

Chapter 13

A Case Study on the Integration of Cannabis Law Enforcement in New Jersey

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ABSTRACT

Legalized medical cannabis is implemented in 44 states in the USA while recreational marijuana legislation has challenged the law enforcement community. The public safety concerns of citizens involve a perceived increase in crimes, marijuana being a gateway for hard drug usage, the influx of residents from bordering states, increased fatal crashes, and the depletion of vital resources. In New Jersey, the State Police Forensic Science Laboratory System is the primary support system for law enforcement and laboratory professionals. Several Fatality Analysis Reporting System training programs are offered statewide, while the critical need remains to review enforcement practices. This study examines current medical cannabis enforcement practices to determine pending challenges and establish solutions for the state's oversight of legalized recreational marijuana.

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INTRODUCTION

A major comparative analysis was conducted between 2010 and 2014 in states with changed and unchanged marijuana laws (Maier et al. 2017). While California was the first state in 1996 to allow the sale of medical cannabis for patients with painful diseases, crime levels were explicitly examined in Colorado, Washington, and bordering states based on the adoption of recreational marijuana. At the time of the study, 23 states and the District of Columbia had legalized medical cannabis, while Colorado and Washington allowed one ounce of marijuana for personal use.

The national law enforcement community also identified several practices for states with recreational marijuana to adopt. Primary research was conducted on the impact that the legalization of recreational marijuana had on public safety in states. Coordinated standard practices between law enforcement and the laboratory community have been essential for setting consistent objectives and requirements among practitioners. Social service referral systems were also needed to obtain support for violators. Also, an interconnected network was imperative for maintaining professional competence through ongoing short courses, meetings, and training sessions on standard improvements, identifying research needs, and advancing law enforcement practices (Bradley & Cooper, 2007; NHTSA Law Enforcement Liaison, 2020). The study confirmed that violent and property crimes decreased in 11 states after the legalization of medical cannabis. Findings also showed no relationship between the density of medical cannabis dispensaries, violent crime rates, or property damage. It was determined that medical cannabis and retail businesses had maintained significant security measures for deterring crime within 100 and 250 feet of establishments and reduced past harm associated with unregulated transactions.

The law enforcement community confirmed that state-sponsored forensic laboratories serve as critical support systems for law enforcement practitioners and laboratory science professionals. The standard practice for law enforcement officers was being charged with collecting evidence at the crime scene while scientists prepared and analyzed evidence for court presentations. A comparative analysis was conducted in New Jersey to determine the impact that legalized recreational marijuana has on public safety and law enforcement practices. The following hypothesis serves as the foundation for this scope of work: What additional law enforcement practices are needed to enforce legalized recreational marijuana in New Jersey successfully?

U.S. PUBLIC SAFETY PRACTICES

Public safety practices in states with legalized recreational marijuana were examined in several domains to identify changes in crime rates, gateway status for hard drug usage, impaired driver fatal crash rates, and toxicology testing practices (Zwahlen & Suravaram, 2007). The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (1994-2002) data was examined to identify the status of marijuana as a gateway drug. FARS data offered fatal crash levels based on the legal status of marijuana in the United States. The following section examines an independent study of 253,137 fatal crashes with 20,950 marijuana-impaired drivers to determine the effectiveness of testing procedures on the behavioral status of impaired drivers.

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