

Comparative harms of legal and illegal drugs essay



There is much harm that comes about due to the use of drugs, legal or illegal. For starters there are many health risks that one takes if he or she abuses the power of drugs. Someone that is addicted to drugs, either legal or illegal, puts an awful strain on their bodies. They also put an awful strain onto their family and friends.

Attempts will be made in this paper to compare the harms that occur from the abuse of legal and illegal drugs. Throughout U. S. history there have been many attempts to control drug use. The first attempt to control drugs in the U. S.

came about in 1868. In that year the Pharmacy Act of 1868 was passed (Drugs 78). The act required the registration of anyone that was dispensing drugs, such as prescriptions. Around 1987 the first amounts of cocaine began to appear in the country, it was mainly used as a substitute for opium and a cure for asthma and toothaches (Drugs 78). The next major step to enforce drugs in the country came by the passing of the Harrison Act in 1914.

The act though was not a major force to prohibit the use of drugs. It was mainly a means to collect revenue from the sale of prescribed drugs. It also did make it unlawful to poses narcotics unless the drug was prescribed by a doctor (Drugs 79).

The next major act the came about to try and enforce drugs was in 1970. It was the Controlled Substances Act and the Controlled Substances Import and Export Act. These two acts created schedules for drugs amended the

penalties for violation and also gave strength to the regulation of the pharmaceutical industry.

What the federal government meant for these acts to do was act as a model for the states legislation to follow, and more often than not have been followed (Drugs 82). Then during the beginning of the 1980s the government began what is known as the War on Drugs. During this time many task forces, drug enforcement offices and drug polices began to appear and the focus of the drug control began to come down to punishment rather than treatment.

Lets try to define abuse and what it means to abuse drugs. Drug abuse consists of taking more than the prescribed amount of a medication without the medical advise of a physician.

Drug abuse also includes the use of any illegal substance such as marijuana, cocaine, LSD and heroine (Microsoft Drug 1). It is also possible to abuse legal substances such as nicotine or caffeine through excessive use. The word abuse also could be used along side of the word addiction. One is said to be addicted if their pattern of use, or any kind of activity, interferes with their everyday responsibilities in their life, such as their job or family.

There are many types of treatment that can be used to try and get the drug abuser off of the drugs. As far as tobacco is concerned one survey found that the majority of former smokers, (approximately 91%), quit on their own, without any professional assistance (Skaar 3). And the most popular method for those who quit was cold turkey, an all of the sudden stopping of smoking

without any type of medication or gradual reduction (Skaar 3). Another method that is used to quit smoking is a nicotine patch.

A nicotine patch is an actual patch that goes onto the smokers arm and delivers small doses of nicotine to the smoker instead of actually smoking the cigarette.

The doses are then gradually reduced until the smokers body no longer needs the nicotine in their body. As far as illegal drug abuse is concerned there is other types of treatment. Some of those other types of treatment include psychotherapy, psychological counseling and other types of detoxification programs, which is a supervised type of treatment that gradually takes the drugs out of the users system (Microsoft Drugs 1). During illegal drug abuse there is often crime that can become part of the users life.

Not only is it illegal to buy, sell and use illegal drugs, many users cant afford their habit. To support their habit they then have to become involved in various types of crimes.

These crimes often include burglary, robbery, and petty theft in which they then sell to afford the drugs. So the user then becomes deeply involved in the life of crime. It does not have to happen that way though. There is an enormous part of illegal drug abuse that involves people that have money to afford their habit.

In the course of this paper both legal drug abuse and illegal drug abuse will be discussed. Four drugs in each category will be discussed. In the legally abused drugs alcohol, nicotine, caffeine and herbal medicines will be

discussed. The illegal drugs that are commonly abused that will be discussed in this paper are, the most commonly used or abused drug in the world marijuana, cocaine, LSD and heroine. Of these drugs both the harms of the drugs themselves will be discussed and also some type of treatments that try and suspend the use of the drug will be discussed. Tobacco is the first of the legal drugs that will be talked about.

The addictive agent that is in tobacco is nicotine. It is very well known that smoking contributes to higher rates of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and many other respiratory diseases such as emphysema. Although even smokers very well know all of this, approximately twenty-five percent of the United States population continues to smoke (Skaar 1). In the United States in 1990 tobacco related deaths reached upward of 400, 000. This number represented nearly nineteen percent of all deaths and almost forty percent of all deaths resulting from a preventable cause (Skaar 1). Also as noted by Breslau, there has been observation in both men and women of a more than twofold greater risk for major depression in persons with nicotine dependence (Breslau 1).

Also stated was that even though there is a more common chance of major depression in women nicotine dependence and depression did not vary between the sexes. All of this means that both nicotine dependant men, and women are at a greater risk for major depression. As far as death from cancer, smokers are at a two times greater risk than a nonsmoker, and a heavy smoker is at a four times greater risk than a nonsmoker. Of the 400, 000 deaths that are accredited to smoking each year cancer accounts for close to 150, 000 of those (Skaar 2). There are two major cancer-causing <https://assignbuster.com/comparative-harms-of-legal-and-illegal-drugs-essay/>

agents that are found in cigarette smoking. These agents are polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons and heterocyclic amines (Skaar 2).

These substances can interfere with the process of cellular replication; often cause genetic damage and mutations. Smoking also has another way to kill, second hand smoke. Second hand smoke or passive smoking also has a large death rate. It is estimated that somewhere around 53, 000 deaths are caused each year due to second hand smoke (Skaar 2).

Another disease that smoking has a great toll on is cardiovascular disease. Smoking results in a three to four times greater likelihood of myocardial infarction, cardiac arrest and stroke. Of the 400, 000 smoking related deaths that were reported in 1990, 180, 000 of them were a result of some cardiovascular problem (Skaar 3). Patients that have been found to have some sort of cardiovascular disease and smoke have experiences a rapid decrease in the conditions of the disease once they quit smoking. One last major concern of smoking is when a women smokes when she is pregnant with a child. There are a few concerns that are associated with smoking and being pregnant.

There is an increased risk of pre and prenatal mortality, placenta abruptia, placenta previa, low birth weight, preterm delivery and SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) (Skaar 3). One other problem that the United States is currently having with smoking is paying for all of the people that are in the hospital with smoking related illnesses.

The states are stuck paying for illnesses that cigarette companies caused by putting their product on the market. So the states organized and filed a class action suit against the companies and won.

The settlements then made the cigarette companies raise the prices for their cigarettes and smokers end up footing the bill for their own habits. There is many ways for someone to quit smoking. The most popular way of smoking cessation is cold turkey or stopping smoking abruptly without any assistance. The majority of people, ninety-one percent, quit this way (Skaar 3). Other methods of quitting include gradual reduction from their high levels of nicotine by switching to a different brand of cigarette that has a lower nicotine dose, cutting back on daily consumption over a period of time and quitting with family members or friends. Alcohol is probably the most common legal mind altering drug found around the home and in fact everywhere.

The alcohol related costs to the United States have been estimated at 100,000 deaths and one hundred billion dollars each year (Dufour 1). It has recently been found that small amounts of alcohol can actually give the body protective efforts against coronary heart disease (Dofour 1). Alcohol affects each persons body different so each everyone must be aware of how their bodies react with alcohol. We have many of the obvious harms of alcohol use such as driving while intoxicated and possible causing an accident. Another situation in which alcohol is very harmful is that of a pregnant woman drinking. Alcohol can be very harmful to the developing fetus.

Some other risks that arise from the use of alcohol include violence, alcohol poisoning from excessive consumption, as well as the combination of alcohol and medicines can be dangerous. There is also long term risks that are part of the consumption of alcohol such as alcohol dependence, where the body needs alcohol to function properly, alcohol cirrhosis, and alcohol heart muscle disease (Dufour 2). There is two main ways in which a person can be detoxified from the use of alcohol. These include inpatient and outpatient detoxification.

If one were to consider outpatient detoxification they would be looking at a cheaper and quicker route to detoxification, but there is a much greater chance of a relapse back into the use of alcohol. Inpatient offers a better chance of success but its much more costly and time consuming because of the constant care and supervision by professionals (Hayashida 1).

During outpatient care the patient is expected to travel to a treatment facility daily during their detoxification. The treatment can range anywhere between three to fourteen days, averaging around six and one half days. Inpatient care requires a stay at a facility for the duration of the treatment. The usual stay ranges from five to fourteen days (Hayashida 1).

The main factor for detoxification of an alcoholic is not whether of not they seek inpatient or outpatient care, it is their personal characteristics. It will not matter if you are under constant supervision or not, if the patient does not want to quit drinking both of the programs are not going to work.

Codeine is a painkiller that is used mainly along with acetaminophen.

Acetaminophen alone is believed to produce analgesia mainly through

peripheral effects on the body. Codeine is believed to act mainly with the central nervous system and is used with acetaminophen.

The reason that codeine is used along with acetaminophen is that sometimes acetaminophen is ineffective by itself.

The codeine is believed to increase the analgesic effect without increasing the side effects (Walling 1). But when codeine is taken in more than one dose there are many side effects that occur. Some of these effects include nausea, dizziness, drowsiness and constipation (Walling 1). Other patients that use codeine on a long-term basis may be attempting to improve psychiatric symptoms such as mood disturbances. Romach suggests that data from a study performed at the University of Toronto provides proof that there is a strong relationship between depression and long-term codeine use (Depression 1). Patients with depression frequently present multiple symptoms such as headaches and back pain.

Instead of trying to solve these pain problems they are in fact trying to seek an improvement in their mood (Depression 2).

It is also found that the combination of analgesics containing codeine should be avoided wherever possible. It is said that the combinations offer no significant benefit, but can cause side effects such as constipation (Avoid 1). Codeine is also used in cough syrups. These cough syrups containing codeine may actually produce serious and possible life threatening side effects if children when taken in large doses.

It is also not necessary to treat children with these types of medications because coughs are mainly the result of viral infections and can be treated with the use of a humidifier and fluids (Use of Codeine 1). It was hypothesized that because there have been no well-controlled scientific studies on the use of narcotics such as codeine in children that the drug should not be used.

Also it may in fact be premature to prescribe such a medication because the cough is most likely the result of a viral infection that can be cured through much more conventional means such as fluids and a humidifier (Use of Codeine 4). Evidence points back to the Neanderthal period for the earliest use of plants as remedies for human ailments (Winslow 2). The practice of herbal medicine flourished until the 17th century when more scientific remedies began to be found. Recently herbal remedies have really begun to flourish as an interest has been developed in a more natural health (Winslow 2).

Currently around thirty percent of all drugs are made from plants (Winslow 2). Some estimates have the use of herbal medicines in the United States around 93% and yet others estimate the use of the herbs as low as 3% (Winslow 3). The economics of herbal remedies in the U. S. is great.

In 1994 Americans spent nearly \$553 million and these types of drugs.

And in 1996 it was estimated that herb sales reached \$1. 2 billion (Winslow 4). One reason that people tend to take herbal remedies instead of conventional medicines is a sense of control over what they are taking.

In other situations such as cancer and AIDS patients they take herbal remedies because there is no cure that has been found and they are giving themselves a natural medicine. As far as if the remedies are safe, there has been no real evidence to show that the medicines are not safe. Also there has been no real evidence that the herbs actually work as they are intended to work. One particular herb can vary greatly between different manufactures and different batches from the same manufacturer (Winslow 5). There is little reason for the manufacture of the herbs to conduct tests on these medicines because they are not required to, and it costs a lot of money to prove a new drug effective and is very hard for them to recoup any monies spent.

Marijuana is the first of the illegal drugs that is going to be spoken about. There are many common side effects that come about from the use of marijuana. These include trouble remembering things, sleepiness, anxiety, paranoia, and an altered sense of time. Also using marijuana for a long period of time makes people lose interest in school, work, relationships and many other activities (Adverse effects 1). There are also some physical effects that can but do not occur.

These physical effects can include tremors, nausea, headache, bad coordination, breathing problems, increased appetite, reduced blood flow to the brain, and probably the most severe in irreversible changes in the reproductive organs (Adverse effects 2). Marijuana also contains some of the same chemicals that are found in cigarette smoke that cause cancer.

Marijuana cigarettes or joints can cause more damage to the lungs than many tobacco cigarettes.

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That is mainly due to the fact that cigarettes are smoked with a filter and marijuana cigarette are not. Smoking marijuana is also associated with decreased positive mood states, such as friendliness, elation and vigor, and an increase in negative mood states such as anger, fatigue, and confusion (Brook 1).

Another finding about marijuana use is that individuals that smoked marijuana frequently during their adolescents and their early twenties were nearly twice as likely to be unemployed in their late twenties (Brook 7).

Lysergic acid diethyl amide or LSD was introduced in the United States in 1949 as a psychotomimetic that could produce a model psychosis. Although intellectuals refined LSD in the mid 1950s as a psychedelic capable of producing mystical enlightenment, the drug was being used by psychiatrists to cure neuroses and alcoholism and enhance creativity by the late 1950s. In 1960, Sidney Cohen, a doctor, concluded that the drug was safe if given in supervised medical settings. However, he retracted his statement in 1962 by warning of the effects of LSD as popularization, nonmedical use, black market LSD and patients harmed by the drug began to surface. T

here are many physical risks that are associated to the use of LSD.

Some of these risks include increased heart and blood pressure, sleeplessness and tremors, lack of muscular coordination, sparse, mangled and incoherent speech, decreased awareness of touch and pain which can result in many types of injuries, also the user develops a tolerance and therefore takes more of the drug and higher doses include greater risk of coma heart and lung failure and even death. There has also been a link

found between heavy users and birth defects in their offspring (Monroe 2). There are also some types of psychological risks involved. They include a sense of distance and depersonalization, depression, anxiety, paranoia, confusion, loss of control and flashbacks (Monroe 3).

Also a major concern of LSD is its unpredictability. No one can tell whether the LSD trip one is about to take is going to be a good trip or a bad trip. LSD can cause terrifying thoughts and feelings and fear of insanity and death.

Cocaine is a dangerous drug and is made from a plant called the coca.

The people of the Andes used the plant for centuries in a legal way by using the plant for chewing and as an herb tea. Part of the harm of cocaine is all of the money that the United States has to spend to try and stop the production of the coca plant. The U. S. utilizes military and police personnel to try and attack the production of the plant.

One of the major problems that they are having is a social and economic problem that will occur for the farmer of the plant if their farming is stopped. There is no alternative crop for the farmers to grow at this point. They did try and promote the production of soybeans in the area but the USDA put a stop to that with fears of competition with American growers and exports (Boucher 1). It is estimated that Peru's export earnings from the coca plant somewhere between \$1.

3 billion and \$2.8 billion, and Bolivia's at somewhere between \$1.4 billion to \$2 billion.

The plant is then imported to Columbia where it is processed into the drug.

When Columbia exports the drug they earn somewhere between \$7 billion and \$15 billion, but the actual revenue from transaction in the United States is far larger at \$76 billion to \$181 billion (The Kickback 1). Heroin is a drug that is often mixed or cut with other substances to both increase weight for sale and add different pharmaceutical effects (Scopolamine 1). The drug is injected into the arm of the drug user and is received by the body very quickly. One harm of this drug is that it is injected into the body. That means needles are being used and possibly shared between users.

Which in turn puts all of the users at a potentially greater risk to contract HIV, the disease that causes AIDS and then eventually death. Heroin users have a significantly higher risk of contracting HIV than do other drug users that inject drugs such as methamphetamine users (Zule 1). Users of heroin often overdose and when overdosing have characteristics of lethargy, respiratory depression, and pinpoint pupils (Scopolamine 4). There are many effects that drugs can have on someone's body.

It doesn't have to be harm, but for the majority of drugs, both legal and illegal there are harms that can come about from the use of the drug. This paper tried to explain the different effects and harms of four legal and four illegal drugs.