

Challenges of marijuana use in australia



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Abstract

Marijuana is an addictive drug which is made from a hemp plant and is typically consumed through smoking or liquid form. This illicit drug is widely used for recreational purposes and has a number of strengths and weaknesses associated. This paper will argue that recreational marijuana should not be legalised in Australia. Due to this, some of these strengths consist of mental and physical health problems caused by marijuana and environmental impacts associated with cultivation. The weaknesses of controlling the quality and safety of marijuana, reduction in crime and economic and social costs will be outweighed and converted. Furthermore, the theoretical perspective of social learning theory will be implemented to the non-legalisation of marijuana in Australia to further enhance this position.

In Australia, cannabis was recorded to be the most widely illicit drug used in 2016 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2018, Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia). Although this is the case, research from empirical sources indicates as to why marijuana should not be legalised for recreational use in Australia. This paper will clearly define and discuss terms such as marijuana as well as identifying the weaknesses and strengths of marijuana legalisation through the use of statistical research and data. Furthermore, the theoretical perspective of social learning theory will be implemented to support the position of not legalising marijuana in Australia for recreational purposes.

Marijuana is known as cannabis, weed, pot and so on and is an addictive drug that can have severe negative long-term effects on mental and physical health and the environment. To gain a better understanding of the drug, Marijuana is defined by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (2018) as a psychoactive drug made from dried leaves and flowers from a hemp plant which contains THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), creating mind-altering effects on users. The alteration of perception can gradually develop into and increases the likelihood of mental health problems such as schizophrenia (National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, 2019). Schizophrenia is a brain disorder that causes delusions and hallucinations which can also affect one's concentration span and motivation (American Psychiatric Association, 2017). When viewing information from the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (2019), it is evident that marijuana users are at a 40% risk of developing schizophrenia then non-smokers. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the National Drug Strategy Household Survey (2017), recorded that mental illness for cannabis users has increased from 21% to 28% throughout the year of 2016. Psychological distress from cannabis use also increased from 17% to 24% over the year of 2016 (National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 2017). Marijuana not only affects the user's mental health but also has an effect on one's physical health.

Lung and respiratory system damage are the main health issue associated with marijuana smoking according to the American Lung Association (2019). This is due to marijuana smoke containing 50% more benzopyrene and almost 75% more Benz anthracene, then unfiltered tobacco smoke (Tashkin, 2013). In addition, WU, Tashkin, Djahed and Rose (1988) stated that “

smoking one joint can lead to four times the exposure to carbon monoxide and three to five times more tar deposition". Moreover, marijuana smoker's lungs are at a high risk of exposure to tar and carcinogens due to the deep and longer retention of marijuana smoke (Tashkin, 2013). This has been further supported through biopsies taken from chronic marijuana smokers which disclosed mutation of tissue and identified early signs of cancer (Tashkin, 2013). As humans mental and physical health is negatively affected by marijuana so is the environment.

Indoor marijuana growing requires a lot of electricity for industrial lighting, heating, humidifiers and ventilation. More or less, indoor marijuana plants are capable of using between 50, 000 to 100, 000 watts of electricity for illumination alone (Jonlin & Lewellen, 2017). This is further supported by Mills (2012), who states that indoor cannabis production uses the equivalent of more than a million homes worth of electricity. This abundant use of electricity can generate a strain on the distributing networks, as well as polluting the air through the use of toxic chemicals resulting in the production of a large amount of greenhouse gas emissions. Although marijuana cultivation operations require substantially less energy and produce fewer emissions, they also come with consequences of land clearing, soil deterioration, habitat destruction and stream modification (Ponce, 2018). When trees are cleared in large quantities, it can become demanding on soil and the encircling ecosystem is deprived of its essential source of water retention, concluding in the extracting of nourishment from the soil (Keenan & Kimmins, 1993). As cultivators acquire water for irrigation, they divert springs, streams and rivers in order to do so. Consequently, the

amount of flowing water is decreased, evoking ecological concerns of altering the condition of the aquatic biosphere, lowering oxygen levels and raising water climates (Bauss, 2017). Along with this, the application of anticoagulant rodenticide (AR) around marijuana horticulture locations has significantly reduced the wildlife population (Thompson, Sweirzer, Gabriel, Purcell, Barrett & Poppenga, 2014). As a result, the mental and physical health of users and the environment are majorly affected by marijuana and should therefore not be legalised.

As this has been proven, people such as Todd (2018), believe that legalising marijuana is beneficial in controlling the quality and safety of marijuana, reducing the criminalisation and is financially profitable. These strengths of legalising marijuana will be examined and manipulated to promote the position that marijuana should not be legalised in Australia for recreational purposes. When viewing Todd's (2018) report, she states that if marijuana is not prohibited in Australia its purity and potency cannot be tested. Without monitoring mechanisms and inspections on the quality of marijuana, user's will not be protected against toxic contaminants (Todd, 2018). It is believed by the Drug Policy Alliance (n. d.) that by not legalising marijuana, the quality and safety of the product can lead to consumer harm. However, the National Institute of Drug Abuse (2019) reported that there have been no recorded deaths from marijuana poisoning or overdose in Australia. In support, the Department of Health (2004) found that poisoning or death from marijuana does not occur. The main causes of death associated with marijuana are physical health effects such as lung and respiratory damage. This is evident when viewing Better Health (n. d.) as it is recorded that 18,

800 smokers in 2011 died from lung cancer in Australia. In addition, Better Health (n. d.) states that lung cancer is mainly caused by smoking and has the highest rate for cancer-related deaths in Australia. These effects cannot be prevented by quality and safety control of marijuana and will only worsen if the drug is legalised. This increase could, in turn, inflate the rate of crime in Australia.

It is stated by Morris (2018) that the authorisation of marijuana will reduce the population participating in illegal acts and remove the stress stationed on the criminal justice system, in turn diverting attention to other crimes. As marijuana is legal in the state of Washington, a study conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington (2014) concluded that since the legalisation of marijuana, the figure of minor convictions for this drug reduced by 98%. Furthermore, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2017) established that the number of adults convicted for misdemeanour possession fell to zero between 2012-13. Within the early years of legalisation in Colorado, cultivation, distribution and possession charges fell by 85% (Gettman, n. d.). Although this was to be expected, the legalisation of marijuana does not occur to be correlated with minimisation in non-drug related crimes (Morris, 2018). An inquiry administered by Chu and Townsend (2017) found no evidence of property crime rates being affected by the legalisation of marijuana at a national level. It is also reported by Morris (2018) that violent crime such as rape, robbery, burglary, larceny and auto theft were not considerably altered when the legalisation of marijuana was introduced. To further support Morris (2018) and Chu and Townsend (2017), the Colorado Bureau of Investigations' (2017) annual state-wide

statistics reported that all forms of violent crime in Colorado have steadily increased by 25% over the past five years (2013-17) since legalisation of marijuana and property crime rates also rose state-wide during that time. Due to an increase in violence and property crime, the economic and social costs of marijuana legalisation may vary.

Pro-marijuana campaigners have debated that the immediate costs of legalising marijuana are counterbalanced by the economic profits from compressed budgets on criminal justice expenses (Evans, 2013). According to Miron (2005), the legalisation of marijuana will reduce the need for criminal justice resource costs by approximately USD\$13. 7 billion annually. Although this is the case, the legalisation of marijuana will increase the number of users and have a direct cost on violent crime and property crime, the healthcare system and productivity. This is stated by the National Drug Intelligence Centre (2011), who calculated America's annual waste to illness, accidents, lost productivity, and crime from legalising marijuana at USD\$129 billion. Ultimately, there are fewer benefits involved in the economic and social costs of marijuana legalisation and should therefore not be adopted in Australia. To further support this position, the theoretical framework of social learning theory will be applied.

The theoretical perspective of social learning theory is a learning procedure and cordial conduct that suggests different behaviours are perhaps attained through observation and following others (Bandura, 1971). It is stated by Bandura and Walters (1963) that “ learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation or direct instruction”. This theory has been applied to the use of marijuana as it is

learned through observing behaviour. In addition to the observation of behaviour, deviance is a behaviour that is engaged in by others close to one creating them to become more likely to engage in similar behaviour (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Deviance is learnt through vicarious reinforcement for example, if the behaviour is honoured the behaviour will prevail; if behaviour is disciplined it will most likely cease (Bandura & Walters, 1963). This is relevant to my position of not legalising marijuana as the longer it stays illegal the more likely it will stop, as opposed to legalising marijuana it will continue and grow. The theoretical perspective of social learning theory is used as the use of marijuana is learnt through observation and further support the position of not legalising marijuana due to vicarious reinforcement.

As can be seen from the ongoing evidence, marijuana should not be legalised in Australia for recreational use. With the help of empirical research and data, the strengths of not legalising marijuana such as mental and physical health problems and negative environmental impacts have outweighed the weaknesses of not legalising marijuana. These weaknesses consist of quality and safety control, minimal criminal offences and benefits in the cost of the economy. They have been identified and developed into strengths as a result of a lack of evidence. The theoretical perspective of social learning theory has therefore been incorporated as it is a learnt behaviour through observation and overall enhances the position of not legalising recreational marijuana in Australia through vicarious reinforcement.

References

- American Civil Liberties Union of Washington. (2014). Court Filings for Adult Marijuana Possession Plummet. Retrieved from <https://aclu-wa.org/news/court-filings-adult-marijuana-possession-plummet>
- American Lung Association. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/smoking-facts/marijuana-and-lung-health.html>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2017). What Is Schizophrenia? Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/schizophrenia/what-is-schizophrenia>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2017). *National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016: Detailed Findings*. (Cat. no. PHE 214). Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/15db8c15-7062-4cde-bfa4-3c2079f30af3/21028a.pdf.aspx?inline=true>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018). Alcohol, tobacco & other drugs in Australia. (Cat. no. PHE 221). Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/phe/221/alcohol-tobacco-other-drugs-australia/contents/drug-types/cannabis>
- Bandura, A. (1972). Social Learning Theory. Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20131024214846/http://www.jku.at/org/content/e54521/e54528/e54529/e178050/Bandura_SocialLearningTheory_ger.pdf
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1963). *Social Learning and Personality Development*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bauss, C. I. (2017). Mapping Marijuana Cultivation Sites and Water Storage in the Redwood Creek Watershed, Southern Humboldt

County. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.csun.edu/bitstream/handle/10211.3/193763/CG-2017-p29-52.pdf?sequence=1>

- Better Health. (n. d.). Smoking Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/Health/HealthyLiving/smoking-statistics?viewAsPdf=true>
- Chu, Y. L., Townsend, W. (2017). Joint culpability: The effects of medical marijuana laws on crime. *School of Economics and Finance*. Retrieved from https://www.victoria.ac.nz/sef/research/pdf/2017-papers/SEF-WP_04-2017.pdf
- Colorado Bureau of Investigation. (2017). CBI 2017 Annual Report. Retrieved from https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/CBI%20Annual%20Report_2017.pdf
- Department of Health. (2004). 4. 5 Drug-related deaths and harm among young people. Retrieved from <https://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/drugtreat-pubs-front5-fa-toc~drugtreat-pubs-front5-fa-secb~drugtreat-pubs-front5-fa-secb-4~drugtreat-pubs-front5-fa-secb-4-5>
- Evans, D. (2013). The Economic Impacts of Marijuana Legalization. *The Journal of Global Drug Policy and Practice*. Retrieved from https://www.drugfree.org.au/images/pdf-files/library/Medical_Marijuana/MarijuanaLegalization-DavidEvans.pdf
- Gettman, J. (n. d.). Marijuana Arrests in Colorado After the Passage of Amendment 64. *Drug Policy Alliance*. Retrieved from <https://www.drugfree.org>

org/sites/default/files/Colorado_Marijuana_Arrests_After_Amendment_6
4. pdf

- Jonlin, D. L., & Lewellen, D. J. (2017). A low-energy high managing energy use for commercial indoor cannabis cultivation. *Energy Engineering*, 114(4), 69-79. doi: 10. 1080/01998595. 2017. 11876936
- Keenan, R. J., & Kimmins, J. P. (1993). The ecological effects of clear-cutting. Retrieved from
file:///Users/ClaireMcPherson/Downloads/KeenanandKimmins1993. pdf
- Mills, E. (2012). The carbon footprint of indoor cannabis production. *Energy Policy*, 46, 58- 67. doi: 10. 1016/j. enpol. 2012. 03. 023
- Miron, J. A. (2005). The Budgetary Implications of Marijuana Prohibition. Retrieved from [https://www. prohibitioncosts. org/MironReport. pdf](https://www.prohibitioncosts.org/MironReport.pdf)
- Morris, J. (2018). Does Legalizing Marijuana Reduce Crime? *Reason Foundation*. Retrieved from [https://reason. org/wp-content/uploads/does-legalizing-marijuana-reduce-crime. pdf](https://reason.org/wp-content/uploads/does-legalizing-marijuana-reduce-crime.pdf)
- National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre. (2019). Does cannabis cause mental illness? Retrieved from [https://ndarc. med. unsw. edu. au/BLOG/DOES-CANNABIS-CAUSE-MENTAL-ILLNESS](https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/BLOG/DOES-CANNABIS-CAUSE-MENTAL-ILLNESS)
- National Drug Intelligence Centre. (2011). The Economic Impact of Illicit Drug Use on American Society. Retrieved from [https://www. justice. gov/archive/ndic/pubs44/44731/44731p. pdf](https://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs44/44731/44731p.pdf)
- National Institute of Drug Abuse. (2018). Marijuana . Retrieved from [https://www. drugabuse. gov/node/pdf/1380/marijuana](https://www.drugabuse.gov/node/pdf/1380/marijuana)
- Ponce, M. (2018). Environmental Impacts of Cannabis Cultivation in California. Retrieved from [https://www. csus. edu/envs/for %20students/Ponce. finalthesis. spring18-. pdf](https://www.csus.edu/envs/for%20students/Ponce.finalthesis.spring18-.pdf)

- Tashkin, D. P. (2013). Effects of marijuana smoking on the lung. *Annals of the American Thoracic Society*, 10(3), 239-247. doi: 10.1513/AnnalsATS.201212-127FR
- Thompson, C., Sweitzer, R., Gabriel, M., Purcell, K., Barrett, R., & Poppenga, R. (2014). Impacts of rodenticide and insecticide toxicants from marijuana cultivation sites on fisher survival rates in the sierra nation forest, California. *Conservation Letters*, 7(2), 91-102. doi: 10.1111/conl.12038
- Todd, T. (2018). The Benefits of Marijuana Legalization and Regulation. *Drug Policy Alliance* . doi: 10.15779/Z38NK3652D.
- WU, T., Tashkin, D. P., Djahed, B., & Rose, J. E. (1988). Pulmonary hazards of smoking marijuana as compared with tobacco. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 318(6), 347-351. doi: 10.1056/NEJM198802113180603
- Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2017). I-502 Evaluation and Benefit-Cost Analysis: Second Required Report. Retrieved from http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1670/Wsipp_1-502-Evaluation-and-Benefit-Cost-Analysis-Second-Required-Report_Report.pdf