

DANGERS OF DAGGA

BEFORE SAYING 'YES' TO DAGGA CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ...

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT DAGGA ... ?

"Boom" or "Madjat", as it is often known. Will you recognize it if you see or smell it? What are the users reactions? What are the dangers of the use of dagga? What are the legal consequences? If you don't know the answers to these questions, kindly read on. If you think you have all the answers, why not read on and test your knowledge?

HOW DOES ONE KNOW IT IS DAGGA?

It is estimated that the drug dagga has been with us since 1 000 BC. It consists of dry khaki-green leaves, twigs and pips. It is usually sold to the public in the form of a "stoo" (dagga rolled into a small packet) or a cigarette called a Zol, Stick, Reefer, Skyf or Joint. It smells and looks quite different from a tobacco cigarette so that you will be able to recognize it instantly, even if someone should try to fool you.

SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH ONE JOINT?

Dagga does not affect everyone in the same way - your existing state of mind would largely determine your reaction. However, it is known to intensify existing moods: dagga may aggravate feelings of depression up to a point where the person becomes a danger to himself. Self-control disappears, the person becomes exceedingly talkative, laughs easily and generally appears to be silly. Smokers often become thirsty and hungry and their eyes turn red. Heavier dosages cause hallucinations and loss of muscular control. Anyone driving in this condition is as much a criminal as is the drunken driver. Even one joint lowers the oxygen supply to the brain which might account for the dagga smoker's loss of short-term memory.

IS DAGGA AS HARMFUL TO MY LUNGS AS CIGARETTE SMOKE?

Certainly, and it beats cigarettes to the job even if you should smoke only 2-3 joints a day.

It is common knowledge that smokers (cigarette and pipe) are more susceptible to heart diseases and lung cancer than non-smokers - a survey in a hospital's cardiac section has shown that 90% of the patients were smokers. More specifically, it is the substances contained in the brown tar which causes disease.

WHEN YOU ARE NEXT OFFERED A JOINT, REMEMBER THAT IT CONTAINS 50% MORE TAR THAN A TOBACCO CIGARETTE OF THE SAME WEIGHT.

BUT THAT IS NOT THE WHOLE STORY ...

The tar of a dagga joint contains 70% more of the substance which has been associated with cancerous changes in lung tissue. It simply means that 2-3 joints per day carries the same risk of lung damage as a packet of cigarettes. Research has shown that lung cells which have been exposed to dagga smoke, lost their ability to destroy harmful bacteria.

In short, smoking dagga is merely a quicker way than cigarettes to cause possible irreversible lung damage.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER PHYSICAL HAZARDS?

- It has been found that prolonged dagga use lowers the body's defences against viruses and cancer.
- Tests carried out on animals showed that frequent dagga use impairs learning ability and results in abnormal brainwave activity.
- It leads to a decrease in the male sex hormone (sperm) levels and abnormal sperm cell formation.
- It has recently been found that babies whose mothers use dagga during pregnancy showed an increased incidence of tremors, abnormal reactions to light and an exaggerated startle reflex.
- Contrary to popular belief, dagga has no medicinal value in treating ailments for which safer and much more effective products do not already exist.

WOULD I GET A HANGOVER?

Dagga users may perhaps not experience some of the "morning after" effects like a throbbing headache, extreme thirst and tremors usually associated with heavy drinking. What dagga-users don't always know is that the joint which they smoked last night will continue to influence their behaviour for days or even weeks afterwards: whilst alcohol is rapidly oxidized by the liver and excreted, the body only has a limited capacity to break down the active ingredients of dagga. Indications are that this substance gradually builds up in fatty tissue and especially in the brain so that the person is kept subtly intoxicated for long periods.

Your body needs at least 3 days to get rid of the active ingredients of only 1 dagga joint. During that time dagga continuously influences your behaviour.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME IF I AM CAUGHT?

If you are charged and convicted in terms of Act 41 of 1971, the sentence can be quite severe.

A person, 18 years of age and over, convicted of possessing dagga faces a sentence of up to 10 years in jail. If caught with more than 115 gram of dagga in your possession, you may be charged with trading, in which case the sentences are naturally more severe.

If you are under 18 years of age, the court has the discretion to pass other sentences like placing you under the supervision of a probation officer, postpone the sentence or committing you to a reformatory.

In any case, you're going to wind up with a criminal record. Think about it - you'll be applying for a job soon.

IS IT WORTH THE RISK?

Some so-called buddies will be quick to label you as stuck-up or a drip if you refuse to join in - because of their feelings of guilt, they'll pressure others to go along. Are you sure these guys will still be around if you need helps.

You have a real choice: you can opt for the short-lived thrill of joining a small group of drug users - or gain the respect of your entire community by setting and living up to your own standards.

By now you can probably decide for yourself - but there's a lot more to it than what you've just read. If you would like to know more about dagga or have information to supply to the Namibian Police, contact your local police who will put you in touch with the Namibian Police Drug Enforcement Bureau.