



LIGHT

AUGUST - OCTOBER 2003

Photo: The Australian Women's Weekly, July 2003, p 127



Linda Watson - inspirational

Leading nomination in the *Women's Weekly* competition to find Australia's Most Inspirational Woman, Linda Watson's uplifting story of her prostitute rescue ministry is reaching millions of Australians - see page 3.

Also inside:

Medicinal marijuana - the new snake oil?

Shared parenting - a new way to cut the divorce rate

Teens and sex - the good news

Editorial

The new meaning of marriage

In a recent letter to Festival of Light, the federal Attorney-General Daryl Williams announced that the government has decided not to appeal the 2003 ruling of the Full Family Court which validated the "marriage" of two biological women.

Some years ago a woman (known as "Kevin") who had undergone a hysterectomy and breast reduction surgery, went through a form of marriage with "Jennifer". Jennifer later bore two children with donated sperm, and Kevin was listed as the "father" on their birth certificates.

The federal Attorney-General, through his department, appealed the earlier Family Court "Kevin" ruling, handed down by Justice Chisholm in 2001. However some observers have queried the conduct of this appeal as some allegedly debatable evidence was not challenged. Earlier this year, the full bench of the Family Court decided to uphold Justice Chisholm's 2001 ruling - thus effectively changing the meaning of marriage in Australia.

The Australian Marriage Act 1961 defines marriage as "the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others voluntarily entered into for life". Following the Full Family Court ruling, the word "man" in this law no longer means "biological males". The word "man" now also includes women who think they are biological males, possibly as a result of psychological dysfunction.

Women who think of themselves as men (and vice versa) are said to suffer "gender dysphoria" - meaning "mental discomfort with one's biological gender". This uncommon but distressing condition is often linked with childhood disturbance or child abuse. Sometimes a twin of one sex will identify with the twin of the opposite sex.

Gender dysphoria may sometimes be resolved by psychological counselling and support. It is not an irreversible condition, and several authorities consider that sex-change surgery is not an appropriate treatment. A long term follow up of post-operative transsexuals at the Johns Hopkins Medical Centre in the US found that surgery had not improved the condition of any of the patients. A number of transsexuals later deeply regret their surgery, and request further operations to try to return to the body they were born with.

Given this background, what of "Kevin"? What happens if he/she should later wish to return to womanhood? What is then the status of her "marriage" to Jennifer? And what will be the psychological effect on Jennifer's artificially conceived children when they find out that



the "father" on their birth certificate is not a biological male?

It is a matter of deep regret that the Family Court has apparently not resolved these important issues. And unless legislation is passed in federal parliament clarifying the definition of marriage in the Marriage Act, same-sex marriages could be just around the corner.

As the Festival of Light resource paper on homosexual parenting (May 2001) documents, the effect of legitimising same-sex marriage could have a devastating impact on any associated children.

The idea that same-sex marriage could soon be validated in Australia is not as far-fetched as it might have appeared only a few years ago. The Canadian federal government is already planning to legalise same-sex unions.

In June this year the Ontario Appeals Court in Canada ruled that it is discriminatory to limit marriage to heterosexuals. Thereupon the Canadian federal government of Jean Chretien announced its intention to introduce a bill to change the definition of marriage to the lifelong union of "two persons".

Canadian Catholic Bishop Berthelet wrote to Prime Minister Chretien on 19 June, asking him to abandon the proposed "gay marriage" bill. "Marriage, understood as the lasting union of a man and woman to the exclusion of others, pre-exists the State," he said. "Because it pre-exists the State and because it is fundamental for society, the institution of marriage cannot be modified, whether by the Charter of Rights, the State or a court of law... Same-sex unions cannot be considered as marriage."

The federal Attorney-General's Department, in conveying Mr Williams' decision not to challenge the Full Family Court "Kevin" ruling in the High Court, emphasised that the federal government still views the issues raised by the case as serious, since they affect "the meaning of marriage ... and in particular the role of the Parliament in determining the meaning of marriage". The government "is giving further consideration to what other options it might have to respond to the decision".

We hope this implies new legislation to amend the Marriage Act to make marriage mean what it has always meant across almost all cultures for thousands of years. In the words of the Canadian bishop, the Australian government needs "the courage to act in conformity with the law that is inscribed within human nature and which is not affected by every wind that blows."

David & Roslyn Phillips

Light

No 115 August 2003

PUBLISHER:

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Openbook Publishers
205 Halifax Street, Adelaide, SA 5000

EDITORIAL:

Letters, articles and news items should reach the editors at least six weeks before publication dates, which are Feb 1, May 1, Aug 1, and Nov 1.

EXTRACTS:

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FESTIVAL OF LIGHT AIMS:

1. To mobilise Australians in support of purity, love and family life.
2. To proclaim the value of Christian standards of behaviour for family and community life.
3. To persuade national and community leaders to strengthen the family as the basic unit of society.
4. To resist any influences that lower moral standards and threaten human dignity.
5. To research the social implications of Biblical ethics and the effects of modern trends on family and community life.

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

Yearly including postage: \$46 incl GST
Send name, address and subscription to state branch at the address below.

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Linda Watson - inspirational

It's official. Linda Watson, former Perth prostitute and madam, is featured on p 126 of the *Australian Women's Weekly* (July 2003) as the first of five leading nominees in the competition to find Australia's Most Inspirational Woman.

The final result will not be announced until the September 2003 edition, but early voting trends suggest that Linda is well ahead.

The *Women's Weekly* has a readership of around three million. Add to that another million or so who have read about Linda in *New Idea* (5/7/03, p 25) and that's significant exposure.

Each article briefly tells the story of how Linda was lured into prostitution as an impoverished single mother, quit after 20 years of damage, then set up Linda's House of Hope to help other girls leave the sex trade and start a new life.

It is a long way from December 1997 when mainstream media stayed away from Linda's press conference. In February 1998 *Light* magazine was among the first to tell about Linda's amazing transformation with a resource paper by Pastor Dwight Randall, *A Perth madam's story: an inside account of abuse, exploitation - and God's power to save.*

Later on, Linda told her story in more detail at public meetings in WA and interstate - how, sitting beside the swimming pool on 31 August 1997 in a luxury home belonging to a wealthy Perth brothel owner, she was in the depths of despair. It was the day Princess Diana had died.

When Princess Diana died

"Diana was always a sort of hero of mine," Linda said. "I identified with her - even bought clothes and handbags like hers. I could see the suffering in her eyes, because I had suffered too. When the news came through that Diana had been in a car accident, I thought, 'She'll be OK. She'll have the best doctors in the world to bring her through.'

"But she died. And I cried all day. I said, 'God, if Diana with all her beauty and wealth can die, what hope is there for me? Where am I going to be when I drop dead?'

"I felt so full of guilt. I knew I had hurt so many girls as a madam, by using them as prostitutes. I had hurt my family. I felt so much pain and shame.

"I sat by the pool and I asked God for forgiveness. But I felt so empty. I didn't know where I could go, except a brothel. Is that all I was good for? You could have given me millions of bucks and it wouldn't have filled that horrific emptiness I felt. I said, 'God, I need to know what it is like to be a whole person.' That's all I said.

"What happened next was a powerful miracle. I got up from the pool, and over the next two days it was as if I had a new mind. God's hand had touched and totally freed me. I know I have done wrong, but I don't feel that terrible emptiness."

Looney-Tune Fran

But where was she to go? Linda then turned to an old Christian friend from before Linda's prostitution days. "Fran had never given up on me," says Linda. "I used to jokingly call her *Looney-Tune*, because she carried a Bible everywhere, even into my brothel. She would call in and chat over a cup of coffee and pray for me. She even gave me a passage from Hosea chapter 14 that she said was God's message for me. I tossed it aside then - but after 20 years it came true.

Linda went to see Fran in September 1997, and was welcomed with open arms. The prodigal daughter - who had learned about Jesus from her early days in a Baptist Sunday School - had returned. There was great rejoicing.

But what was Linda to do next? In the days after her conversion she felt God speaking to her as a news flash came through that then WA Premier Richard Court was proposing to legalise brothels. Linda's instinctive reaction was: "No! He can't do that - it would damage so many more girls. God wants me to campaign against this bill!"

Linda also felt God calling her to set up a rescue ministry, so girls who wanted to leave prostitution could go to someone who understood them.

Roslyn and David Phillips

For weeks, Linda phoned scores of ministers, pastors and priests - but they didn't know her, didn't trust her, or were just not interested in her vision. Then Fran brought home a small leaflet with the names of Roslyn and David Phillips of the

The rescuer

Born-again Christian Linda Watson ran a successful brothel until five years ago when she realised she didn't have the heart for it anymore.

'Any kind of prostitution harms women,' she says. 'I know because I did it for 20 years. It's addictive because the money is so good, but it leads to great unhappiness.'

Linda now 'rescues' women from sex work and gives them safe haven in her 'Linda's House of Hope' in Perth. To date she has rescued three trafficked sex slaves.

'I gave shelter to a girl who'd been sold into the business by her father when she was just nine years old,' she says. 'It wasn't possible to prosecute the traffickers. All I can do when these girls come to me is help them deal with their experiences and get them home safely.'

Linda says trafficking sex slaves has been going on for years and is highly lucrative.

'I used to have businessmen offering me thousands of dollars for sex with girls as young as 13 who'd been trafficked,' she explains. 'These people also invested in girls, buying shares in a "contract", which meant they take a big slice of the girl's earnings. She gets virtually nothing.'

Violence and drug addiction are everyday hazards, with many forced



Linda helps trafficked women escape.

into unsafe sex. 'I'd say eight out of 10 prostitutes have been anally raped and many are gang raped,' Linda says. 'And any money the girls earn tends to go straight into their arms. Heroin, speed and cocaine are popular drugs of choice.'

Linda feels the law needs tightening to prevent trafficking.

'Prostitution destroys your self-esteem,' she says. 'You think you have no worth and nobody could ever really love you.'

Linda featured in New Idea 5 July 2003, p 25

Festival of Light who were visiting Perth in October 1997. They were keynote speakers at a rally against legal brothels.

Linda contacted rally organisers Richard Egan of the Australian Family Association and Dwight Randall of Life Ministries, who introduced her to the Phillipases. Roslyn and David saw Linda as God's answer to their prayers - that He would raise up someone from the sex trade who would be prepared to tell the truth, unlike the propaganda flooding the brothel TV and newspapers. "Linda is God's angel for you, and you are God's angel for her," they told the Perth Christian community. "Guard her with care!"

Linda certainly needed guardian angels. She needed to move from the Perth madam's home, away from the Mr and Ms Bigs of the sex trade (including bikie gangs) who were furious at the news of Linda's defection. She also needed support and encouragement to adjust to the enormous change from living on thousands of dollars each week to a small pension.

Her ministry to girls with a past or present history of prostitution began straight away. One former prostitute came to her because her marriage was in tatters - she could not forget the images in her mind, even though she had only worked as an escort for six months. Linda was able to counsel the girl and her husband and help restore their relationship.

But the going was hard. In December 1997, when Richard Egan and Dwight Randall called a media conference to report Linda's changed life, only two radio

Continued on page 6

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Professional

Thanks for your tireless and highly professional work in producing *Light* over a long time now! It proves to be a constant blessing to me and is a great resource to use in helping others.

Jonathan Philips
Port Macquarie, NSW

Children in detention

I know there are many pressing issues with which Festival of Light is manfully dealing, but is not the way we are treating refugees one of the worst blots on our record as a fair-go nation? We say we care about families (and we do), but there are families - and unaccompanied children - behind razor wire, for reasons which escape many of us.

Festival of Light should add its voice to the many agencies calling for a more compassionate form of justice for these families.

Dr Alasdair Livingston
Mitcham, SA

We share your concern for the welfare of children. However the media gives major coverage to children in detention centres, but largely ignores injustice to children in other areas such as exposure to pornography, media violence and cannabis promotion. Our light must shine where others leave shadows - Ed.

Homosexual lobby gains

We have recently witnessed some disturbing advances by the homosexual lobby - while the Church seems divided, indifferent and uninformed. Homosexual activism has been making progress for many years, but the past few months have witnessed even more ominous developments.

In June 2003 the Ontario Appeals Court declared that exclusive heterosexual marriage laws violated the human rights of Canadian homosexuals and lesbians. In the same month the US Supreme Court decided that Texan laws against sodomy were unconstitutional. And in July, English Anglicans and Australian Uniting Church members discussed the ordination of gay clergy - with the Australian Uniting Church opting to proceed.

All of this spurred one local homosexual commentator to express amazement at how rapidly and easily the homosexual agenda was being implemented. He said he had previously doubted whether same-sex marriage was an attainable objective, but his doubts have been proved wrong. He said, "Progress in this area has been much faster, and has met much less resistance, than I or anyone else anticipated."

Australian homosexual activist Graham Willett has written a new book, *Living Out Loud*, outlining the history of homosexual activism in Australia. His book shows how successful the homosexual lobby has been in achieving its ends.

"Anti-gay ideas still exist in society, of course, but a basic liberal tolerance is the dominant mood," Willett says. "Never have homosexuality, the gay and lesbian community and their issues been more visible or more seriously dealt with by the mainstream, or more entrenched in social and political life ... reinforced by the role of the mainstream media."

Willett argues that the real problem for the homosexual community may be internal fragmentation due to its own diversity and acceptance.

However the church appears unprepared to meet the challenge of the homosexual onslaught. It is not easy - it brings unjust labels of "bigots", "homophobes" and worse. We must be careful in how we present our case.

We must speak the truth, in love - while remembering that the most loving, humble and blameless man on earth met with plenty of angry opposition when he proclaimed the truth.

Bill Muehlenberg
Australian Family Association, Vic

'No-fault' divorce

So-called "no-fault" divorce was introduced in Australia over 25 years ago, but has left us a legacy of serious problems.

My daughter's sad situation is one example. She has been married for over five years and has two young children. About five weeks ago her husband (and their father) suddenly announced that he wanted to "move on". He wants a divorce.

Our daughter is devastated. Her children are very confused.

If her husband has "another woman", I am concerned about the adverse effect on the children if they live with their father and his new partner - or possibly series of partners.

In the opposite situation where the wife strayed, I would be equally concerned about the children sleeping under the same roof as their mother and her partner(s).

For the sake of our nation's children, federal parliament should repeal the "no-fault" provisions in the Family Law Act.

Name and address supplied
South Australia

NZ prostitution law

You may be aware that the NZ Prostitution Reform Bill to legalise NZ brothels passed on 25 June by just one vote - 60:59.

There was tremendous pressure placed on (Labour) government MPs to support this bill. A Muslim Labour MP who had opposed the bill decided to merely abstain when the final vote came. If he had voted against, the bill would have failed.

The Justice and Electoral select committee which examined the bill had five Labour MPs, two Nationals and one each from the Greens, NZ First, ACT and United Future. Two of the five Labour MPs opposed the bill - so they were replaced by Labour MPs who supported it. As a result, the five Labour MPs and the one Greens brought in a majority report (6:5) in favour of the bill. The other five MPs on the committee wrote a scathing minority report. The whole process was a travesty of justice.

It is disappointing that NZ churches were largely silent for much of the debate on the Prostitution Reform Bill over the past three years. Five days before the third reading in parliament, 30 church leaders sent an open letter to all MPs asking them to vote against the bill. This action was too late.

We are now working for the repeal of this legislation from hell.

Ken Orr
Right to Life New Zealand,
Christchurch, NZ

Festival of Light in action

National: making elections fairer

Festival of Light national president Dr David Phillips and field officer David d'Lima gave evidence last year to the federal parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

They argued that for fair elections, voters need to establish their identity before going on the electoral roll or placing their vote. Rules for voting "above the line" for the Senate should be changed to prevent effectively secret preference deals.

The committee report was tabled in June 2003, and Festival of Light evidence was cited several times. "We were pleased that the committee has adopted some of our recommendations, at least in part," Dr Phillips said. "We believe there should be

further changes - to allow to preferential voting above the line, instead of allowing the groups to make their own private preference deals."



Report adopted some FOL recommendations

South Australia: sex education warning

A new sex education course being trialled for students aged 11-15 in 14 SA high schools has created great controversy. "Parents in other states should be warned that if this course is accepted in SA, their schools could be next," said Festival of Light research officer Mrs Roslyn Phillips, who has analysed the course in detail.

The lesson plans have been devised by SHineSA - a group known in other states as the Family Planning Association, with links to Planned Parenthood in the US. Teacher manuals and curriculum details have not been released to the public, but Festival of Light has managed to obtain copies.

"The first thing that hits you is that the promotion of abstinence for teens - which has worked so well in sex education in the US - is completely missing from the SHine program," Mrs Phillips said.

"The second thing that hits you is the emphasis on homosexual sex, out of all proportion to its incidence in the community. Eleven year old children are taught about the male and female reproductive system, as you would expect in a sex education course. But the teacher is told to point out that the male (reproductive!) system includes the anus as well as the urethral opening - and likewise the anus is said to be part of the female system.

"Sexual intercourse is defined to include anal sex as well as vaginal. Both

are said to be "safe sex" if condoms are used. There is no mention of the serious dangers in anal sex, even though this practice is the main way that HIV/AIDS is spread in Australia. Anal sex always results in damage to the thin rectal wall, allowing faecal bacteria and viruses to pass into the bloodstream," Mrs Phillips said.

"Another concern (there are many more) is the overhead projector transparency provided for 15 year old students, called the "Kinsey Model". This presents, as if it were fact, the baseless theory of Dr Alfred Kinsey that 80% of the population is bisexual to some degree.

Kinsey's 1940s research has been shown to be seriously and fraudulently flawed. Kinsey himself is revealed in a recent biography as a bisexual masochist who forced his colleagues to participate in sexual orgies and other 'experiments'. He included child sex abuse as part of his 'research'."

Festival of Light has urged SA education minister Trish White to withdraw the SHine course immediately.

NSW: religious freedom conference

NSW Festival of Light held its annual conference on 17 May on *Defending our Christian Freedoms*, with Pakistan-born Pastor Daniel Scot as keynote speaker.

Pastor Scot is an authority on Islamic studies. He was a senior mathematics lecturer in Pakistan and later in the University of Queensland. More recently he has become a full time pastor with the Assemblies of God in Brisbane, helping Christians understand the Muslim faith and how to reach out in love to Muslim people.

Pakistan allows its citizens very little religious freedom, and Daniel Scot ex-

pected that Australia would be much more open. Yet he and Pastor Danny Nalliah of Catch the Fire Ministries were accused of vilifying Muslims at a church seminar in Melbourne in March 2002, where Pastor Scot, an Arabic scholar, explained the meaning of verses in the Quran.

The Islamic Council of Victoria has taken the case to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Mediation ses-

Queensland: same-sex adoption proposal

Festival of Light Queensland state officer Geoffrey Bullock is contacting Queensland state MPs to find out whether they support a proposal to allow same-sex couples to adopt children.

"A review of adoption law set up by the Beattie Labor government last year has now published its recommendations. One proposal is that the words 'husband and wife' be removed from the Adoption of Children Act, thus paving the way for homosexual and lesbian couples to adopt babies," Mr Bullock said.

"However when I question government MPs about the proposal, they claim to know nothing about it. They tell me to 'ask the Minister'. I asked the Families Minister (Hon Judy Spence) - but she ignored my question."

Geoffrey Bullock is undeterred. "If we let this matter rest, we could see a repeat of last November's debacle, when the Beattie government suddenly introduced legislation to remove church and Christian school exemptions from the anti-discrimination laws, and to ban homosexual 'vilification'," he said.

The Beattie government has a huge majority (66 seats to 23) and Queensland has no Legislative Council to allow for further debate on bills before the parliament. "The Beattie government can bring in legislation without warning and pass it almost overnight," Mr Bullock said. "The WALabor government has already changed the law to allow same-sex adoption.

"Queenslanders need to be prepared. MPs do care what voters think, and when many voters contact them about an issue they take notice. I am encouraging people to contact their local state MP and write to Premier Beattie, pointing out that our



Geoffrey Bullock

adoption laws are working well. Changing them to allow same-sex couple adoptions - the dangers are documented in the Festival of Light resource paper (May 2001) - would be a disaster."

sions have failed, and a public hearing before the Tribunal is now expected in October 2003. Even if the case against Scot and Nalliah is dismissed, the cost to them in terms of time, effort, travel and legal advice will have run to many thousands of dollars.

Festival of Light is asking Australian Christians to pray for the two Daniels as they prepare for their coming time of trial.

Linda Watson - inspirational - from p 3

stations and the Perth Catholic *Record* turned up. Sex trade sources later revealed that a leading Perth madam had phoned TV and newspaper editors the day before, demanding they boycott Linda's conference. The madam apparently threatened that if any TV station or newspaper covered Linda's story, the madam would publicly expose certain top executives who used her brothel.

Archbishop Barry Hickey

However Linda did not give up. Over the next couple of years she kept following her vision, seeking backers for her rescue ministry. In the end, after many knock-backs from others, it was Catholic Archbishop Barry Hickey who answered her call.

In August 1999, Linda and the Archbishop launched Linda's House of Hope - a four bedroom house in a Perth suburb*. The Channel Nine *Today* show (from interstate) ran the story. "The phone hasn't stopped ringing - with desperate girls from all over," says Linda. She has since helped hundreds leave prostitution, counselling many by phone and providing shelter and physical support for others.

She continued to campaign against legalising brothels. In 2000 Linda helped persuade the WA Premier to drop the idea and instead, to clamp down on street prostitution and procuring advertisements. More recently Linda has played a key role in lobbying the new Labor Gallop government against its dangerous Prostitution Control Bill.

Threats and harrassment

Linda's success brought renewed opposition from key WA prostitution bosses, who saw her as their number one enemy. Harassing, abusive phone calls had always been a problem at Linda's House of Hope, but the abuse became physically violent in October 2001 when two windows were smashed.

Over the next 15 months Linda experienced intruders in the roof, her fence set on fire, a firebomb in her second shelter down the street, a shooting attack and a window forced out of its frame. Regular police patrols now provide some protec-

tion.

The attacks were also psychological - spreading rumours. "When I first quit in 1997, the sex trade told the media I was off my head on drugs and would soon be back," Linda said. "When I didn't go back, they said I was having affairs - all sorts of vicious things."

These attacks, and the constant demands on her time have caused great stress. At times Linda has felt close to walking away from her House of Hope. "The phone never stops ringing. There are always girls in trouble and desperate parents, who don't know where else to turn," she says. "And prostitution has damaged me too. Like the others, I'm still

LINDA WATSON of LINDA'S HOUSE OF HOPE, PERTH
Phone 9358 2544 Fax 9358 2561

MEDIA RELEASE 8 SEPTEMBER 2002

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS 'SAFE' SEX-WORK

"WA Police Minister Michelle Roberts wants to turn back the clock - by something like 140 years," Linda Watson of Linda's House of Hope said today.

"Back in Queen Victoria's time, the British government thought it could make prostitution safe by licensing prostitutes and requiring them to have regular medical checks," Ms Watson said.

"They passed legislation called the Contagious Diseases Act in 1864. It didn't work then and it won't work now. Sexually transmitted diseases went up, not down. The licensing system branded sex workers for life. They suffered blackmail and abuse. Pimps had a picnic!

"Mrs Josephine Butler, with the help of the newly-formed Salvation Army, fought for some 20 years to have the law changed. Licensing stopped and the law came down hard on those who exploit prostitutes - the brothel owners, madams and pimps," Linda Watson said.

"That's what Mrs Roberts should be doing today. She should be enforcing all the prostitution laws and helping sex workers get out. I see these girls every day in Linda's House of Hope. They suffer so much physical and psychological damage from what they do - Worksafe would go broke!

in recovery. It's a long road back from where I've been.

"One of the biggest problems is drug addiction. Prostitution hurts so much - physically and mentally - that most girls end up on drugs. When I was a madam I'd get together with other madams and we'd estimate how many of our girls were on drugs and how many were clean. Out of a hundred girls, in the early 1990s, we used to count only about 13 to 17 who were not on drugs.

"It's even worse today," Linda says. "I was not addicted like most others - but for a while even I had a problem with pethidine (supplied by a doctor) and alcohol. Now girls take the whole range, from marijuana and alcohol through to amphetamines, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin.

"I have helped many girls quit prostitution, but some have relapses back into the drugs. It's very hard for me to manage because places in detox and rehabili-

tation centres are not always available."

Australian sex slavery

But media interest, including ABC TV *Compass* on 29 April 2001 and more recent articles in *The Australian*, the *Women's Weekly* and *New Idea*, has brought great encouragement for Linda's ministry. Part of the reason is the dawning realisation of the scale of sexual slavery in Australia's legal or tolerated brothels.

This year *The Australian* newspaper has run a series of exposé articles on sex trafficking, particularly of women from poor Asian countries who are sold in Australia to the highest bidder. There has been only one prosecution so far, partly because hard evidence of coercion is difficult to obtain. When procuring was illegal, such evidence was not needed to obtain convictions.

A recent article in *The Weekend Australian* (26-7/7/03, p 3) reported on the sale of a Korean woman in the lobby of a plush Sydney hotel. "The latest US State Department Report on sex trafficking estimates it is the third largest money-maker for organised crime," the article said. "International criminal organisations traffic hundreds of Thai women yearly to Australia ... Albanian mafia (are) now involved in trafficking women to Melbourne." Asian triads, well organised and resourced, are also into sex traffick-

ing in a big way.

Linda Watson is playing a key role in exposing this abuse of women. She is also in demand as a speaker - she recently addressed meetings in Tasmania where MPs are considering yet another bill to legalise brothels. "I just tell the MPs about the damage prostitution does to women," Linda says. "I ask them if they would want that kind of life for their own daughters or grand-daughters. I have a feeling that bill will not pass."

Yet always, back home, there are the calls for help - growing all the time as brothel legalisation in Victoria, NSW and Queensland has created a boom in demand for new girls. "I weep for those young girls," says Linda. "Please pray for us - and for more people who understand, to take on this much-needed ministry."

* PO Box Z5640, Perth St Georges Tce, WA 6831; phone (08) 9358 2544.

Shared parenting - a new way to cut the divorce rate

When Jason (not his real name) turned seven, he was a bright, outgoing youngster who had settled well into school. But Jason aged eight was a different child. Prone to disruptive behaviour in class, he began wetting his bed at night. Academically, he was going downhill fast.

The reason for this drastic change? Jason's mum and dad had separated and later divorced. As is so often the case, mum was awarded custody while dad was allowed contact every second weekend. Jason yearned for his dad to be at home, to muck around with the footie after tea and have pretend wrestling matches on the floor which Jason always "won".

But dad didn't come home. After the divorce, he had to look for a better paying job to keep up with the child maintenance payments. His new work often took him to the country, making contact times with Jason more difficult to arrange.

Then Jason's mum moved in with a new lover. He found Jason a nuisance, and sometimes knocked him around, especially after a few drinks. Jason's school behaviour grew worse. His only friends were other "problem children". They introduced him to drugs and petty crime to pay for them. At least with the gang he felt he belonged somewhere...

Shared Parenting Council

Geoffrey Greene, federal director of the Shared Parenting Council of Australia, says Jason's case is becoming sadly more common around the nation today. "The latest research shows that children in sole parent (usually single mother) families are more likely than others to have low self esteem, to take risks, to suffer abuse, to engage in anti-social and aggressive behaviour, to have poor academic results, to have problems with mental health and depression, to be involved in crime and to abuse alcohol and illicit drugs.

"As the divorce rate continues to climb, these are problems we cannot ignore," he said. "Fatherless families tend to be bad news, especially for boys.

"But there is some good news. Overseas, states which have introduced 50:50 joint custody as the presumed norm after divorce have experienced significant benefits. One of the most important is that the divorce rate in these states has actually gone down.

"*Child Custody Policies and Divorce Rates in the US*, a paper presented by Richard Kuhn and John Guidubaldi at the Children's Rights Council Conference in Washington DC in October 1997, compared divorce rate trends in US states which encourage joint custody (shared parenting) with those in states which favour sole custody," Mr Greene said.

"Their research found that states with

over 30% of joint custody awards in 1989 and 1990 showed significantly greater declines in divorce rates in the years that followed, compared with other states.

"Divorce rates declined nearly four times faster in high joint custody states like Kansas and Montana compared with those states such as Utah and Alabama where joint physical custody is rare."

Why is this so? The researchers suggest that joint custody makes it difficult for an angry parent to hurt the other by taking away the children, or to relocate and thereby limit interaction with the other parent.

They also point out that high levels of child support payments associated with sole custody may encourage divorce, because custody of children then becomes a financial benefit for the sole custodial parent. Because joint physical custody results in more equal division of parenting time, child support payments may be lower - although there are still payments unless both parents have the same income.

Sometimes divorce is necessary to protect children from a violent, abusive parent. But US research suggests that in 70% of divorces there was no violence or abuse of any kind in the marriage. In this situation, children are much worse off after the divorce. And in this situation, a presumption of 50:50 joint custody after divorce may be enough for some parents to rethink the implications and decide it would be better not to separate at all.

Malcolm Muggeridge

Malcolm Muggeridge, one of the founders of Festival of Light, once told the story of his parents' initially unhappy marriage. His father was a serious, thinking type while his mother was pretty but had very little education and no interest in the academic world.

"My parents used to argue all the time at first," he said. "But there was no easy divorce in those days, so they didn't consider it. As the years went by, however, they got on much better. They became a great comfort to each other."

The greatest beneficiaries from joint custody (as opposed to sole custody) arrangements are the children. Geoffrey Greene now shares the parenting of his children with his ex-wife. He believes this is part of the reason why his children have avoided some of the problems experienced by many other divorced families.

The Shared Parenting Council, of



Geoffrey Greene with his children Bridie and Quintin

which Festival of Light Australia is a member, has warmly welcomed the recent announcement by Prime Minister John Howard that his government will seriously consider the shared parenting issue.

Federal parliamentary inquiry

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs is holding an inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation.

The main terms of reference are:

(a) given that the best interests of the child are the paramount consideration,

(i) what other factors should be taken into account in deciding the respective time each parent should spend with their children post separation, in particular whether there should be a presumption that children will spend equal time with each parent and if so, in what circumstances such a presumption should be rebutted; and

(ii) in what circumstances a court should order that children of separated parents have contact with other persons, including their grandparents.

The closing date for submissions was 8 August 2003, but interested parties (such as grandparents) may still contact their local federal MP to let them know their concerns.

"We believe that the rebuttable presumption of shared parenting is a step forward for Australian families," Geoffrey Greene said. "The main benefit is that children would no longer be held and used as weapons in protracted Family Court disputes. It would be in parents' best interests to negotiate custody arrangements that suit their individual circumstances.

"We fully support calls to protect children from violent or abusive relationships. We understand that shared parenting may not be suitable to every situation. Exceptions to the rule would be catered for in clear and specific terms. No child would be required to live with violent fathers or mothers, or to have two schools.

"But the reality is that 70 per cent of divorced dads in Australia want to spend more time with their children because they love them. Grandparents are also suffering from current sole custody arrangements. This reform of the Family Law Act is long overdue."



Australian
Festival of Light
Resource Paper
AUGUST 2003

Medicinal marijuana

- the new snake oil?

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“Snake oil” is 19th century American slang for the quack medicines sold in great quantities in the days before governments regulated the pharmaceutical industry. Hawked from door to door by travelling salesmen or sold from corner stores, these bottles of liquid or jars of ointment came with amazing claims to relieve every imaginable ailment. The placebo effect of “snake oil” medicine was no doubt the reason some people wrote glowing testimonials about its healing powers.

In the 21st century cannabis (from the leaves and flower heads of the *cannabis sativa* plant) - or marijuana, as it is often known - may become the new snake oil. A British company called G W Pharmaceuticals has been set up to produce, research and promote extracts of cannabis in tablet, liquid or spray form.

This company’s website makes extraordinary claims that its cannabis products may be useful in treating AIDS (wasting syndrome), arthritis, brain injury/stroke, multiple sclerosis, nausea, pain, spinal cord injury, asthma, Crohn’s disease, colitis, depression and mental illness, eating disorders, epilepsy, fibromyalgia, glaucoma, high blood pressure, migraine, nail patella syndrome, schizophrenia, Tourette’s syndrome.¹

Although cannabis has been shown to cause or trigger depression, schizophrenia and other forms of mental illness, G W Pharmaceuticals is undaunted. Its website quotes from anonymous, glowing testimonials such as: “Before using cannabis I used to find the pain intolerable...” and “I have a few pipes of cannabis and it stops the tremors and eases the pain...”

The company has been set up at a time of great worldwide pressure for the legalisation of “medicinal use” of cannabis. In May 2003, soon after the NSW ALP government had been returned to power in the March elections, Premier Bob Carr announced he would introduce a bill to allow a properly conducted trial of cannabis for medical purposes. Federal ALP opposition leader Simon Crean backed the proposal, and federal health minister Kay Patterson said she would examine it in more detail.²

Even Prime Minister John Howard gave qualified support. “My personal view is that ... provided there is no other mainstream treatment available, and provided it doesn’t take the form of being permitted to grow marijuana - in other words it’s dispensed in some way, by tablet or spray - I would give it in-principle support,” he said.³

On 4 June 2003, Greens MP Kris Hanna introduced a bill⁴ in the South Australian House of Assembly to allow people to possess or smoke cannabis provided they had a doctor’s certificate stating that they suffered from an illness, that the doctor believed cannabis could mitigate their suffering, and that they had discussed the risks.

These Australian moves follow almost a decade of US “medical marijuana” campaigns. Back in 1993 the former

director of NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) Richard Cowan said: “Medical marijuana is our strongest suit. It is our point of leverage, which will move us toward the legalisation of marijuana for personal use. The key is medical access. Because once you have hundreds of thousands of people using marijuana medically under medical supervision, the whole scam is going to be bought.”⁵

Does cannabis have any beneficial effects? What is behind the current push for medicinal marijuana? This paper reviews the available evidence and provides some answers.

Dubious research

The research on marijuana being conducted by G W Pharmaceuticals is of doubtful validity. Physiologist Dr Greg Pike, deputy director of the Southern Cross Bioethics Institute in Adelaide, says: “Very few whole plant extracts are now used in medicine - they are an extremely coarse approach to determining the medicinal value of a substance. It is like going back to the 1800s - using the whole opium poppy plant for treating pain, instead of the active component (morphine). It is like using willow bark instead of aspirin.

“The cannabis plant has over 400 different chemicals which may differ in relative concentration from plant to plant. When you use the whole plant, dosages can never be exact and cannot be validly compared with other doses. You cannot be exactly sure what you are testing. You need to isolate the different chemicals and test them separately,” Dr Pike said. “They should be administered in tablet or liquid form - never smoked (which is harmful in itself).

“Moreover, cannabis is known to have adverse effects, and one would expect the whole plant extract to have these harmful side effects too,” Dr Pike says. “One must therefore question the ethics of the G W Pharmaceuticals trials. If they want to do valid research, they should do the hard work of extracting the active ingredients in cannabis - such as THC (tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (cannabidiol), and trialling them.

“The current trials test the cannabis plant extract against placebos, not against the best available treatment. It could be argued that these trials are neither valid nor ethical,” Dr Pike said.⁶

Billionaire backer Soros

In 1994, US billionaire and free-thinker George Soros told those wanting legal drugs to devise “an approach that emphasises treatment and humanitarian endeavours ... hire someone with the political savvy to sit down and negotiate with government officials and target a few winnable issues like medical marijuana.”⁷

The new strategy was adopted. Over the next few years in the US, expensive media campaigns were launched to promote

citizen initiative referendums legalising the possession and use of cannabis for medicinal purposes. The referendums passed and were made law in nine states - Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. The initiatives were largely funded by wealthy entrepreneurs with pro-drug views.⁸

The three main backers, according to Robert Maginnis of the Family Research Council,⁹ were billionaire George Soros, Ohio insurance company CEO Peter B Lewis and Arizona's Phoenix University founder John Sperling. Mr Lewis was arrested in New Zealand in 2000 after NZ customs found cannabis and hashish (a potent form of cannabis) in his luggage¹⁰ - suggesting a personal interest in a relaxation of drug laws.

George Soros claims a different motivation. His website says he was born in Hungary in 1930, survived Nazi occupation and left communist Hungary for England in 1947.¹¹ He graduated from the left-wing London School of Economics in 1952. The philosopher Karl Popper had a profound impact on Soros's thinking. Popper's famous book *The Open Society* argued that governments should "maximise the freedom of individuals to live as they wish".

Soros moved to the US in 1956 and later became one of the world's richest men after manipulating international money markets. He has donated millions of dollars to causes he considers worthy, such as opposing communism. He has also donated at least \$30 million to groups advocating medicinal marijuana and the decriminalisation of addictive drugs.¹² In 1997 alone, he donated \$15 million to campaigns to weaken US drug laws.¹³ Soros money finances the Lindesmith Center in New York, a pro-drug "drug policy research organisation".¹⁴

George Soros has openly admitted that in his younger days he "tried marijuana and enjoyed it but it did not become a habit and I have not tasted it for many years ... I believe that a drug-free America is a utopian dream ..."¹⁵

Some aging power brokers, like George Soros and Bill Clinton, dabbled in the milder forms of cannabis available 40 years ago and seem unaware of the much greater dangers of the high-THC cannabis available today. Cannabis available in Australia in the 1990s was 10-15 times more potent than the "pot" smoked in the 1960s and 70s.¹⁶

Addiction and mental health

Recent studies have disproved the widely held belief that cannabis is not addictive. The November 2000 edition of *Experimental and Clinical Pharmacology* reported a study by Dr Elena Kouri which found 60% of participants experienced significant withdrawal symptoms - increases in irritability, anxiety and physical tension as well as decreases in appetite and mood.¹⁷

Scientists at the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) have shown that laboratory animals will self-administer THC (the active ingredient in cannabis) in doses equivalent to those used by humans who smoke the drug. This self-administration by animals is characteristic of all drugs of addiction, such as heroin and cocaine. NIDA researcher Dr Steven Goldberg said, "Marijuana has as much potential for abuse as other drugs of abuse."¹⁸

Evidence of the mental health risks of cannabis has been available for many years, especially in the Middle East where cannabis has been part of the culture for centuries. British author and media commentator Malcolm Muggeridge taught at Cairo University in the late 1920s. He later described the "stupefied faces and inert minds of so many of the students there" - all addicted to cannabis. He said: "I know of no better exemplification of the death wish at the heart of our way of life than this determination to bring about the legalisation of hashish so that it may ravage the West as it has the Middle and Far East."¹⁹

"Hashish", according to the Oxford Dictionary, is the top leaves and tender parts of the cannabis plant, dried for smoking or chewing²⁰ - that is, similar in meaning to "marijuana". More

recently, "hashish" is used to describe a potent, processed form of cannabis - the thick translucent resin secreted on the hairs of the leaves of the *cannabis sativa* plant.²¹ Our English word *assassin*, "one who undertakes to kill treacherously", is derived from the Arabic *hassasin*, "hashish-eaters". The first assassins were Muslim fanatics at the time of the Crusades who were primed with hashish before setting out on their murder errands.²²

Australian cannabis authority Elaine Walters quotes emeritus Professor of Psychiatry Samuel Cohen of the London Medical College, who said: "Cannabis is certainly one of the commonest reasons for admission to psychiatric wards and is extremely costly to the health services." Citing media reports of people who have killed others after smoking cannabis, Mrs Walters says: "To counsellors, this relationship between marijuana use and violence comes as no surprise."²³

Cannabis and depression

Actor Garry McDonald, better known as TV comic "Norman Gunston", featured in *Australian Story* on ABC TV on 11 February 2002. He told how his career collapsed ten years earlier, after he became deeply depressed. He said his first anxiety attack began after he smoked hashish.

Garry McDonald's story was broadcast only days after the media reported a major study by George Patton, a professor of adolescent health in Melbourne, showing a link between cannabis and depression. The study, published in the *British Medical Journal*, followed 2000 youths for seven years from the ages of 14 to 21 to gather data.²⁴ Professor Patton described the research findings as "very, very striking ... This is the best evidence yet that ... cannabis is bad for your mental health and does cause higher rates of depression and anxiety problems."²⁵

News of the Melbourne findings coincided with a report from Sydney, where a 32 year old surfer, Marcel Mitton, who had been a daily cannabis smoker for at least five years, drowned himself after a bout of depression in January 2002. His mother Gundi Mitton "unleashed a fiery condemnation of cannabis during her eulogy at his funeral".²⁶

Similar concerns were expressed at the May 2001 funeral of a young Adelaide man, Gordon MacKenzie, from a loving Christian home. His sister told the congregation that when her brother was 15, a fellow worker at a fast food outlet offered him some cannabis to help pass the time during quiet periods when they were not needed in the kitchen. Gordon accepted the joint, and the habit began - eventually leading to his death by suicide 13 years later. Relatives said Gordon received little help from government drug agencies or hospitals, who "didn't see cannabis as a problem".²⁷

An SA drug counsellor confirmed that depression is a common problem for cannabis addicts. "A recent client ... was so depressed after years of cannabis use that she had to be placed on anti-depressant medication before we could begin treating her."²⁸

The counsellor said cannabis users find it hard to detoxify because the active component THC is fat soluble, unlike alcohol, heroin, amphetamines or the nicotine in tobacco. "When you stop using heroin, it is all out of your system within a day," the counsellor said. "But the THC in cannabis sticks around in your fatty tissue - the brain, the ovaries, testes and other organs - and it takes nearly three months before it completely leaves your body. Some people are now realising that cannabis is as dangerous as heroin. Cannabis can cause depression and psychotic attacks in users. It may also be a 'gateway' drug - I don't know any heroin or speed users who didn't start on cannabis," the counsellor said.²⁹

Schizophrenia and youth suicide

A 1987 study of the incidence of schizophrenia in more than 50,000 Swedish conscripts followed up for 15 years found that cannabis use more than 50 times during adolescence increased the risk of schizophrenia by 600%, with the risk proportional to the dose.³⁰ A longer follow-up and re-analysis published in the

British Medical Journal in 2002 confirmed the earlier findings and showed that cannabis use triggered the schizophrenia - not the other way around.³¹

A three year follow up of a Dutch cohort of 4045 people free of psychosis and 59 with a baseline diagnosis of a psychotic disorder showed a strong association between use of cannabis and psychosis. The length of exposure to cannabis predicted the severity of the psychosis, which was not explained by the use of other drugs.³²

The editorial in the November 2002 edition of the *British Medical Journal* cited these and some ten other recent studies showing that cannabis use is associated with a very serious increase in psychiatric illness.³³

More evidence linking cannabis with suicide is emerging. On 4 February 2002, Norman Swan of ABC Radio National interviewed Sven Silburn about his research into the causes of youth suicide. Sven Silburn is Professor at the Centre for Developmental Health at Curtin University and the Institute for Child Health Research, both in Perth.

Professor Silburn said the percentage of suicides involving illicit drugs, detected post-mortem, "has risen from 10% twelve years ago to 50% in the last two years ..." He said that the incidence of suicide followed the availability of cannabis. "There are a number of studies internationally that are showing that any amount of regular cannabis use beyond once a week is likely to quite significantly elevate the risk of depression," Professor Silburn added.

On 15 February 2002, psychologist Dr John Anderson told a drug seminar in Perth: "Australia has one of the highest male suicide rates in the world and the second highest rate of cannabis use. There is a link." Dr Anderson said most people underestimate the dangers of cannabis. "You don't see people admitted with serious mental health problems through the use of tobacco and alcohol," he said.³⁴

Physical health risks

More and more studies are indicating serious health risks from cannabis use - not only to mental health as mentioned above, but to heart, lungs (including lung cancer), other cancers, fertility, pregnant women and their babies, memory and motivation. Cannabis also adversely affects the ability to drive cars and operate machinery safely.³⁵

A *British Medical Journal* editorial in May 2003 cites nine recent studies which show that regular use of cannabis is associated with an increased incidence of schizophrenia, depression, and diseases of the heart and respiratory system. "There are indications that smoked cannabis may have similar effects to smoking tobacco, with many of them appearing at a younger age," the editorial said. "Myocardial infarction (heart attack) is 4.2 times more likely to occur within an hour of smoking cannabis."³⁶

Cannabis can also impair the immune system. A study in *The Journal of Immunology* found that the THC in marijuana can impair the body's anti-tumour immune system, thus enabling tumour growth.³⁷ Another study published in the journal found that THC suppresses immunity against the bacteria which cause legionnaire's disease.³⁸ A study in the *Journal of Cannabis Therapeutics* found that "marijuana and cannabinoids alter immune cell function and can exert deleterious effects on resistance to infection in humans."³⁹

Such studies led the US Drug Enforcement Agency to say in 2002: "Marijuana can affect the immune system by impairing the ability of T-cells to fight off infections, demonstrating that marijuana can do more harm than good in people with already compromised immune systems. Because of these immune suppression properties, the National Institutes of Health recommends that people with HIV, and others whose immune systems are impaired, should avoid marijuana use."⁴⁰

History of medicinal marijuana

The cannabis plant was a source of some US medications in the 19th century. In the 20th century, Middle East nations such as Egypt and Turkey, where cannabis harm was well-known, lobbied for international conventions against its use. In 1937 the US outlawed cannabis use and drug firms such as Squibb (now Bristol-Myers Squibb) and Eli Lilly stopped marketing their preparations containing cannabis.⁴¹ By 1942 cannabis had disappeared from the US Pharmacopoeia.⁴²

Then came the 1960s "hippy" movement, famous for its uninhibited exploration of illicit drugs and sexuality. Cannabis use in Western nations increased greatly, particularly among the growing homosexual community. Recent surveys of the Sydney gay community by the National Centre in HIV Social Research note that about 50% of male homosexual respondents reported cannabis use in the previous six months⁴³ - way above the Australian average of 18% during the previous year.⁴⁴

As the deadly disease Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) took its toll of homosexual communities in the 1980s and 90s, governments were pressured to legalise "medicinal marijuana" to help relieve the severe pain and "wasting" syndrome in male homosexual AIDS patients. Many of these patients were already addicted to cannabis - the "relief" claimed by smoking the drug may have been only relief of withdrawal symptoms.

US federal drug officials have so far resisted moves to legitimise "medicinal" cannabis. The US Public Health Service stated in 1992: "Existing evidence does not support recommending the smoking of marijuana as a treatment of choice for any of the stated medical conditions. This decision was made by the Public Health Service primarily because of the fear that smoked marijuana would be harmful to people with compromised immune systems."⁴⁵

The US Supreme Court came to a similar conclusion after hearing all the evidence in 2001. The Court ruled, in *United States v Oakland Cannabis Buyers' Cooperative*, that marijuana has no medical benefits worthy of an exception outside a government-approved research project. The Court held that "medical necessity is not a defence to manufacturing and distributing marijuana."⁴⁶

Rules for medicinal trials

The medicinal use of cannabis plants or liquid plant extracts does not comply with the *Rules Governing Medicinal Products in the European Union*, which require that all active ingredients be identified and their chemistry determined. The products must be tested for purity, with limits set for all impurities including pesticides, microbes and fungi and their products. Prior testing on animals is required to provide information on effects on fertility, embryo toxicity, immuno-toxicity, mutagenic and carcinogenic potential - to evaluate risks to humans.

Other requirements include adequate safety and efficacy trials. The method of administration must be stated, as well as adverse drug reactions including any effects on driving competence or operating machinery and effects on special groups such as people with kidney problems and pregnant women. The drug must be accepted by qualified experts whose detailed reports must take into account the addictive potential of the drug.⁴⁷

In a letter to Californian Attorney-General Bill Lockyer in 2002, the Administrator of the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) rejected the medicinal use of cannabis or whole plant extracts, but gave qualified approval for the use of THC. The DEA said: "Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, has proven to have some medicinal value. That is why the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the drug under the name MarinolTM."

The FDA regulates the contents of the drug, and it is available by prescription from licensed physicians. Unfortunately, marijuana distributed by dealers at clubs cannot offer the same

safety guarantees. Just as the medical community regulates morphine, rather than recommending patients smoke opium, so Marinol™ seems the better choice for ill persons, as opposed to smoking marijuana...⁴⁸

However THC has not performed better than other treatment options in valid trials. A study in the 2001 *British Medical Journal* found that cannabinoids tested in cancer, chronic or acute pain, were no better than codeine and had far more serious side effects.⁴⁹ A separate study on the effectiveness of cannabinoids in treating nausea (eg from chemotherapy) found they were slightly more effective than standard treatments, but their side effects made them a poor choice for nausea relief.⁵⁰

Australian cannabis use

The softening of cannabis laws in South Australia and the ACT has already sent a dangerous message to Australian young people that cannabis - contrary to the evidence - is a relatively harmless drug. Former Queensland Supreme Court judge Athol Moffitt and his co-authors showed that before decriminalisation, SA teenage cannabis use was below the national average. After the SA law changed in 1987 to require a mere "expiation" payment (like a parking ticket) for growing up to ten cannabis plants, SA teen cannabis use increased by 50% - the highest increase for any state.⁵¹

It is noteworthy that the SA government has responded to this increase (and corresponding rise in mental illness) in 2001 by reducing the number of "expiable" plants to just one. The SA law was tightened further in 2003, with a prohibition on the growing of any cannabis plants by hydroponic means.⁵²

Laws to allow "medicinal marijuana" would again send a

damaging message to young people. Robert Maginnis of the US Family Research Council has noted that, of the nine US states which passed "medicinal marijuana" laws in the mid 1990s, seven had teenage cannabis use above the national average by 1999.⁵³

Australian rates of cannabis are already among the highest in the world. 2001 statistics compiled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that a quarter of all Australian teens aged 14-19 used cannabis in the last 12 months, with nearly 10% using cannabis in the last week. Of those aged 20-29, nearly a third have used cannabis in the last year while 16% have used cannabis in the last week.⁵⁴ These figures have disturbing implications for the nation's future mental and physical health.

Conclusion

Cannabis is an addictive drug which has serious adverse effects on physical and mental health, and on public safety through driving and operating machinery. Cannabis use is linked with an increase in depressive illness, schizophrenia and youth suicide in Australia.

Medicinal benefits derived from some cannabinoids such as THC (Delta-9-Tetrahydrocannabinol), including relief from pain and nausea, have not been proven to exceed those of other drugs which have less serious side effects. Since cannabis has been shown to impair the immune system, its use by sick people is likely to make their illness even worse.

The enactment of "medicinal marijuana" laws in the US has been linked with an increase in teenage use of cannabis.

No government acting in the best interests of its people should legalise "medicinal marijuana" in any form.

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Chuck Colson

Teenagers, sex and depression

from Chuck Colson of Prison Fellowship Ministries, US

The Heritage Foundation has published a new study showing a link between sexual activity and depression among teenagers.

The news isn't good. For sexually active girls aged 14-17, the rates of depression (defined as "unhappiness", not clinical depression) are more than three times higher than for those who have not been sexually active.

Sexually active boys "are more than twice as likely to be depressed as those who are not sexually active". And both boys and girls who have been sexually active are more likely to commit suicide.

Study co-author Robert Rector is quick to point out that the study, based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health, does not show conclusive evidence of a "causal link" between sexual activity and depression. Such a cause-and-effect relationship, he says, would be "really impossible to prove". And some people, of course, are sceptical about the study as a whole.

Tamara Kreinin of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), which promotes "safer sex" education, thinks it's important to focus on other factors as well when studying teenage depression - factors like family problems and abuse.

Kreinin may be right about that. But the study's authors did control for certain "social background factors", like "gender, race, age and family income". Moreover, nearly two thirds of the sexually active teenagers surveyed expressed regrets about having sex too early.

This suggests that "early sexual activity leads to emotional stress and reduces teen happiness". And regardless of whether unhappiness causes early sexual activity or the other way around, they say, "teens should be told that sexual activity

in teen years is clearly linked to reduced personal happiness."

You'd think everyone could agree about this. Unfortunately, nothing will deter some people from selling the "safer sex" message to kids. No matter what the data show, organisations like SIECUS and Planned Parenthood insist there's no way to stop kids from having sex and that the best we can do is to teach them to use condoms and other birth control methods.



Sex and teens - the good news

from Focus on the Family *Citizen*, July 2003, p 7

A study published recently in the *Journal of Adolescent and Family Health* shows the abstinence education movement, even in its infancy, has made an impact on the teen birth rate.

An Analysis of the Causes of the Decline in Non-Marital Birth and Pregnancy Rates for Teens from 1991 to 1995 compared four factors:

higher rates of abstinence, fewer births among married teens, the decline in teenage marriages and births to single adolescent girls.

Among those, abstinence accounted for two thirds of the declining teen birth rate, from 62 births per 1000 girls in 1991 to 50 births per 1000 in 1995. In addition, the pregnancy rate per 1000 girls fell from 116 to 93 during that time.

"Abstinence education picked up steam in the late 1980s and early 1990s," said Joanna Mohn, M D, the study's lead au-

thor. "Abstinence has blossomed a lot since 1995. So what we're seeing here is the impact of the very start of the movement, not as fully developed as it is now."

The A&FH study contradicts a 1999 report from the Alan Guttmacher Institute attributing 75 per cent of the falling teen birth rate to more consistent use of contraceptives, in which researchers studied teens from 1988 to 1995; however, the report failed to separate married from unmarried teens.

"That's important for two reasons," Mohn said. "Married teens have five times the pregnancy and birth rates of single teens. And births to married and single teens have different social implications, such as greater numbers of single mothers applying for welfare. To put them together is disingenuous."

The greatest increase in abstinence was among teens who were sexually experienced, but who had chosen not to have sex in at least the 12 months before the survey.

Mohn's data was extracted from the National Survey of Family Growth, which released its most recent results on sexual activity among 15 to 19 year olds in 1995. When a new round of data is released next year, examining that age group's sexual activity from 2000 to 2003, Mohn said she expects to see even higher rates of abstinence.

The complete study is available on the Internet at www.physconsortium.com. Click on "Issues", then click on "Journal of Adolescent and Family Health".

Drug-proof your kids

A 2001 study* found that adolescents with "hands-on" parents have a much lower risk of drug use than the average teen. However only one in four teens (27%) live with "hands-on" parents.

"Hands-on" parents are those who:

- sit down to dinner with their teen six or seven times a week;
- monitor their teen's TV and Internet viewing;
- restrict their teen's CD purchases;
- monitor their teen's school performance;
- give their teen a clear message about drug use.

The study also found that teens who attend religious services weekly or more often have a much lower risk of drug use.

* "National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VI: Teens", QEV Analytics, The Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University, February 2001.