

III.B. Recognising the dagga user

Dagga is typically smoked, and the onset of effects occurs within a few seconds of inhaling, lasting for two to four hours.

Some dagga users are very easy to identify:

- The drug has a strong odour that lingers in the hair and clothing. An experienced police member should be able to identify this distinctive smell.
- Devoted users may sport dagga leaf insignia on their clothing, jewellery, bumper stickers, or other items. Their clothing may also make more subtle reference to the drug, through slogans such as 'blunt' (a reference to a hollowed out cigar packed with dagga).
- The Rastafarian religion views dagga as a sacrament, and its members are easy to identify due to their long dreadlocks and typical dress (including the large knit cap or 'tam' and use of the colours of Ethiopian flag: gold, green, and red.)
- Recent users will often have bloodshot, watery eyes; drooping eyelids; slow reaction times, and possibly body tremors.
- The user's pulse and blood pressure will be elevated while under the influence of dagga.
- The inner edge of index finger and the tip of the thumb, as well as the lips, may show burns from smoking short 'stompies'.
- Dagga users suffer from 'non-convergence' of the eyes, or the inability to keep the eyes 'crossed' ('go squint').

This final indicator can be tested in the following manner. A pen is held vertically at the suspect's eye-level, approximately 35 cm from the face. Suspects should be told to hold their heads straight, and follow the tip of the pen with their eyes only. The pen should be moved slowly from side to side along an arc of about 30 cm. The pen should then stop at the centre of the suspect's face, in line with his nose, and should be moved towards the nose at eye level. If sober, the suspect's eyes should both track the pen smoothly to the tip of the nose – the eyes will cross. Dagga use will cause one eye to 'release' and track out, with only one eye remaining focused on the tip of the nose.

Of course, people may display any of these indicators and NOT be users of dagga – none of these indicators can stand alone as a basis for reasonable suspicion of



possession, but they can provide a basis cumulatively. Note should be taken of symptoms present for use in court.

All sorts of people use dagga, and some use well known techniques to avoid detection:

- Use of breath fresheners, body sprays, and incense to cover the odour.
- Use of eye drops or dark glasses to hide bloodshot eyes.

HINT: Always require suspects to remove dark eyeglasses. Not only are the eyes the most important feature to observe in order to detect drug use, but they are also helpful in determining whether the suspect is lying, intends to resist or flee, or is mentally ill.

Dagga generally produces a state of sedation, so intoxicated subjects are usually compliant. Excessive consumption can produce paranoia and panic attacks, however. As is the case with all intoxicants, dagga users may behave in ways they would not when sober.

Dagga is fat soluble, and its metabolites are detectable in the urine for periods of a month or more after last use for heavy users. According to the 3 Metros study, urban dagga users are more likely to be:

- male;
- Indian or coloured;
- under the age of 20;
- arrested for thefts or drug related crimes.

This profile is consistent with that of the population presenting for treatment at the country's rehabilitation centres, as monitored by the South African Community Epidemiological Network on Drug Use (SACENDU).