

# Psychoactive substance use and preventing alcohol problems

Robin Room

Centre for Social Research on Alcohol & Drugs, Stockholm University;

School of Population Health, University of Melbourne;

Centre for Alcohol Policy Research, Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre,  
Fitzroy, Vic., Australia

Motivation for a Creative Thinking Workshop, Berzelius Symposium 87,  
"European Debate on Evidence-based Alcohol Policy", 18-19 October 2012,  
Stockholm, Sweden

What about promoting regulated use of cannabis or Ecstasy as a measure to prevent alcohol problems?

- The current verdicts on intrinsic harmfulness (to the user and to others) are clear: use of either is less harmful than use of alcohol

# Adverse effects on health for heavy users of the most harmful common form of each of four drugs

Adverse Effects	Marijuana	Tobacco	Heroin	Alcohol
Traffic and other accidents	*		*	**
Violence and suicide				**
Overdose death			**	*
HIV and liver infections			**	*
Liver cirrhosis				**
Heart disease		**		*
Respiratory diseases	*	**		
Cancers	*	**		*
Mental illness	*			**
Dependence/Addiction	**	**	**	**
Lasting effects on the foetus	*	*	*	**

Source:  
Hall et al.,  
1998.

\*\* = important effect; \* = less common or less well-established effect

# Overall harm scores, Nutt et al., 2010

• Alcohol	72	• Ketamine	15
• Heroin	55	• Methadone	14
• Crack cocaine	54	• Mephedrone	13
• Methamphet.	33	• Butane	11
• Cocaine	27	• Anabolic steroids	10
• Tobacco	26	• Ecstasy	9
• Amphetamines	23	• LSD	7
• Cannabis	20	• Buprenorphine	7
• GHB	19	• Mushrooms	6

# Issues for discussion in the workshop

- How much it matters whether they are substitutes or complements for alcohol?
  - Some evidence both ways
  - Even if complementary, could result in reduced trouble
- If officially available, would they lose their attraction?
- Options for a legal regulated market
- Can market promotion be controlled?
- What about border problems (and how much do they matter?)
- How much discouragement of alcohol?
- How to get there from here