

The harmful effects of marijuana have been exaggerated essay sample

[Health & Medicine](#), [Addiction](#)



Thousands of people die every year from tobacco and smoking related illnesses, and hundreds of innocent people die every year in auto accidents caused by drunk drivers. It's even possible to die from alcohol poisoning, but marijuana has never been directly attributed to any deaths. Despite all this, public opinion on marijuana is still based on myth and prejudice even though it remains relatively harmless. The harmful effects of marijuana have been exaggerated.

In the 1930's the United States was flooded with reports that described marijuana as an extremely dangerous drug that enabled people to accomplish " great feats of strength and endurance, during which no fatigue is felt", and proclaimed that "[Use of marijuana] ends in the destruction of brain tissues and nerve centers" (qtd. In Stroup 57). Early myths such as these have been debunked over the past few decades, and one of the only true negative effects of marijuana is short-term laziness, comparable to the well-known side effect of consuming alcohol: a hangover.

The argument most commonly brought into discussion on marijuana is the addictive properties (or lack thereof) which it possesses. Although marijuana may cause " mild psychological dependence", according to Richard Lowry in his essay, " Marijuana is Relatively Harmless", it offers no long lasting physical addiction like that of nicotine (16). As long as one does not self-medicate their anxieties and depression with it the way so many people do with alcohol no dependence will be encountered. Most often if someone becomes psychologically dependent on marijuana they're most likely to

experience only a few years, at most, of moderate to heavy use before somewhat growing out of the drug and discontinuing use altogether.

There is scientific evidence to support the addiction theory of marijuana when speculation and opinion aren't enough. In 1991 a study found that marijuana exhibited addictive properties less than or equal to caffeine in lab rats when compared with nicotine, alcohol, heroin, and cocaine (Lowry 19). Lots of people could say they're addicted to caffeine, but it doesn't involve a physical dependence on the drug. One could stop drinking caffeinated drinks if they wanted to, but many don't, because drinking a Coke doesn't damage your body like a cigarette does.

While marijuana is classified alongside hard drugs like cocaine, heroin, and LSD, it's virtually impossible to overdose on it. Cocaine and heroin can kill in a few doses and it's estimated that hundreds of thousands of people die from alcohol and tobacco related diseases. How harmful is marijuana when compared to these drugs? Of course inhaling smoke of any kind can lead to cancer if it's done enough, but other than the carcinogens inhaled through smoking there is no other chemical found in marijuana that causes any other health problems.

The claim that marijuana use results in brain damage among other outrageous health risks, is false and such exaggerations have only been perpetuated to deter young people from trying the drug. No evidence has ever been presented to blame marijuana for specific long-term health risks. Even one of the most apparent and severe risks the drug can have, when

someone is behind the wheel of a car while intoxicated, can be avoided if the drug is used with discretion by responsible people, similar to alcohol.

So what happens when teenage kids get a hold of marijuana? Some argue that the drug's effects that impair reaction time, coordination, and the thought process in general can be dangerous in the hands of children and teens. If kids in the United States were educated and brought up around marijuana the way European kids are with alcohol, they would probably be able to use the drug in a mature and rational way. Unfortunately this is not the case. Teens abuse alcohol more in America because they can't legally drink, similarly, all ages abuse marijuana because it's totally illegal. If teens can experiment intelligently and responsibly, and avoid succumbing to the "psychological dependence" of marijuana, then it offers no direct harm towards young people any more than it does adults.

Often the way marijuana is presented in the same category as harder drugs in drug education classes can result in some misconceptions with kids. They are told that marijuana is extremely addictive along with alcohol, cocaine, and heroin. Many times the exaggerations offered up in these drug seminars are received as plain lies by the generally cynical youth. Like the case of the girl interviewed in Marsha Rosenbaum's essay, "Marijuana is not an exceptionally dangerous drug for teens," where she states:

"...They told us if we used marijuana we would become addicted. They told us if we used heroin we would become addicted. Well, we all tried marijuana

and found we did not become addicted. We figured the entire message must be B. S. So I tried heroin, used it again and again..."(34).

Instead of teaching children that marijuana should be regarded as though it's just as dangerous as LSD they should be taught of the true risks associated with each individual drug. When something that is thought to be true is found out to be false, especially in the mind of a teenager, then all other related facts might also be untrue. The "consistent mischaracterization of marijuana" according to Rosenbaum is what hinders approaches to promote drug prevention in teens (35). This is how children fall victim to the "gateway theory", it has nothing to do with the properties of the drug, but the way the dangers of it are inflated to the point that when the kid actually experiments with the drug they find it to be totally harmless compared to what they heard.

Although the "gateway theory" typically depends on the personality of the individual experimenting with the drugs, it general stands that most people that try marijuana or even use it regularly don't go on to try or become addicted to harder drugs. For every 100 people that try marijuana in their lifetime only 1 goes on to use cocaine (34). This is because for most people marijuana "represents a temporary experiment or enthusiasm" (18).

Most marijuana users in the U. S. are in their 20's and their interest in the drug tapers off during their 30's. The very nature of the drug, the fact that it isn't physically addictive and has low health risks and side effects, makes it the type of drug that people go through a phase of doing. Most people have

the sense to realize at some point that there's more to life than getting stoned, and they either quit all together or use it far less frequently.

The only person who can decide whether marijuana is harmful or not is the individual user. With a very low possibility of any addiction, far less risks of disease than cigarettes and other drugs, and a short list of undesirable side effects, marijuana can only be approved or disapproved by the person choosing to use it. Healthier than cigarettes and less harmful than alcohol, it's easy to see that marijuana is not nearly as dangerous as it has been made out to be.