

**Senate Committee to Reassess
Canada's Anti-Drug Legislation and
Policies**

Final Report

**An Exploratory Study Among Canadians
About the Use of Cannabis**

June 2002
10414-001



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Study Highlights | 6 |
| Research Findings | 8 |
| 1. The Main Concerns of Canadians | 9 |
| 2. Overall Perception of Cannabis and Cannabis Use | 11 |
| 3. Attitudes and Behaviour Toward the Use of Cannabis | 15 |
| 4. Challenges and Concerns Related to Cannabis | 19 |
| 5. Options for the Future..... | 25 |

Introduction

Study Context and Objectives

The Senate Committee to Reassess Canada's Anti-Drug Legislation and Policies has commissioned Leger Marketing to conduct an exploratory study among Canadians, as per the terms presented in the service proposal of February 2002.

The main objective of this research project is to **identify and validate the opinion trends with regard to a public policy that could serve as the basis of a social consensus on the use of cannabis in Canada.**

More specifically, the exploratory research must enable the following to be evaluated:

1. The overall perception of drug use in general, and cannabis in particular;
2. The social image (values) associated with the use of cannabis (tradition/openness, constraints/freedom, etc.);
3. Attitudes and social behaviour toward the use of cannabis for recreational purposes;
4. Fears, prejudices and taboos that still exist regarding cannabis (perceived effects, relationship with crime, social cost, impact on young people, etc.);
5. Knowledge and perception of the legislative framework governing the use of cannabis;
6. Expectations of citizens with regard to a public policy on the use of cannabis for recreational purposes.

Methodology

To fulfill the study's objectives Léger Marketing held 16 focus groups across various regions of the country (Montréal, Trois-Rivières, Halifax, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Toronto, London) and conducted a total of 14 in-depth interviews in Montréal and Toronto.

A total of more than 130 Canadians took part in this study conducted during the last two weeks of February and the first week of March 2002.

In each region, participants were selected and invited so as to ensure a representative balance of the different demographic and socioprofessional categories of the population. However, gender and age were the two main criteria that determined the group composition and the distribution of the in-depth interviews. The chart below details the number of participants per region, per gender and age group.

| Groups | Regions and cities | Total number of participants | Gender distribution | | Age groups | | | |
|--|--------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|----|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | | | F | M | 15-18 yrs | 19-24 yrs | 26-35 yrs | 35 yrs & + |
| Group 1 | Montréal | 7 | 4 | 3 | 7 | | | |
| Group 2 | Montréal | 8 | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 4 | |
| Group 3 | Montréal | 6 | 2 | 4 | | | | 6 |
| Group 4 | Trois-Riv. | 7 | 3 | 4 | | 3 | 4 | |
| Group 5 | Trois-Riv | 6 | 4 | 2 | | | | 6 |
| Group 6 | Toronto | 8 | 3 | 5 | 8 | | | |
| Group 7 | Toronto | 8 | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 4 | |
| Group 8 | Toronto | 7 | 3 | 4 | | | | 7 |
| Group 9 | Halifax | 8 | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 4 | |
| Group 10 | Halifax | 8 | 4 | 4 | | | | 8 |
| Group 11 | London | 8 | 5 | 3 | | 4 | 4 | |
| Group 12 | London | 8 | 3 | 5 | | | | 8 |
| Group 13 | Vancouver | 7 | 3 | 4 | | 4 | 3 | |
| Group 14 | Vancouver | 7 | 4 | 3 | | | | 7 |
| Group 15 | Winnipeg | 8 | 4 | 4 | | 4 | 4 | |
| Group 16 | Winnipeg | 8 | 4 | 4 | | | | 8 |
| | | 119 | 58 | 61 | 15 | 27 | 27 | 50 |
| Interview distribution in Montréal and Toronto | | | | | | | | |
| | Montréal | 8 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 2 | | 2 |
| | Toronto | 6 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 | | 2 |

Also, during the selection process, participants were invited to answer questions pertaining to major social issues namely abortion, the death penalty, euthanasia, etc.

Focus groups lasted two hours and the in-depth interviews one hour. These sessions were held in either French or English depending on the location.

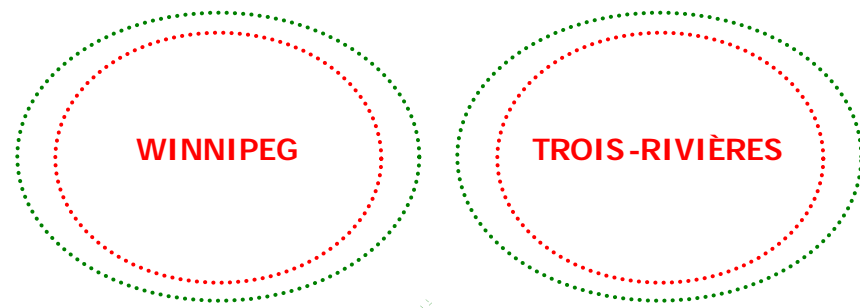
The present document contains the detailed results of the qualitative research project.

Note to readers

- This document exposes the opinions and views of respondents as expressed during the focus groups. It therefore has its limits and must not be taken as an end in itself. The findings reflect the opinions of specific people to specific questions at a given point in time. They are trends and must not be taken to represent the opinions of all citizens, groups or sub-groups of the population being studied. In an effort to make reading easier, the document may contain references to Canadians or residents of a given region or city involved in the study.

Study Highlights

STUDY HIGHLIGHTS



| | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|
| STATUS QUO | INCREASED CRIMINALIZATION |
| PROHIBITIONIST OPTIONS | |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| MIXED OPTIONS | | LEGALIZATION OPTIONS | |
| DE FACTO DECRIMINALIZATION | DECRIMINALIZATION | LEGALIZATION | DEPENALIZATION |

POSITIVE OR NEUTRAL IMPACT ON:

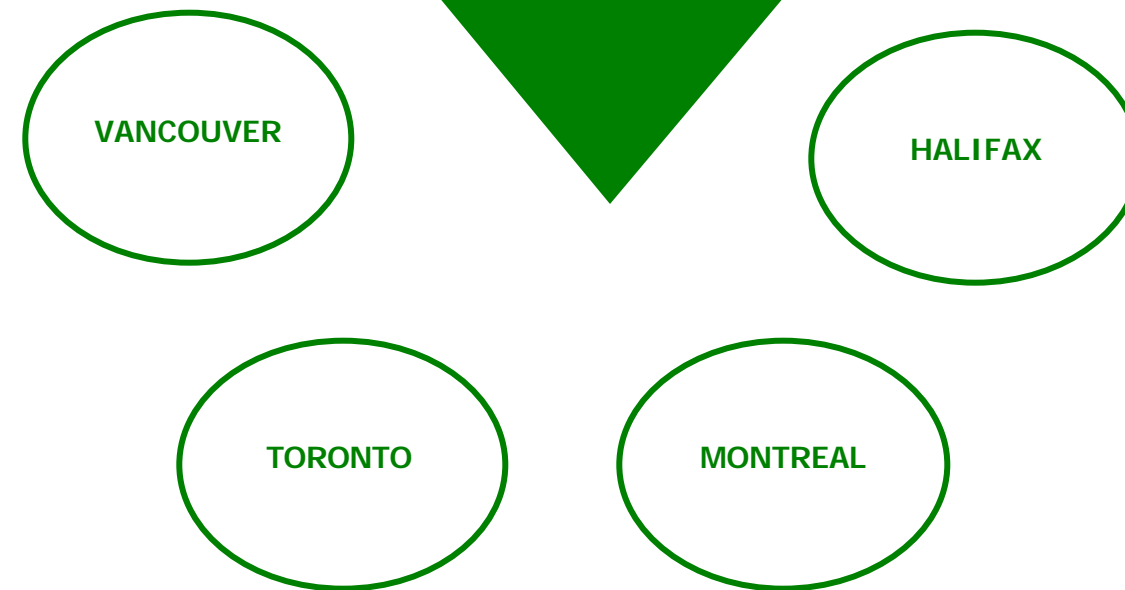
- Cannabis use
- Use among young people
- Ability to inform citizens about the risks related to cannabis
- Health of individuals
- Public health
- Public safety
- Illegal trafficking
- Involvement of organized crime
- Respect of individual rights and freedoms
- Effective use of public monies

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON:

- Cannabis use

POSITIVE OR NEUTRAL IMPACT ON:

- Cannabis Use
- Abuse
- Use among young people
- Ability to information citizens about risks related to cannabis
- Health of individuals
- Public health
- Public safety
- Illegal trafficking
- Involvement of organized crime
- Respect of individual rights and freedoms
- Effective use of public monies



Research Findings

1. The Main Concerns of Canadians

- The recreational use of cannabis does not constitute an everyday concern for Canadians. The moderator of the focus groups had to directly question the participants on the subject of illegal drugs in order to get them to discuss the topic. This shows the subject is not a topical one among Canadians. Once the subject was broached, the participants were more concerned with related criminal activities such as drug trafficking and smuggling than in personal use by Canadians. In addition, participants in various cities were also concerned with the effect the presence of illegal drugs would have on the quality of life and safety in certain neighbourhoods (Gastown in Vancouver or Montreal North in Montreal, for example).
- Canadians are mostly preoccupied with issues related to health, education and poverty.

Health, education and jobs are the key issues on the minds of Canadians

✍ Generally speaking, the Canadians who took part in the focus groups were not overly concerned with issues surrounding the recreational use of cannabis, regardless of their province of residence. When asked to name the issues that preoccupy them most as citizens, health, education, the future of young people, jobs and poverty were spontaneously mentioned.

"health, it's urgent!..." (translation)

*"the quality of the education for today's young people..."
(translation)*

"the gap between the rich and the poor...in the eighties, this gap was not as wide. But today it's like there are either really rich people and really poor people. There's nothing in between anymore..." (translation)

*"tuition fees and cost of education..."
"health care..."*

"cost of living... change in lifestyle..."

None of the participants spontaneously mentioned drugs in general or cannabis in particular.

Violence is a preoccupation related to the events of 9/11.

✍ Violence constitutes another important concern for Canadians. This concern has, however, been exacerbated by the events of September 11, 2001. Five months after the events, we therefore see that Canadians are questioning Canada's ability to defend itself from terrorist attacks. Some doubt that the Canadian Armed Forces are adequately prepared to face this type of situation.

"All this business of war is depressing me. What do you get out of it? Nothing... I just don't see the purpose of it"

"we should have better military equipment..."

"increase in terrorism..."

"there is too much violence: terrorism, the war in Afghanistan..." (translation)

"the Canadians Forces have good ads but they are not well equipped ..." (translation)

"life just seemed to stop in the United States after 9/11" (translation)

2. Overall Perception of Cannabis and Cannabis Use

- Given the fact that it is natural and that it is not associated with any harmful side effects for users, Canadians see cannabis as a “soft” drug and distinguish it from “hard” drugs

Drugs are divided in two main categories

- ✍ Participants proceeded to an almost systematic ranking of the various drugs when they were asked to give their opinion in this respect. They therefore categorize drugs in two, clearly defined groups, namely “hard” drugs and “soft” drugs.

“First, we need to have a clear definition of what a drug is” (translation)

“there are hard and soft drugs...”

“drugs are everything that lead to addiction...beer, work, cigarettes, coffee can be considered drugs” (translation)

Cannabis is a “soft” drug

- ✍ With the exception of a few people who believe that regardless of the name, “drugs are drugs,” the majority of participants placed cannabis in the “soft” drug category. In many cases, the word “drug” was deemed inadequate to describe cannabis. Participants, particularly those in Montreal, Halifax, Toronto and Vancouver, were more likely to compare cannabis to alcohol, since alcohol does not have the same negative connotation as the word “drug”, even though its effects are perceived as the same if not greater than those of marijuana.

“In my view, there are no soft or hard drugs, there are only drugs...” (translation)

“There are some drugs that are not as strong as others...” (translation)

“Marijuana is considered soft...”

“Heroin is hard, marijuana is soft...”

"Smoking marijuana is like having a cigarette and a scotch after work..."

The difference between "soft" and "hard" drugs

Generally speaking, participants included cannabis, ecstasy, hashish, magic mushrooms and alcohol in the "soft" drug category while crack, cocaine, LSD, heroin and opium were defined as "hard" drugs.

✍ The difference between "hard" and "soft" drugs can be explained by two major factors, namely the composition of the product and its effects. "Soft" drugs are made of natural substances and have "controlled" effects. "Hard" drugs are chemically based and have "destructive" effects. Several respondents also mentioned the addictiveness of certain drugs as a further differentiating factor. So-called "chemical" drugs were thought to create an almost immediate dependency compared to marijuana that has practically no risk of dependency according to a very large number of respondents. A large number of participants felt that marijuana as such does not cause dependency when used for recreational purposes, but that it can induce dependency in those with a psychological propensity toward dependency. Once again the comparison with alcohol seemed obvious to the participants: although the great majority of the population can drink alcohol in reasonable quantities, a proportion of the population does develop a dependency. The same can be said for marijuana.

"Soft drugs are more likely to be natural products while hard drugs are made of chemicals and are cut with other substances ..." (translation)

"The way hard drugs are cut is so unpredictable... You don't know what you're getting. Marijuana is a little harder to mess with, so it's more predictable..."

The colour green is spontaneously associated to cannabis

"Smoking a joint doesn't make you an addict..."

"Chances of od'ing on pot are less..."

"You can become addicted to cocaine more easily than to marijuana..."

"Marijuana won't fry your brain cells..."

"Those who get hooked on pot have dependent personalities. That same person could get hooked on gambling, booze or anything else."

"It makes me think of the ogre in Le Petit Poucet"

✂ The term *cannabis* is not often used by Canadians regardless of the region in which they live. They are more likely to use words like *marijuana*, *pot*, *joint* or *weed* to talk about cannabis. In English, in particular, people seemed less familiar with the term *cannabis*.

✂ The fact that cannabis is plant-based greatly influences the perception of Canadians when it comes to this substance. Asked to describe a character that could be associated to cannabis, participants mentioned the following images:

"A plant..."

"A small green man..."

"Green and hairy..."

✂ Some participants eventually associated cannabis to criminal activity and biker gangs. This was mostly the

case in Quebec. Outside of Quebec the association with criminal activity is linked more to environment. In other words, marijuana is associated with certain neighbourhoods where other illegal activities connected to hard drugs take place. Few of the participants felt that occasional marijuana users would be likely to rob or commit other crimes in order to obtain their drug of choice.

"I see a scarecrow, in a field with straw hair...It makes me think of organized criminal groups that plant cannabis in farmer's fields and terrorize them after..." (translation)

"There are people making too much money from it..." (translation)

"This is a man who hangs around bikers..." (translation)

"It's an evil little elf..." (translation)

"I can't picture a guy robbing the corner store to buy himself a joint. This is something heroin addicts would do. First, pot is cheap, second it doesn't make you want it desperately."

3. Attitudes and Behaviour Toward the Use of Cannabis

- There is an element of pleasure and conviviality generally associated with cannabis use, while “hard” drugs are normally associated to moral and physical distress and social degradation. Cannabis is almost always used on social occasions, a little like alcohol. Marijuana users present in the groups, as well as those who had previously experimented with it, admitted that it was used to “enhance ” their pleasure during the evening.
- No real generation cleavage was noted in terms of the opinion regarding the recreational use of cannabis, at least among “baby boomers” and the generation after them. However, there is a slight difference as to how the issue is introduced: the comments expressed by the younger generation reflect banality while the older generations have a more reserved attitude. Commitment to more conservative beliefs and values, generally more present among older population groups, do not seem to have a decisive impact on the opinion and attitude toward the recreational use of cannabis.
- If a cleavage does exist, it lies in socio-professional characteristics, those with lower levels of education and residing in rural regions demonstrating greater resistance to its use. This finding is critical and must be validated through a quantitative study. However, the qualitative study demonstrated that participants, especially those who had attended university, had often been in contact with or used marijuana. This familiarity with marijuana enabled them to discuss the subject without making reference to the stereotypes often associated with illegal drug users. Another cleavage could be found among women with school age children. Several among them said they were very worried about the availability of marijuana in schools (mostly high schools, but elementary schools as well) and about the fact that individuals older than their children hung around the schools.
- The pockets of resistance to the recreational use of cannabis are often related to moral and religious reasons. Those opposed to its use often used arguments with a strong sense of right and wrong. These types of reactions were expressed by older participants as well as young adults (20-25 years), particularly in Trois-Rivières and Winnipeg. Various opponents asked why we should question something that “had always been considered wrong”, since this questioning only served to deny established morality and the validity of their own principles.

A socially acceptable drug

✍ The recreational use of cannabis is generally well accepted. For that reason, many participants in every group spontaneously referred to their own past or present experience with cannabis. This “admission” was not made as the result of a moderator’s direct question, but was made spontaneously and voluntarily in order to show that “anyone can do marijuana”.

“Everyone does it, everyone has done it...” (translation)

“It almost seems normal when you see someone smoking a joint...” (translation)

“I sometimes smoke with friends...” (translation)

“It doesn’t bother me that people do marijuana. As long as they are aware of their decision, what they are doing, I respect it...”

“Some drugs are socially acceptable, the same as alcohol...”

“I sometimes smoke pot and it doesn’t keep me from being a productive guy at work or a good family man.”

*Cannabis: “A party drug”
(translation)*

“Doctors, lawyers, accountants and pot heads do it. It doesn’t matter what you have in your bank account or what you do for a living.”

“It’s a choice, just like anything else.”

✍ From a moral point of view, using cannabis is often compared to drinking alcohol. As is the case with alcohol, the idea of abuse and social responsibility

A character with a thousand faces

make the difference. Some of the participants were much harder on alcohol abuse resulting in either domestic violence or random fights in a bar.

"You can smoke it at a party. Instead of drinking, you smoke a joint..."

"Marijuana is more like alcohol for the level of buzz..."

"Some types of alcoholic beverages are more harmful than cannabis..."

"It's very pleasant, it's like beer. You get the same sensation except that you don't have any problems after..."

"I used to go out to bars a lot. Every night there would be a fight. A guy gets drunk and then starts insulting somebody else or feels another guy is flirting with his girlfriend. At one point, punches get thrown around. But you know what? I have never seen a guy stoned on pot go nuts and want to knock somebody out."

"People on pot just feel mellow and want to relax and have a few laughs. I'd rather have that at a party than a bunch of drunks."

The fact that there is cannabis in schools makes parents feel powerless

✍ The recreational use of cannabis is not limited to a single segment of the population. The use of cannabis is associated to young high school or college students just as much as to professionals, artists and anyone working under pressure.

"It's a person who begs for a quarter on the street corner..." (translation)

"He doesn't do anything in life..." (translation)

"It makes me think of high school or college students more...They like trying new things..." (translation)

"Fine for people to light up and go about their normal duties..."

"A gentleman with a shirt, carrying a briefcase. He makes \$125,000 a year..." (translation)

"He's a writer, an artist...marijuana makes people relax..." (translation)

"Everyone smokes it regardless of social status... CEOs, lawyers..."

✂ The fact that access to marijuana is seen as easy and dangerous is a major concern, particularly for mothers. This concern influences the opinion of this segment of the population which wavers between a need for tolerance and openness and a deep concern about the consequences of the liberalization of the use of cannabis.

"Whether or not it's legal doesn't change a thing. The only thing I want is that young people not have access to drugs...The fact that drugs are sold in elementary schools makes me furious since youngsters become addicted..." (translation)

"If cannabis is to become legal, I'm afraid that young people who would not have touched the stuff, now will want to..." (translation)

"I completely stopped using it once I had children..."

"I think it should stay illegal. Think of the kids."

4. Challenges and Concerns Related to Cannabis

- Legalizing cannabis for medical purposes raises a need among citizens to obtain information by participating in a reflection on the topic.
- Moderate use of cannabis apparently does not have a harmful impact on human health, as opposed to tobacco.
- The risk of becoming addicted and moving to harder drugs is, for most participants, associated to the user's environment and personality rather than to cannabis itself. However, many participants worry that using at a younger age may lead to more dangerous experimentation in the future.
- Based on the knowledge and the information they possess, the moderate use of cannabis does not lead to behavioural problems. While alcohol may lead to violent behaviour, using cannabis leads rather to a feeling of relaxation. However, a question remains about driving under the influence of cannabis. Without talking about dangerous driving, most participants feel that the risk is real because the driver's reflexes are slower.

The use of cannabis for medical purposes obtains the approval of participants

✍ Generally, participants are not opposed to the legalization of cannabis for medical purposes. However, before giving their unconditional support to such an endeavour, some participants would like a clear distribution network to be established in health institutions and adequate doses to be precisely determined according to the intensity of the pain experienced by users. This form of legalization seems to have had an impact on the perception of some of the participants towards marijuana. The fact that the medical community is accepting marijuana made the participants question some of their prejudices towards the substance. In particular, it altered their perceptions as to its danger and toxicity. In addition, the fact that marijuana could have beneficial effects was given a certain degree of credibility.

"If it works to help relieve pain... If they approve of Tylenol [as a painkiller], they should approve of marijuana as well..."

*"It's a plant that is seen as being harmful yet it is less so than tobacco..."
(translation)*

"If we decide to legalize it for medical purposes, the infrastructures must be fine tuned. We can't start reacting to problems only after they occur..." (translation)

"If the government wants to make marijuana legal for medical purposes, then they should be able to control its distribution..."

"We may find out someday that it helps relieve stress. What if it also helped with certain types of mental illnesses?"

The occasional use of cannabis rarely causes addiction

✍ In general, participants feel that occasionally smoking cannabis is not harmful for human health. Many participants spontaneously compared it to tobacco and alcohol and often reached the conclusion that cannabis is the least harmful of the three substances.

"Given what we currently know about cannabis, I don't think we should be afraid of it..."

"I have never heard of pot related cancer. Nor have I ever heard of somebody od'ing on pot."

"I wonder what the smoke from marijuana does to your lungs. But if it's only occasional, I guess it's not bad."

*"It's not worst than having a beer. Smoking [a joint], it's not like using needles...As long as it's reasonable..."
(translation)*

Addiction to cannabis stems from using it too often

✍ The majority of participants do not worry about addiction in the case of cannabis. In their view, only frequent use of a soft drug could lead to addiction.

*"Someone who smokes a joint once in awhile, I don't think that really changes very much..."
(translation)*

"It always depends on the individual"

"Each person is different. A person must be able to determine the dose that will not lead to addiction. He or she must be mature enough to do this..." (translation)

"Some people may gradually go toward harder drugs. But often, those who do this are younger people who are with their peers..." (translation)

"This is the key question. I don't think you can get hooked on it really. Not as much as booze or nicotine for sure. But that's the kind of proof or medical evidence I would like to have if you want me to make up my mind on it."

✍ For most participants, addiction to cannabis is strongly related to frequency of use and to the quantity used. Occasional and moderate use of marijuana can hardly lead to addiction.

"I don't think marijuana is necessarily addictive..."

"Some people may not get addicted and some may... People react differently to it..."

"A guy who's always smiling but who doesn't know why"

✍ The use of cannabis does not inevitably lead the user to try harder drugs. According to the majority of participants, taking "hard" drugs is related more to the personality and maturity of the user and to his or her environment rather than to cannabis itself. Participants seemed to disassociate the fact that marijuana was often the first drug done by those who went on to use harder drugs from the drug itself. In other words, they didn't feel that marijuana contained any toxic agent or ingredient that pushed users towards harder drugs, but rather that hard drug users simply started out with marijuana because it was more readily available, cheaper and had less of a stigma attached to it.

"Teenagers are the most vulnerable to this..." (translation)
"It often starts with soft drugs, but because of the environment they're in, some will move to harder drugs to experience stronger effects..."
(translation)

"A joint has a relaxing effect" (translation)

"It would be easier for young people to be interested in trying one drug and another out of curiosity and based on the cost..." (translation)

"I would guess that people that do harder drugs started with pot, yet others have never done anything but pot..."

✍ The majority of participants, including those who are not very favourable to the recreational use of cannabis, agree to say that cannabis does not lead to violent behaviour among users. Although users will often seem *happy* and *relaxed*, they can sometimes cry or feel sad. According to some participants, the active component of cannabis accentuates feelings of joy and sadness among users but does not lead to violence.

"It's more the violence associated to the production and distribution of cannabis that scares people..." (translation)

"Marijuana has a calming effect..." (translation)

"I use it every night to go to sleep..."

"Some people like to smoke it before they go out. It helps to calm them down..."

"This data is out of date"

✍ Cannabis, as opposed to alcohol, does not push users to violence. However, in terms of driving a car while under the influence of cannabis, it is just as dangerous as doing so after having had a drink. According to some participants, this is even more of a concern since no *cannabis-test* exists yet.

"The effects are the opposite of those associated with alcohol: you smile, you are in your own world..." (translation)

"One beer can create more violence than cannabis..." (translation)

"It's like taking a hammer to kill a fly and a needle to kill a lion"

"In and of itself, cannabis is not dangerous, but it's impossible to function while under its influence..."
(translation)

"I think that marijuana puts you on the couch more than out to steal..."

"I find the system slightly hypocritical and incoherent"

"You can't drive. Your faculties are impaired the same way as with beer. You don't have the same reaction time..." (translation)

"Your perception changes, your reflexes are going to be slower..." (translation)

✍ There was unanimous consent regarding some of the findings presented to participants:

- Disbelief upon hearing that 10 percent of Canadians use cannabis. According to participants, this figure is grossly underestimated. It is more likely to be 50 percent.

"I'm surprised that only 10 percent of the population uses it. I was expecting 50 to 60 percent..." (translation)

"It's not our generation that is using..." (translation)

"My parents have friends who use it..." (translation)

- 30,000 arrests for possession of cannabis. Participants find that the attitude of police is disproportionate. They have the feeling that efforts and resources should go toward the fight against criminal distribution networks. One of the most important objectives is to prevent all types of drugs from entering the schoolyard.

"30,000 people charged per year seems like a waste of taxpayers money if it's just for possession. It's a lot of money to prosecute and they all get thrown out anyway..."

"I didn't know you could get arrested for possession. It's not like you have the intention of selling it..." (translation)

"When we think of other crimes that are much worse, when we think of the backlog in the courts, I find it ridiculous..."

"If you have a kilo of cannabis, then I understand. Maybe you want to cut it and sell it. But it's ridiculous to arrest someone who has three joints..." (translation)

"For me the problem is with the organized groups that produce and sell these drugs. When they are arrested, they are out in six months..."

"Why would you spend my tax money to go after pot smokers, while the hard drug dealers involved in organized crime go about their business without being bothered. Let's get our priorities straight here."

5. Options for the Future

- **Based on the trends that could be seen through the opinions expressed, Canadian society seems to be ready for the decriminalization of the use of cannabis.**
- **The need to proceed gradually can be perceived in the attitudes of Canadians. In the long term, this could lead to controlled legalization.**
- **The prerequisites, the modes and complex mechanisms made necessary by controlled legalization constitute an obstacle to this option for the near future.**
- **Maintaining the status quo is considered “collective hypocrisy.” It is a kind of wait-and-see policy that leads to a waste of public monies.**
- **The public consultation must be part of an exercise aimed at educating and informing the public.**

1. The need to protect young people and children is at the centre of all reflections about a public policy on the use of cannabis.
2. There seems to be a consensus surrounding an intermediary solution that would involve decriminalizing the social use of cannabis.
3. The decriminalization of cannabis would sanction an already existing social practise and would allow the authorities to concentrate on “real problems” related to the distribution of illegal substances.
4. Some participants, namely in Montreal and Vancouver, were in favour of liberalization. However, they wondered about the nature of the methods of controls that authorities could put in place in terms of:
 - ∫ Producing cannabis and the quality standards required;
 - ∫ Distributing and commercializing cannabis (references to coffee shops like those found in some European countries is an option. However, the option of selling marijuana in the same way as cigarettes is rejected);
 - ∫ Setting up “quotas” to avoid abuse: some suggested using a smart card to control the use and a “cannabis-test” for drivers.

5. Rather than just a consultation on the basic elements of a public policy on the use of cannabis, citizens would like to be informed and “educated” about the use of cannabis. The information needs pertain to:

- ∫ Scientific findings about the short- and long-term effects of cannabis use;
- ∫ The real risks related to addiction and escalation of drug use;
- ∫ The ways to protect children against early usage;
- ∫ The impact of decriminalization (or legalization) on the fight against organized crime.

This information must be documented and backed by credible expertise. In fact, the prerequisite to supporting a policy on the decriminalization or legalization of marijuana must be the gathering of further scientific data.

Canada, a tolerant society...

✍ Generally speaking, participants feel that Canadian society is rather tolerant when it comes to the recreational use of cannabis. Were we to rank Canada in terms of its level of tolerance, it would be closer to the Netherlands than to the United States.

“I think that in Switzerland and in the Netherlands, there is a lot more openness and more tolerance than in Canada...” (translation)

“Canada is in the middle... ”

“As tolerant as you can get without legalizing... ”

“Repressive countries would include Singapore, Saudi Arabia and the USA. Canada is more tolerant and Holland would be more tolerant than us...”

... but is concerned about the consequences of this tolerance on children and teenagers ...

Although the majority of participants are in agreement with the prevailing view held by Canadians about the recreational use of cannabis, they greatly dislike the fact that young people can easily obtain drugs particularly in schools and Cegeps.

"It has to be zero tolerance for young people..."

"I don't want drugs to end up in elementary schools"

"I want the law to be stricter with people under 18 years of age... and not as strict with adults ..."

Decriminalization is the consensus

✍ For the most part, the opinions of participants tend toward a position between decriminalization and legalization.

"I'm between decriminalization and legalization..."

"The best option is decriminalization leaning towards government legalization. The worst option would be depenalization: to legalize without getting involved..."

"What does it change for Canadians to have criminal records because of smoking marijuana? We are not fighting the real problem..."

This position is particularly popular in **Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver** and **Halifax**. Participants who opt for the decriminalization of the recreational use of cannabis feel that it will have a positive impact on the following:

- The ability to inform citizens of the risks involved
- The health of individuals
- Public health
- Public safety
- Illegal trafficking
- The involvement of organized crime
- The respect of individual rights and freedoms
- The effective use of public monies

In addition, participants expect an increase in the use of cannabis for recreational purposes but do not think that decriminalization will lead to an increase in the abuse and use among young people.

In this respect, many participants in the various regions mentioned that decriminalizing the recreational use of cannabis would lead to a lower interest in the drug among young people since it would no longer be a “forbidden fruit.”

“Pot is attractive to kids only because it’s prohibited. Remove the element of curiosity and they aren’t as interested...”

“If everyone is doing it, it won’t be cool anymore”

✍ There is still a hardcore segment of the Canadian public who feel that the law concerning the recreational use of cannabis is not strict enough and that Canadian society should move toward greater criminalization of the social use of cannabis.

Pockets of resistance still exist

This view is popular namely in **Winnipeg** and **Trois-Rivières**. Participants opting for greater criminalization of the recreational use of cannabis feel that such a decision would have a positive impact on the following aspects:

- The recreational use of cannabis
- The abuse of cannabis
- Use among young people
- The ability to inform citizens about the risks
- The health of individuals
- Public health
- Public safety
- Illegal trafficking
- The involvement of organized crime
- The respect of individuals rights and freedoms
- The effective use of public monies

✍ The complete depenalization of the recreational use of cannabis does not seem to raise the enthusiasm of Canadians who participated in the focus groups.

"The worst case scenario would be depenalization because it would lead to chaos. The Mafia would be so involved... it would get much worse than it is already..."

"Depenalization is too much of a free for all. Pot would be everywhere, young kids would get a hold of it. There has to be some kind of control... like alcohol..."

No to depenalization

"There would have to be a certain control...marijuana should not be available everywhere...young people should not be able to obtain it in convenience stores..."