

# Marijuana in Chuuk

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## Introduction

Marijuana is best known as "mamo" to the people of Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia. Marijuana is sometimes referred to as the "different" cigarette. Marijuana is a pretty new item to the Chuukese people. Its newness and foreignness is evident in the many vocabulary words that the Chuukese use in association with marijuana. They include such words as "joint", "wrap", "tops", and "seeds".

It is said that marijuana was first introduced to Chuuk

**"Overall, marijuana smoking is seen as a major youth problem, second only to the drinking of alcoholic beverages as the greatest youth problem in Chuuk."**

by a foreigner to Nama Island towards the end of the 1960's. This foreigner was reported to have brought some marijuana seeds which he planted. By the early 1970's there was also a small amount of marijuana filtering into Chuuk. The substance was brought in by students from Palau, Yap, and Saipan. In 1973 marijuana seeds were also brought in from Saipan by a sailor. These seeds were planted on one of the lagoon islands.

It was not until the late 1970's that marijuana invaded the islands in large quantity. With improved transportation and increased population movement, marijuana found new and effective means of entering and leaving the area.

## Method

This report, the outcome of a five month study that started in May, 1985, looks into the problem of marijuana in Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia. This study was exploratory, to gather as much information on marijuana as possible. Three different questionnaires were used. One questionnaire was for habitual marijuana users, those who smoke now as well as those who regularly smoked in the past and have now given up the habit. Another one was for the non-users of marijuana, people who never smoke the material, or those who tried it only

once, then stopped. The last questionnaire was for the dealers, those who make marijuana a source of income. If a person has ever at any time sold marijuana, he was considered a dealer. Fifteen dealers with ages ranging from 17 to 32 answered this questionnaire.

There was no criteria for picking the subjects except that they be cooperative and willing to answer the questions asked of them. The study was done mostly on the lagoon islanders, although some of the subjects were outer islanders residing on Moen.

Information about marijuana in Chuuk was gathered from the government agencies dealing with illegal substance control. These agencies include the Public Safety Department, the Chuuk State Court, and the State Legislature. Information was also gathered from casual contacts with other people "in the know".

## Results and Discussion

Today, marijuana is grown on every island in Chuuk Lagoon and smoked widely by Chuukese youth. This is illustrated by the following incident:

*Three young boys were drinking coconuts by the road. On approaching them, I asked if I could have one. The youngest one, who was naked and about 5 to 6 years old, offered me one. The other two kids were probably about ten or eleven. When the five-year old was handing me the coconut, I could smell the marijuana smoke. I asked how it was that I could smell marijuana. One of the older boys said that his friend, the other older boy, had just finished smoking some. Giggling, the five-year old said it was true. I turned to the younger kid and asked if he smoked. To that he said "No". I then asked him if he knew what marijuana was. He quickly replied yes to the question, as though he could not believe I asked him that question. As if to prove his claim, he went on to say that it is like cigarettes which you smoke and then you get "stoned". I asked him what "stoned" meant. He responded by saying that it is when a person laughs and giggles all the time. He then ran off upon seeing that other people were approaching us.*

This incident shows that even a five-year old knows what marijuana is and what it does. Yet, the child must have had some idea that what he was talking about was a bad thing, because he stopped what he was talking about and ran off when other people approached.

## Marijuana and the Law

The Chuuk State Government does not have its own laws or regulations on any illegal drugs or substances. There is a plan to enact legislation soon, according to a

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**Table 1. Daily Police Reports 1978-1984**

Year	Date	Place	Offenders			Quantity Confiscated	Value (\$)	Year	Date	Place	Offenders			Quantity Confiscated	Value (\$)
			Sex	No.	Age						Sex	No.	Age		
1978	9/24	Moen				1 p.	n/a	1984	2/25	Moen	M		9	2 p.	0
1979	2/09	Moen	M				n/a		2/29	Tol	M		31	200 p.	n/a
	6/18	Moen	M			15 j.	15		2/29	Tol	M			some p.	n/a
	9/26	Dublton	M			8 mature p.	2000		2/29	Tol	M			135 p.	0
1980	4/28	Moen	M			11 j.	11		2/29	Tol	M			5 p.	n/a
	4/28	Moen	M	17		Unreported			3/12	Moen	M			5 p.	n/a
	8/14	Moen	F	2	20,21	14 j.	14		3/20	Moen	M			6 p.	n/a
	8/19	Moen	M	2	29, ?	Unreported			3/20	Moen	M			10 p.	n/a
	9/18	Moen	M		30	1 plastic bag	21		3/21	Moen	F	4	16-17	1 j.	1
	9/18	Moen	M		30	5'5" p.	125		3/23	Tol	M			25 p.	5333
	9/19	Moen	M			14 oz.	292		3/23	Tol	M	2		74 p.	n/a
	10/1	Moen	M	2	?	2 mature p.	500		3/23	Tol	M		50	20 p.	n/a
1981	4/7	Moen	M	2	16, ?	32 j.	32		3/27	Udot	M			11 p.	0
	4/7	Moen	M		17	Unreported			3/30	Moen	F		22	6 j.	6
	4/15	Moen	M	2	22, ?	Unreported			3/30	Moen	F	2	22,41	5 j.	5
	4/30	Moen	F			2 j.	2		4/11	Tol	M			1 p.	n/a
	5/19	Moen	M		20	8 j.	8		4/16	Moen	M			cult. p.	n/a
	5/31	Moen	M		35	22 j.	22		4/16	Moen	M			12 p.	2500
	6/1	Moen	M			1 pack			4/21	Fefan	M			cult. p.	n/a
	6/6	Moen	M			1 j.	1		4/23	Moen	M			5 p.	n/a
	6/20	Moen	M			25 j.	25		4/23	Moen	M		24	cult. p.	n/a
	6/28	Moen	M			27 j.	27		4/30	Moen	M			1 p.	250
	7/22	Moen	M		25	1 j.	1		5/3	Tol	M		24	25 p.	5250
	9/9	Moen	M		32	2 j.	2		5/30	Tol	M			130 p.	16250
	10/20	Moen	M			plants	n/a		6/6	Moen	M		32	44 j.	44
1982	4/24	Udot	M			146 lbs	48667		6/9	Tol	M			2 p.	400
	4/24	Udot	M	3		some p.	n/a		7/3	Moen	M		26	1 j.	1
	4/24	Udot	M		34	6 lbs	2000		9/7	Moen	M		20	2 j.	2
	4/24	Udot	M		49	37 lbs	12333		10/1	Moen	M		22	7 j.	7
	5/6	Moen	M			some p.	n/a		10/6	Fefan	M		20	8 j.	8
	6/5	Tol	M			5 lbs	1667		10/6	Fefan	M		22	20 j.	20
	7/20	Moen	M		35	8 lbs	2667		11/21	Moen	M		41	65 j.	65
1983	No records for the whole year									12/1	Tol	M		10 lbs	3333
1984	1/26	Tol	M			16 j.	16		12/17	Moen	M		21	1 j.	1
	2/19	Fanapg	M	2		some j.	n/a	<b>Total Value of Marijuana seized: \$105,049</b>							

Computed values: 1 joint (j.) \$1. Mature plant (p.) \$250.



legal aid at the Chuuk State Legislature. The Chuuk State Government has adopted the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Criminal Code, formerly the old Trust Territory Code. It was enacted in 1980 as part of the FSM Code.

In this code it is specifically stated that possession and trafficking of marijuana is illegal. Possession of an ounce or less is punishable by a fine of not more than \$50. To possess from an ounce up to a kilo, or 2.2 pounds, is punishable by imprisonment of not more than three months, a fine of \$500 or less, or both. Possession of 2.2

One valuable piece of information that the officers' daily report provided was the quantity of the confiscated substance (See Table 1). The officers' reports did not assign any cash value to the confiscated substance but they did give the number of plants and the weights. Based on the information given by the dealers and the quantity recorded in the Daily Police Reports, we have calculated the estimated street value of the confiscated marijuana. According to the dealers, a mature plant (four to seven feet tall) when sold as a whole plant brings in an average of \$250. A mature plant, according to our rough calculations, would produce a weight of twelve ounces.

**For something as widespread and illegal as marijuana, one would expect to find records of many cases in the Government Judiciary system. Yet, it is surprising to find that there is only one recorded case in Chuuk's Courts.**

During the five years from 1979 to 1984 (excluding 1983), close to \$105,049 worth of marijuana was confiscated. This is an average of \$21,010 worth of marijuana per year.

None of the individuals arrested on possession or trafficking charges have ever been convicted, and very few have even been brought to trial. The Clerk of Courts told me in July 1985 that there

pounds or more of marijuana is punishable by imprisonment of not more than a year, a fine of not more than \$1000, or both. Possession of the same amount is presumed to constitute the crime of trafficking, because it is assumed that this quantity is too much for personal use. This is, therefore, punishable by imprisonment of not more than five years, a fine of not more than \$5000, or both.

The records at Chuuk Public Safety Department indicated that marijuana use is a crime that has been increasing yearly. The records showed that the first reported case of marijuana took place on Moen late in 1978. In the following years, the total police raids recorded were:

- 1979..... 3 cases
- 1980..... 8 cases
- 1981..... 13 cases
- 1982..... 8 cases
- (April-July only)
- 1983..... No records
- 1984..... 36 cases

This information was based on the individual police officers' daily reports. The daily reports do not mention whether the offenders were arrested or not. The monthly reports do.

Regrettably, the monthly reports only cover 1983 and 1984. They showed the following:

Year	Reported Cases	Number Arrested
1983	30	26
1984	56	40

has not been one marijuana case tried at the State level. According to a source who associates closely with that department, however, there have been three cases that have reached the court system on the State level. One has been adjudicated and two are still pending. One marijuana case has been tried in the FSM Supreme Court level on July 9, 1982. The offender was charged with trafficking and possession of a kilo or more of marijuana on April 26, 1981. This was the only case of marijuana use tried by the FSM Supreme Court in Chuuk. This particular case was dismissed on the grounds that the FSM Supreme Court did not have jurisdiction over the case.

**Marijuana as a Source of Income**

The study did not find conclusive evidence that the Chuuk marijuana crop was shipped or sold outside of the State. However, in the late 1970's and early 1980's marijuana was reported to be sold to the Marshall Islands. Some people said that this was because the Marshall Islands crop lacks the extra "kick" of the marijuana from Chuuk, Yap and Palau.

There were reports of two marijuana dealers who held responsible positions in the Chuuk government in 1976. At this time, the limited supply of marijuana in Chuuk was unable to meet the growing demand for the substance. Moreover, the marijuana imported from Palau and Saipan were reported to contain the extra "kick" the smokers were seeking. Consequently, the price was high - \$2 per joint and \$10 per plastic sandwich bag, later raised to \$20 per bag as the demand increased.

The Yap crop, which came into Chuuk, was reported to be just as strong as the Palau and Saipan crop. A former dealer told us that a plant would cost him between \$50 and \$150 in Yap. He would stuff a briefcase with marijuana and sell it in Chuuk as joints. This would bring in an average of \$1000. This fellow was the only one in Chuuk who had a whole network of dealers. His dealers went around the islands of the lagoon, especially Moen, selling marijuana joints. In an effort to keep up the interest of his dealers, he gave a ten percent commission to anyone who sold 50 joints. The most successful dealers were also given a bonus of about an ounce of marijuana for their own use. His business prospered from 1979 to 1982, when finally joined the Mwichen Asor and so took a religious pledge to discontinue his business.

On the whole, marijuana as a business was done very poorly. Mostly, it is a family undertaking, not a professional one. Many of the dealers who cooperated with us in providing information sell marijuana on a part-time basis. Some do so for a year or two, and others for a couple months only. There are others, however, who have been fortunate enough to gain the publicity necessary to do well in the business.

It was about one o'clock in the afternoon on a payday Friday on Moen. I walked into two young men wrapping joints of marijuana. I sat down by them and we talked while they went about their business. After talking about some unrelated topics, I asked them how much they made a week. One of them answered, "\$80 a week". I commented that that was a lot of money. He smiled, and as if quickly embarrassed, he grabbed the marijuana and the zig-zag wrappers and stuffed them into his backpack. He stood up and told his friend that they would have to finish wrapping later on. They did not leave the area. Neither did I. I hung around, observing the transactions which began the minute the two young men walked into the open. Apparently, they already had wrapped a lot of marijuana joints and had stored them in the backpack. I sat back and counted 22 people buying marijuana joints at a dollar a joint in the one hour. These two young men were at it every day of the week except on weekends. This made me doubt their claim that of \$80 a week income; they seem to be doing better business than that.

The 15 marijuana dealers interviewed made an average of \$100 a week. Some dealers claimed that they make more than \$150 a week, especially if the business is based on Moen. The dealers on the other lagoon islands said they would make an average of \$50 a week. These dealers either grow their own or buy plants from others. These plants are purchased at \$150 or more and were then sold as joints. It was estimated that these

dealers made profits of 100% to 200%. All except one of the dealers claimed that the marijuana business has helped in meeting their daily needs. The money has been used to buy kerosene, canned goods, soap, mosquito coil, and cigarettes. Those that really did well in the business have been able to buy outboard engines, generators, tape recorders, and motor bikes.

## Marijuana and the People

The study interviewed 121 people ranging from the age of 12 to 72. The breakdown of the interviewees were as follows:

	Males	Females	Total
Users	58	3	61
Non-users	21	23	44
Dealers	14	2	16

Twelve of the 44 non-users have tried the drug at some time or other. Although we cannot give a number or percentage of people who have come in direct contact with marijuana, we can say with certainty that a great majority of the interviewees have had some contact with it. Not a single one of the interviewees expressed lack of knowledge of the drug. All have at least heard about it.

Eighty percent of the interviewees believe that marijuana smoking produces certain side effects. These are, in order of the frequency with which people listed them: "craziness", absent-mindedness, laziness, reproductive

**"Many of the people interviewed believed that "craziness" was a side effect of marijuana smoking. This belief has led many of them to avoid the substance."**

process impairment, physical handicap, over-eating, high blood pressure; damaged nerves, irritability, lost in dreams, and affected lungs. "Craziness" is thought to be the most common side effect of marijuana smoking, as indicated by 22% of those interviewed (users and non-users only). In fact, this belief is given as the main reason those who have given up smoking actually quit. It is also given as the reason why 16 of the 44 non-users of marijuana do not use the drug. In describing what they mean by "crazy", some of the interviewees have mentioned "keeping silent", "feeling abnormal about oneself", "visualizing things", and "being afraid of people". It might also be noted that 10 of the 35 recorded Chuukese psychotics regularly use marijuana, according to case files assembled by Mariano Marcus.

Another of the perceived side effects of marijuana is laziness. It is this that has caused some of the regular users to break the habit. Moreover, it has been attributed



as the main reason why some of the regular users prefer taking the drug only at night when they are resting. This is especially true for the older members of the group who have families to take care of or who are responsible members of the community.

Interviewees claim that beside knowing of other substances like gasoline fumes and spray paint that are used to produce a "high", there are other drugs that they know of. They mention cocaine, snuff, heroin, opium, hash, LSD, pills, and speed. Five percent of those interviewed claimed that they have tried gasoline sniffing, and one individual expressed his preference of the gas fume's high over the marijuana high. Four percent of them have tried snuff. Twenty-five percent have not heard of any other substance besides marijuana. Six percent of the interviewees have heard that heroin is used in Chuuk but have not tried it. There is one person who claims he has tried cocaine while in Chuuk. There are two others who have tried heroin and hash, but they did not say where they experimented with these drugs.

Marijuana is seen as the second most common problem of Chuukese youth, after drinking of alcoholic beverages. When the interviewees were asked whether they preferred alcoholic beverages or marijuana, 45% said

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they prefer taking both, 35% prefer alcoholic beverages, and 20% prefer taking marijuana. Most teenagers prefer marijuana over alcohol. Of those interviewed, 70% who prefer marijuana are teenagers.

Although alcohol is very different from marijuana in many respects, they have at least one thing in common — they are used in a similar way. That is, they are consumed in the typical Pacific island consumption pattern, however much there is of the substance available, it must be consumed totally. Nearly half of the regular users of marijuana admit to following this consumption pattern in their own use. The quantity smoked can range from a single joint to a plant. In most cases, the users smoke in a group. In fact, one of the reasons given for smoking marijuana, especially for the first time, is peer pressure. All those interviewed who are now regular users admit that their initiation into marijuana smoking was never done alone, but in the presence of others.

The majority (67%) of the regular users said that they first smoked the substance to satisfy their curiosity about it. For most of the users this led to regular consumption of the substance, for they have, in their own words, "liked the high", "gotten the feeling", "felt relaxed", "felt happy", and "found pleasure".

## Summary

Marijuana is currently a widespread substance in Chuuk. It is not a native Chuukese crop, but first found its way into Chuuk in the late 1960's. It became extremely widespread in the later years of the 1970's. From 1979 to 1984 an annual average of \$21,010 worth of marijuana was confiscated each year. For something as widespread and illegal as marijuana, one would expect to find records of many cases in the Government Judiciary system. Yet, it is surprising to find that there is only one recorded case in Chuuk's Courts.

Although there is much buying and selling of marijuana on the local level, little, if any, of the Chuukese crop is sold outside Chuuk. On the other hand, there is strong evidence that Chuuk imports the substance from other areas of Micronesia. The marijuana business in Chuuk has not adopted a professional system, but it remains more of a family venture in which the family members cooperate in growing and selling the substance. The money that comes in is used to provide for the daily needs of the family.

More than half of the regular marijuana users first smoked the drug to test the substance that they had heard so much about. It is feared that the people who have heard of other substances besides marijuana might do the same with these other substances. The ma-

majority of the interviewees have heard of the other substances, but very few have actually tried them. This could be attributed to the very small influx of these substances up to the present. Many of the people interviewed believed that "craziness" was a side effect of marijuana smoking. This belief has led many of them to avoid the substance.

Overall, marijuana smoking is seen as a major youth problem, second only to the drinking of alcoholic beverages as the greatest youth problem in Chuuk.

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## References

References available from the author on request. □