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### **SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Increasing Evidence of Cannabis-Schizophrenia Link**

A recent longitudinal study published in Psychological Medicine discusses the connection between Cannabis Use Disorder and Schizophrenia. In a massive epidemiology study of 6.9 million Danes published in May 2023, researchers found a clear link between cannabis use and schizophrenia onset. A key finding: Over the 50 years covered by the study, 30 percent of all schizophrenia diagnoses among the study cohort could have been prevented if men aged 21 to 30 had not developed Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD).

The researchers also found a clear correlation between the rising cannabis potency over time and the increasing rate of schizophrenia diagnoses. Additionally, the potency of cannabis rose from 13 percent THC on average in 2006 to 30 percent in 2016 meaning that CUD often led to schizophrenia in the men who participated in the study.

Schizophrenia is a serious brain disorder that causes a person to think, feel, and behave abnormally, and can make daily functioning nearly impossible. Emergency Room Physicians have increasingly observed men in their 30's with CUD having a full-blown psychotic incidents and showed signs of schizophrenia. It is rare for schizophrenia to show up in males in their 30s. The typical onset is late teens to early 20s for males, and late 20s to early 30s for females. Cannabis is highly addictive for certain individuals and is significantly more potent than years passed indicating the need to research as well as prevent the psychological effects it can have on people.

Additionally, cannabis is far more widely available. As of January 1, 2024, it has been legalized for recreational use in 24 states plus Washington, DC. Media and marketing messages maintain that marijuana is safe, that it "cures" nearly everything, and that it won't get you addicted. In reality, marijuana use is addictive and can be detrimental to social emotional health. Even if it doesn't become an addiction, marijuana may trigger changes in the brain that can lead to serious problems like chronic psychosis and schizophrenia.

Marijuana is especially dangerous when used by people under age 25 whose brains are still developing. CUD can literally rewire the brains of young people, with disastrous long-term results.

Three facts about marijuana:

1. In the 1990s, the average THC concentration of marijuana in the U.S. was about 4 percent. (THC, or Tetrahydrocannabinol, is the psychoactive part of the cannabis plant.) By 2018, average THC concentration had nearly quadrupled to more than 15 percent.
2. Research has shown that people who start using marijuana before age 18 are four to seven times more likely to develop CUD.
3. Marijuana has the potential to “switch on” certain genes that can lead to schizophrenia in young people. Males are at a higher risk for this than females, but it occurs in both genders.

Researchers advise youth to avoid marijuana until they reach adulthood- age 25 or older, based on the evidence of damage it can do to the developing brain. They should avoid marijuana if there is a family history of schizophrenia or other mental illness or if you currently have schizophrenia or any other mental illness. Urge a loved one or friend who has schizophrenia to avoid marijuana.

It is imperative not just within the medical community but within all human service communities to keep educating the public about the dangers of cannabis and CUD. It is not harmless, and it can be addictive—especially in the potent form it often takes today.

SAFE is the only alcohol and substance use prevention agency in Glen Cove whose mission is to eliminate alcohol and substance use in Glen Cove. Its Coalition is concerned about cannabis use—especially in youth as their brains are developing. The Coalition is conducting a prevention awareness campaign entitled “Keeping Glen Cove SAFE; Underage Marijuana Use,” to educate and update the community regarding marijuana use and its negative consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on [www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition](https://www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition) or visit SAFE’s website to learn more about Cannabis/Marijuana use at [www.safeglencove.org](http://www.safeglencove.org).