question of whether people are for legalization of marijuana and include a question about reform or legalization as it relates to other illicit drugs. Future studies also need to examine the possibility of marijuana being legalized for medicinal purposes.

Based on these results, suggestions for taxing drugs seem to be feasible as well as lessening the penalties for use. It might be more beneficial to place drug abusers in rehabilitation facilities initially rather than jail or have them participate in research that examines why they use and what causes them to move from recreational use to abuse. Future studies should also explore the effectiveness of follow-up/evaluation of people who have been arrested and released from jail. Because several respondents commented that their arrests were very ineffective in curtailing their use and some even developed more education on how to further their use and/or selling/obtaining drugs, follow-up and education with these individuals is crucial. Just arresting them and throwing them into jail or rehabilitation does not seem to have long-term impact on many people who use drugs. Research of the effectiveness of their arrests or forced rehabilitation would help to facilitate one of the major suggestions from this study, which is providing education of proper use and realistic education about use. This study showed that education could be a
major focal point of changes to the efforts to curtail the drug problem. It is important for users to have correct information about drugs so that they can avoid being placed in harmful situations. Users need to know the negative consequences, but education should not solely focus on that because, as the Drugnet study helps to support, recreational use is not always harmful.

When discussing legalization of drugs, many of the respondents were for legalization of marijuana but not necessarily all drugs. This study showed that many respondents felt that marijuana use was no more harmful than alcohol and cigarettes, which are legal. Further study regarding legalization of marijuana should be conducted. Included in these studies should be the idea that marijuana could be legalized for medical purposes. Also, they should examine whether marijuana is not as harmful because it is illegal, thus keeping utilization lower than if it were legal, and whether increased use causes any major problems. This last research suggestion was made because some respondents indicated their use is lower for fear of getting caught. They also commented that alcohol and cigarettes are legal, and they have caused many problems. Therefore, the legalization of another drug may cause more problems, because people may not be as careful with their use (i.e., driving under the influence) without the fear of being arrested for their use. There fear of getting caught and hiding it from others may make some people be more reckless or careless. This issue is very important and difficult to address because so much money is spent on people’s addictions and complications from their drug use that is already legal. The idea of legalizing other drugs raises concern on how that will impact those expenses as well as societal complications. However, a lot of money is being spent
on legal efforts to stop drugs in this country. Also, as several respondents pointed out, prohibition was ineffective with alcohol. Regardless of the money spent on law enforcement efforts drugs are still imported, made and used in this country. Therefore careful exploration of legalization of other drugs should be considered. Some respondents suggested investigating legalization of other drugs as well. Respondents from this study also felt that it should be considered that there will always be new drugs created or old ones being used in new ways, so some type of regulation needs to be considered when addressing legalization or reform. It is recommended by the researcher that further studies be conducted with larger sample populations and to consider looking at the opinions of those who utilize the internet and who do not use drugs and compare their responses to the reform and law efficacy questions. It is also recommended that religious and spiritual beliefs be explored more thoroughly because this issue typically plays an important role in whether or not people use drugs. A study of the nondrug using internet population should include whether a more religious and/or spiritual person would use drugs less or not at all based on their beliefs. Also, it is not known how more religious and/or spiritual people would respond with relative to the reform and effectiveness of law questions. A comparison of the non-religious or less-religious importance versus more religious would probably show different results. One more area to consider researching regarding religion is to look at whether drug users are less religious due to their drug use or if it is a function of age, since young people, by and large, are not particularly oriented toward religion.
Based on the impassioned responses and strong agreement of responses, this study shows there is a definite need and potential for further in-depth studies regarding drug laws, reform, and legalization of drugs. This topic is very sensitive for many people and continues to be a never-ending battle with many casualties. To quote one of the respondents: “The War on Drugs is the new Vietnam – a war we can’t win.” However, with the help of new studies such as this one, maybe we can stop some of the battles and heal some of the wounds.

In conclusion, this study answered the main research question that this internet sample of recreational drug users would not view the current drug laws and enforcement to be effective and that they would be for the reform of these current drug laws. Legalization, improved educational efforts, and improved rehabilitation/treatment programs were the main suggestions for reform. This study also supported the themes regarding the belief marijuana is not any more harmful than alcohol and tobacco and that it should be considered for legalization.
References


Past Experiences

We'd like to know about any past encounters you've ever had with drug policy and enforcement. Tell us how drug use and law enforcement have affected your life.

1. Have you ever had legal problems because of your use of recreational drugs?
   ○ yes
   ○ no

2. Have you ever been convicted of a drug-related (i.e. drug possession and/or trafficking) felony offense?
   ○ yes
   ○ no

3. Have you ever been convicted of a non-drug (i.e. not drug possession and/or trafficking) felony offense in the United States?
   ○ yes
   ○ no

4. Have you ever been convicted of a violent felony offense?
   ○ yes
   ○ no

5. We would like you to briefly describe for us your problem experiences and your opinions and feelings about them.


6. Do you believe that the current drug laws and enforcement are effective in dealing with America's drug problem?
7. Would you support major drug reform which included strategies such as legalization and/or decriminalization of currently illegal drugs?
- [ ] yes
- [ ] no

8. Is there anything else that you would like to tell the researchers about drugs and your experiences with them?
Table 1

**Comments dealing with respondents maintaining normal lives despite drug use**

- "Despite his drug use, he’s a successful professional."
- "Occasionally use drugs, but not something to base one’s life on...Doesn’t think, in his opinion, that drug use has had any lasting negative effects."
- "Graduate GPA is 3.8...doesn’t feel drug use has compromised intellectual abilities."
- "...uses drugs and has a normal, successful life (job, wife and child)."
- "I started experimenting with drugs in high school, and even while I would try some kind of recreational drug every weekend, (LSD, Methamphetamines, mushrooms, etc) I maintained a 4.00 all through high school, most of college and during graduate school. I received a scholarship to the U of Oregon, and a graduate teaching assistantship at the U of New Orleans in Biological Psychology. I have a very happy existence in general, am usually pretty upbeat, and I feel am more creative, explorative, and filled with wonder at the little things in life than most other people. I have fun with my mind, body, and surroundings, and the occasional use of drugs has never harmed me in any way, and actually has helped me grow in my personal life, and artistically. “There are plenty of us in the world who can maintain moderation.”
- "Successful engineer with a wife and two children despite drug use."
- "What is often left out of the whole "debate" (if you can call it that) ... is that it IS possible to take some drugs sometimes and NOT have it screw up your life. It is not necessarily some dead end path of destruction. It is not truthful to tell people that drugs are all bad - sometimes they help and feel good - that should be explained and accepted."
- "... and a special note, not all drug use constitutes a problem. Moderation is the key."

Table Continues
Table 2

**Do You Attend Church Regularly?**

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**Note:** Samples Sizes vary due to missing data.
Table 3

What is the Importance of Religion in Your Life?

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Note: Samples Sizes vary due to missing data.

\(^a\)Levels of rank are: 0 is of no importance and 10 is of great importance.
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Table 5

Comments dealing with support of drug reform as it relates to legalization of drugs

- "... I believe drugs should be legalized."

- "I believe marijuana is a very positive drug, a gift from God, the only problem-free (other than legal) stress reliever, including sex, that I know of. I tried many, many drugs during my adolescence and college days, but marijuana, alcohol and caffeine are the only ones I stuck with. I think that all except marijuana have potential health consequences, but I firmly believe that all should be decriminalized."

- "I think that most of the drug laws make criminals out of the very people that our society ought to be trying to help. I feel that drugs should be de-criminalized, but controlled. Drug treatment should be free and easily obtainable. Until we take the profits out of dealing drugs we will continue to have a black-market drugs trade, and as long as that's the case our prisons will be full."

- "The best way to reduce harm from drugs is to legalize them and allow rules and etiquette regarding their use develop just as rules regarding alcohol use have naturally come about in society. We still have alcohol abusers but imagine the problems if alcohol was illegal like pot, heroin etc."

- "No, I rarely take any form of drug, but I feel that legalization would end most of the negative effects society feels from drugs."

- "... Legalize and tax."
Table 6

Comments explaining harassment from law enforcement officers

- “In 1971, I was busted for possession and cultivation of marijuana. The search and seizure was illegal, and I was given no Miranda warning. The cops claimed they found morphine and needles, though I had never used either. The case was eventually dropped. They'll never take me alive again. Being busted and in jail (13 hrs.) was the most humiliating and scariest time of my life. It certainly fostered a distrust of the police dept.”

- “I have had police officers harass me and friends of mine because they "knew" we were "druggies" (their terminology). By pure luck, I have never been caught by the police for possession, but I have been under surveillance and had my car stopped and searched on several occasions... There were at least six different officers that would go out of their way to stop me, either while driving or walking on the street, for various petty reasons. In my opinion, this constituted police harassment... there were many more severe violent crimes being committed in that city every day that should have drawn their undivided attention.”

- “I was arrested for DUI when in fact I was not legally drunk. The arrest however cost me a good deal of money and anguish to clear my name. I consider myself the innocent victim of an overly zealous police trying to enforce social legislation out of context and inappropriately.”

- “I once got arrested and charged with felony drug possession of pot (in Nevada any amount is a felony). I had less than a gram. In the end, the judge thought it was a bunch of crap so I got a minor in possession of alcohol.”

- “SEARCHES, SEIZURES, AND GENERAL HASSLES”

- “Hassled by police while growing up--hung out with ‘known felons’.”

- “I got sweated by the cops for smoking on the street too near a school (in 1977). That was the only time.”
Table 7

**Comments dealing with arrests or convictions of drug use or possession of drugs**

- "I was driving on LSD once and stopped in the middle of the road. The police arrested me on a non-drug related charge and kept me in jail overnight. They then released me and all charges were dropped."

- "I was entrapped by law enforcement officials in Virginia. The case was ultimately dismissed & the DA was charged with theft."

- "I got strung out about 10 years ago and got myself into trouble with the law. I was arrested but never convicted. Got a suspended imposition of sentence and probation. This episode was due to drug abuse (a brief phase in my life compounded by other emotional circumstances) not the recreational use of drugs which has been a part of my daily activities since age 15."

- "Busted for possession. Waste of taxpayers money."

- "Received two summons to appear in court for possession of less than an ounce of marijuana (California). Both were dismissed by the DA's office before going to court, but it was a waste of time & the cop's efforts to go through the motions."

- "I was caught with a small amount of pot while hitch-hiking when I was 16 years old. It was a misdemeanor offense. Since I was a minor it was wiped off my record after a period of time."

- "When I was 16 years old I was interrogated by the sheriff's department for 'conspiracy to purchase and distribute LSD'. I was scared out of my wits. My parents went sort of nuts. No charges were pressed."

- "DUI 12 years ago. A mistake that has not been repeated."

- "I got caught smoking marijuana outside of a bar when I was 19. Consequences: I was unable to volunteer for a "Big Brother" type of mentor relationship with a younger male. I just about didn't get a job (lucky my dad was a manager at the company) I feel that the criminal record (that I am now pardoned from) is way out of proportion to the crime."

Table Continues
Table 7 continued

- "I have been convicted of possession and supply of cannabis. I resent being made a criminal for doing something that harms no one. I am a responsible adult and wish to make my own decisions about my lifestyle."
Table 8

Comments dealing with respondents paranoia regarding their drug use

• "economic stressors and the increase in lying and pressure are a far greater problem than recreational drug use in this country."

• "No arrests, but it bugs the hell out of me that I have to worry about possession of marijuana, hide it from casual acquaintances and be less than open and honest about it with my kids (ages 8 and 6). I don't acknowledge that I smoke marijuana (infrequently) but I do tell them that there are good and bad drugs and more dangerous and less dangerous drugs, that my nightly beer and morning coffee are drugs, the same as their uncle's cigarettes."

• "In my younger hippie days of regular acid use, there was a moderate anxiety about the police catching on to us, but we realized that unless we exhibited really bizarre behaviors, there was no real way for them to know that we were 'on drugs'."

• "no problem experiences ... except for some worry / paranoia about getting 'caught'.""

• "The rest of us only have a problem in affording it and of course taking the horrendous risk in being persecuted by an archaic and insane judicial system."

• "The only problem experiences I've had with drugs is work-related drug testing. I feel very bitter about it, and I have no incentive to further my career. Since I occasionally still use marijuana (usually only on Friday nights to allow the weekend for flushing), I could someday test positive (so far, only negative). One positive test would damage my career..."

• "The only problem is a feeling of guilt about breaking what I see as unreasonable and unnecessary laws (marijuana prohibition). I'm careful, so I don't get caught. The fear that I might get caught always exists."

• "Generally life is good, I am in a stable and happy relationship, and I'm enjoying my job (a research post in a university). All that would change were I to be arrested for use of marijuana, so I keep my fingers crossed."

Table Continues
Table 8 continued

- "No, I have problems with most law enforcements and how they deal with pot! Many of them are so phony, they use pot too . . . using pot has caused me lots of grief when I would otherwise be a good citizen!"

- "I have long believed, through my own and others' anecdotal experience, that there are a large number of people who can use drugs with sense and without destroying their lives. We're mostly very quiet about it because: the possibility of jeopardizing jobs, the fact that such a belief is politically incorrect and legally dangerous, and the belief that no one would believe us anyway."

Comments dealing with respondents against legalization of drugs

- “Do I support the legalization of drugs? Absolutely not. Radical reform of the drug laws are necessary. Adults should have the opportunity to make decisions for themselves, and where those decisions do not directly impact others, legislation should not exist. Our current drug laws are an attempt at isolated morality. They are identical to the failed prohibition of alcohol, only the use of marijuana is not as commonplace, so there isn't the same uproar. Remember: prohibition was legislated by the majority, but it was still wrong.”

- “It is probably too late to decriminalize drug use/sale/etc. The violence and gangs are here to stay. Compared to visit to other places in Europe with their ghettoized tolerance of drugs, that could have worked here. But the violence is so much a part of the drug culture because of the amount of money to be made. Oh well. Our grand-children will curse us.”

- This person did not know if laws were effective and stated to “Increase the punishment.”
Table 10

Comments dealing with laws not being effective

- "Not at all. The problems lie in lack of real education about the pros and cons of drug use and in the failure to address the problems of the underclass."

- "No, obviously not. The problem here is that all of the laws treat the symptoms of the problem and not the cause. Drug offenders and criminals with problems are not rehabilitated, simply locked away with more of their type, compounding their learned behavior. Another problem is that people try to stop drug trafficking using law enforcement. The drug trade is supply and demand based. The reason there is drug trafficking (supply) is because there are users (demand). Cut off the demand, and the supply will be useless. The problem here is to cut off the demand, which isn't being addressed."

- For laws effective the reply was "obviously not."

- For laws effective the reply was "Not even close!!"

- For laws effective the reply was "Not at all the current drug laws are America's drug problem."
Table 11

Comments dealing with non-specific remarks regarding legalization of illicit drugs

- "No. Laws are completely out of touch with the drug problem. I do believe there should be laws but they should not be manifested the way they are at present. I could elaborate more but it would take too long."

- "Man has sought consciousness changing substances since the beginning of time. This strikes me as a natural thing. Current drug suppression is all about money and power. In a supposedly "free" society, adults should have the right to do anything they please as long as it does not bring others to harm."

- "While mores should be laws because they deal with the violation of others' rights, morals should NOT be laws because they do not (once again in my sense of the word) violate others' rights! If I earn 50,000+ a year, please my bosses, take care of my family and my retirement (since I know the government won't be able to), and smoke a little marijuana that I grow next to my tomatoes and basil in my garden, then I should be thrown in prison stripped of my rights as a citizen and treated worse than a violent rapist or murderer-Right?"

- "No. They don't deal with the reasons people want to use drugs, they just punish people for behavior that some of them can't do anything about. Also, there is something about forbidding something that makes it more desirable. We have done nothing to make drugs less interesting to young people, who often use drugs for the same reasons they take other chances that people later in life might not take -- they believe they are immortal, and that they won't be the one to get caught. (I know I was this way, and the time period during which I tried more things, I was very young.)" This person also stated "I have no experience with "hard" drugs like cocaine or speed. I can tell you, however, that I think marijuana is no more harmful than cigarettes or alcohol, from personal experience of all three."

- For laws effective the reply was "Absolutely not I could fill book with my opinion here. We all know that the government is the ultimate supplier of illegal drugs in the us and it is big business for the govt to keep drugs illegal."

- "If they were we wouldn't have a drug problem."
Table 12
Comments regarding differences in effects of use of marijuana, versus alcohol and/or cigarettes

- One person stated that "... I think marijuana is no more harmful than cigarettes or alcohol, from personal experience of all three."

- "Alcohol is by far the worst/most dangerous/destructive drug in my experience."

- "I do think that if pot was legalized it would reduce some of the crime and also the alcohol consumption."

- His "use of marijuana is no different to another using alcohol as a relaxant, save that he is most unlikely to become aggressive or violent as a result of his marijuana use, a claim many users of alcohol would be unable to make."

- "I see a lot more problems caused by alcohol than by pot."

- "I personally have never seen why our society draws such a sharp line between alcohol and other drugs. Booze is one of the nastiest, most addictive, most debilitating drugs I can think of."

- "I think that marijuana use should be decriminalized. I think marijuana should be treated as any other agricultural crop, with taxation etc. It should be regulated by the FDA as an herb (which is exactly what it is by definition)."

- "..., marijuana should be as free as cigarettes and alcohol."

- "The laws against pot are stupid and unjust. Although I believe that pot is not as destructive as some other drugs, putting people behind bars for smoking a little pot at home is absurd."
Table 10

Comments dealing with hard drugs vs. soft drugs

- "I am not sure that hard drugs should be legalized, they are much more destructive and addictive. I do think that if pot was legalized it would reduce some of the crime and also the alcohol consumption."

- "... drugs should be analyzed by the medical community to determine the benefits of them... drugs should not be blackballed out of research."

- "... legalize pot, take tax money from that to fight the crack, and other drug problems that cause crime, murder, gangs. law enforcement is being bought off with the high priced drug trade, (not pot)."

- "Benevolent 'drugs' (i.e. pot, etc.) should be legalized in the same fashion as more dangerous ones (e.g., aspirin). If, at the same time, other drugs (e.g. LSD, coke, etc.) were available through 'restricted' / 'controlled' channels (e.g. by prescription), then the so-called "drug problem" would virtually disappear."

- "Drugs make lives (with the exception of heroin, crack etc.), oppressive drug laws ruin lives. Marijuana has made me a successful person."

- "... soft drugs should be legalized."

- "I don't believe all drugs should be legalized. But certainly pot should be."

- "Decriminalization of marijuana and establishment of a new and separate corrections institution for addicts and abusers of more dangerous drugs, would greatly reduce the damage to our society from drugs without compromising the rights and freedom of any American citizen"

- "I steadfastly support the Dutch model of decriminalizing personal possession, minor cultivation, and responsible use of soft drugs over the current attempt to legislate morality on an unwilling population."

Table Continues
Table 13 Continued

- "... My use of marijuana is no different to another using alcohol as a relaxant, save that I am most unlikely to become aggressive or violent as a result of my cannabis consumption, a claim many users of alcohol would be unable to make. I do not hold the same views as regards "hard" drugs, such as LSD, amphetamines & cocaine, as these are essentially man-made "poisons" of unknown origin & content."

- "Coke, Heroin=bad drugs, keep illegal E's, speed=probably keep illegal, with a possible future review of medical research pot=HARMLESS. Legalise at once!"

- "Absolutely not. I strongly support the legalization of soft drugs, and believe legalization of other drugs should also be studied."

- "... Other, more powerful drugs like hallucinogens, cocaine, amphetamines and especially heroin can be extremely dangerous. These drugs are normally used infrequently and in small quantities. My experience with drugs and other drug users has show that more frequent and dangerous use of 'hard' drugs and abuse of marijuana, pharmaceuticals, and hallucinogens, result from irresponsibility or mental and emotional problems. Government control of marijuana is, at best, totally unnecessary. Not only would legalization take a tremendous load off our police agencies, legalization would also allow otherwise law abiding and characteristically peaceful citizens to live without the persecution and prosecution deserved by other, more violent and destructive criminals. I believe heroin, powerful hallucinogens, cocaine, amphetamines, and most other 'hard' drugs, are far too dangerous to be legalized."
Table 14

Comments dealing with prohibition of alcohol vs. drugs

- "Prohibition did not work with alcohol, it does not work with other drugs."
- "Prohibition does not work."
- "Firm believer that the current United States drug policy has many uncomfortable parallels with alcohol prohibition with regard to effectiveness."
- "As with alcohol prohibition, if you try to control what the people want, organized crime will always supply the need."
- "I see no evidence that prohibition works. It just creates alternate, tax evading channels that create more serious problems with struggles among competing suppliers."
- "We tried prohibition with booze. It didn't work. We should apply that lesson to other drugs."
- "Prohibition simply does not work (see failed policies earlier in this century regarding prohibition of intoxicants) and usually has the opposite effect."
- "The war on drugs is absurd, as the prohibition era should have taught us long ago."
- "Just like in the prohibition people DIED because they had no control over the quality of what they were imbibing."
Table 15

Comments dealing with focus on education, prevention, and rehabilitation vs. law enforcement

- "Law enforcement is focused on the belief that if you get rid of the supply you will get rid of the demand. This simply does not work with illicit drug use. Instead we should focus on dealing with the problems that contribute to people using drugs. Also the money spent on law enforcement would be put to better use by investing in drug treatment and research to develop better prevention programs."

- "The problems lie in lack of real education about the pros and cons of drug use and in the failure to address the problems of the underclass."

- "We need to educate and inform - not punish and tell people to 'just don't do it' or 'just say no.'"

- "What is often left out of the whole "debate" (if you can call it that) ... is that it IS possible to take some drugs sometimes and NOT have it screw up your life. It is not necessarily some dead end path of destruction. It is not truthful to tell people that drugs are all bad - sometimes they help and feel good - that should be explained and accepted."

- "The problem here is that all of the laws treat the symptoms of the problem and not the cause. Drug offenders and criminals with problems are not rehabilitated, simply locked away with more of their type, compounding their learned behavior."

- "I believe that TRUTHFUL education is the key to handling the problem, and a special note, not all drug use constitutes a problem."

- When asked if the laws were effective the response was: "No, the drug problem is addiction which is a medical problem not criminal."

- "Education is the key. As with people with alcohol problems, people with drug problems could get help also."

Table Continues
Table 15 Continued

- "Education and treatment for those so inclined to abuse is a more rational approach."

- "Instead of sentencing a drug addict or abuser to years of anal rape (prison), our government should help that person. If we help the crack addict kick his habit, work to restore his rational thought, teach him to face the problems that started him doing crack, and help him build the foundation for a quality life, drug addicts and abusers would seek the help of their government instead of joining gangs and militias to fight their government."

- "... However, instead of treating users of these drugs the same as thieves, rapists, and murderers, they could be sentenced to therapy and actual rehabilitation."

- "I believe strongly that the only way to minimize the problem is to make drug use (and abuse) a health and education issue, rather than a law enforcement issue."

- "Education and de-glamorization of "drugs" to kids is what is needed. If you tell them it's wrong, they'll do it. Simple as that."

- "Instead of wasting billions of dollars on interdiction, I believe that a much smaller percentage of that money can provide adequate treatment programs for those who feel they have a problem with drugs, saving us money and keeping the prisons from being a place to throw every minor offender."
Table 16

Comments dealing with positive experiences from drug use

- “Very positive experiences, helped open my mind to the world and people around me I feel I have lived more than the average non-drug-experimenter.”

- “My use of illegal drugs is infrequent now. I do like them, however-they are enjoyable and often give me significant insights into things.”

- “I enjoyed drug use. I learned a lot from drug use. My colleagues consider me to be a creative and independent thinker, and I believe that I developed some of these skills because of experiences I had while under the influence of drugs.”

- “I feel I've become more aware of who I am and how I interact with individuals in every day life. To be able to be one with oneself is surely important regardless of the source of this 'oneness.'”

- “Marijuana, when used in moderation, can actually have medical benefits as well as positive effects on emotional and mental well-being.”

- “I believe my occasional pot use has helped me become a more relaxed, focused and honorable human being.”

- “Using marijuana leads me to experiences of relaxation and open-minded discussions.”

- “Drugs have been a major positive experience in my life. The use of psychedelic drugs has allowed me to explore parts of my life that I would not have otherwise looked at.”

- “It's a cliché, but drugs really do 'expand your mind'. You get to see so many things with a new perspective after you've tried drugs. (Apart from alcohol and cigarettes, where you tend not to appreciate your altered state after you 'come down').”
Table 17

Comments dealing with respondents who continue to use drugs

- "But then I stopped all together, and now it is just recreational stuff on occasion, and totally under control."

- "I'm now 30 years old, use weed on an almost daily basis and use hallucinogens about once a year, and a couple drinks every other month or so. I am a full time homemaker and part time student and quite successful in both areas. I pay my taxes and go to PTA and all that good stuff too. :) I'm just like anyone other middle class homemaker, except because of draconian laws I'm also technically a 'criminal'. Go figg."  

- "I do, however, like to hit a joint now and then. Much less than I used to, but I don't see anything wrong with it if it doesn't affect my relationships or interfere with my daily life in any way."

- "Having experimented with other drugs during my teens and early twenties, my current use is limited to recreational use of marijuana."

- "... I tried various drugs in college and after. Cocaine never did anything. LSD, etc. was infrequent and for special events. Uppers got me through some finals. Pot is the only thing that is still in use. Its just there to be enjoyed much like the fine wines I collect. It's not a 'gateway' to anything."

- "Most of my recreation use is limited to marijuana. I do have a few drinks per month and use LSD or mushrooms perhaps once per year in a ritual context."

- "The only recreational drugs I still use are pot, coffee, and occasionally alcohol (with careful moderation)."

- "... I use marijuana on a daily basis. I am a college student, and my grades have gotten higher since I started smoking marijuana every day. I have made Dean's list every semester, and President's List last semester."

- "All I use now for the most part is marijuana."