

# Legalizing marijuana national institute on drug abuse

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Marijuana, a milder hallucinogen than LSD, comes from the hemp plant *Cannabis sativa*, which originates in Central Asia but is now grown in most parts of the world. It is also known by such names as pot, grass, reefer, weed, and herb. It has for its active ingredient the mind altering substance called delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC (National Institute on Drug Abuse 1). The use of marijuana has been the subject of much debate and controversy in the past. Young people are drawn to it, musicians, movie stars and rock stars endorse it discreetly, and the general population as a whole is divided over whether it is good or bad for people, and whether it should be legalized or not. A website devoted exclusively to marijuana use recently ran an article weighing the pros and cons of legalizing it, and came up with the conclusion that legalizing has several economic benefits, and brings with it the ability of government to properly regulate its use (Shalom). This essay takes the latter position, and argues against the legalization of marijuana because of its overall illhealth and social effects.

### Effects of Marijuana

The physical effects of marijuana include increases in pulse rate and blood pressure, reddening of the eyes, coughing and dryness of the mouth.

Psychological effects include a mixture of excitatory, depressive and hallucinatory characteristics, making the drug difficult to classify. The drug can produce spontaneous and unrelated ideas; perceptions of time and place can be distorted; verbal behavior may increase or cease to occur at all; and sensitivity to sound and colors might increase. Marijuana can also impair attention and memory, which suggests that smoking marijuana is not

conductive to optimal school performance. When marijuana is used daily in heavy amounts, it also can impair the human reproductive system and may be involved in some birth defects. (National Institute on Drug Abuse 1).

### Statistics on the issue

A lot of action has been presented to legalize the use of marijuana and it has been drawing a lot of attention lately. There are already twelve states in the U. S. where it's legal for medicinal purposes. Much of the American public now believes that the drug should be legalized but others are still concerned about health damage and other unfortunate side affects, not to mention moral concerns.

One of the consequences of marijuana legalization would be a large increase in drug users. Right now, drug users have a fear of law enforcement agents, but if marijuana was legalized, they no longer would have fear and would feel that it will be all right to use marijuana. Over twenty years ago, estimates of drug use among Americans was as high as 24 million, but it is now estimated to be as low as 11 million. In 1993, Americans spent \$49 billion on illegal drugs, down from the 1988 figure of \$64 billion. This decline does not mean a decrease in the use of marijuana but an increase of officers on the streets and drug awareness programs.

Crackdowns being a geographically focused drug raid will only limit drug use for a time but not completely eradicate it. According to Walker, this strategy of deploying police officers in streets to catch drug users and dealers and street gangs, merely displace drugs activity to change the place of drug use.

When the Violent Crime Act of 1994 was implemented, government allocated a budget to deploy additional 100, 000 policemen in streets.

One famous crackdown is the Operation Pressure Point in New York that for a time scared drug users away. However, in the long-term, crackdowns are not proven to be effective to totally stop drug selling and drug use despite police concentration. Eventually, the former drug suppliers and dealers were just replaced by some other persons to continue the drug activity. Even New York City police attest that the OPP may have put drug operatives in jail, but it was not an assurance that there will be no other persons to replace them.

Interdiction or the process of inhibiting the flow and entry of drugs, and eradication or the process of reducing drug plants production are two methods that are seemingly out weighted by the fact that drugs is a growing international market despite huge efforts to stop its production and entry to certain territories. Walker the author has found that despite interdiction campaigns, illegal drugs that entered the country have increased significantly from 1987 to 1991. Marijuana and coca leaf production rose by almost 50% and 33% respectively.

The author attributed the failure to the large border that the enforcement agencies have to guard, making it possible for drug traffickers to mutually adapt with the enforcement measures easily by putting up new entry points, and the organized mafia that supports the drug trade. Whether we like it or not, the drug market despite its being underground has been continuously expanding in both international and domestic level.

The problem is, the drug users, as well as pushers are just a small part of the problem on drugs production. The real problem of the drug fight is the large mafia, and big people that benefit most from the drug economy. Interdiction and eradication efforts are doomed to fail when the major actors such as the plant owners and drug traders are not properly apprehended, together with some government allies.

Marijuana is said to be the most used illegal drug in the United States, with 40 percent or 94 million of Americans aged 12 years or older having tried it at least once, and adolescents and teenagers in particular being particularly vulnerable to abusing the drug (National Institute on Drug Abuse 1, citing the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health).

#### Other Health and Social Effects

The ill health effects of marijuana have been well-documented. Heavy use of marijuana has been directly linked to the impairment of a person's ability to shift the focus of his attention from one thing to another, ability to recall events, and ability to form memories (National Institute on Drug Abuse 3). Marijuana is also said to impair balance, posture, coordination of movement and reaction time, because THC affects the proper functioning of the parts of the brain responsible for those functions (National Institute on Drug Abuse 4). Such ill effects are said to be precursors of accidents.

Another ill effect of marijuana use is its link to difficulty in quitting tobacco smoking. Still another ill health effect is the predisposition of marijuana smokers to the same health problems that plague tobacco smokers such as chest illnesses, daily, cough and phlegm, obstructed airways, lung infections,

and cancer of the lungs and respiratory tract (National Institute on Drug Abuse 4).

The heightened risks are said to be the result of marijuana smoke containing 50 to 70 percent more carcinogens than regular tobacco smoke, and because THC is said to impair the immune function thus, making smokers more susceptible to cancer and infectious diseases (National Institute on Drug Abuse 5). Also, marijuana smoking has also been linked to an up to a four-fold increase in the risk of having a heart attack within an hour of smoking it (National Institute on Drug Abuse 5).

The ill social effects of smoking marijuana are also varied and grave. Student smokers are said to perform more poorly than other students, while workers who smoke marijuana are said to have more problems with work performance (National Institute on Drug Abuse 5). Ill emotional and psychological effects such as depression, anxiety, and personality disturbances spill over into poor ability to acquire job and social skills, poor ability to cope with emotional problems because of poor problem solving and emotional skills, and lower levels of satisfaction with life in general (National Institute on Drug Abuse 5-6)

An increase in drug use will result in an increase in drug related crimes if drugs are legalized. Supporters of drug legalization believe that crime and violence would decrease if drug use became legal. Statistics tell us that almost half of those arrested for committing a crime test positive for the use of drugs at the time of their arrest. Marijuana's effects cause memory loss,

trouble with problem-solving, loss of motor skills and an increase in heart rate, panic attacks and anxiety.

Marijuana weakens the body's immune system, which could further complicate any future recovery from a serious medical condition. Young adults observing or knowing adults who are smoking marijuana for medicinal purposes sends a misleading message. Legalization supporters claim that marijuana significantly lessens pain and relieves nausea resulting from serious diseases. However, anti-drug groups think that legalizing marijuana for medical use is merely an ulterior motive designed to gain access to a dangerous substance.

#### Use of Marijuana in some states

In some states marijuana use is legal already for medicinal purposes. According to the NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), twelve states have legalized or decriminalized the medical use of marijuana in some manner. Since 1996, Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington have passed legislation that removes state-level penalties from marijuana use by patients who have a doctor's recommendation.

Moreover, Maryland passed a medical marijuana affirmative defense law in 2003. This states that if a person is arrested for marijuana use but is found to be using marijuana out of medical necessity, even if at the time of use they did not have a doctor's recommendation, he/she will only face a small fine.

These state laws specify that marijuana can be used to treat diseases such as arthritis, cancer, chronic nervous system disorders, chronic pain, Crohn's

disease, epilepsy and other seizure disorders, glaucoma, HIV or AIDS, multiple sclerosis and other muscle spasticity disorders, and help patients cope with severe migraines, severe nausea, and the side effects of chemotherapy. The requirements for patients and doctors to be protected by these laws vary from state to state. The U. S. government has challenged the California law in several cases. Federal law does not recognize a medical use for marijuana and maintains that the drug is a controlled and a banned substance under all circumstances.

### Mandatory Drug Testing in Schools

The main purpose of mandatory drug testing in school is not to expose and expel those whose results are positive. This method is done only to ensure the health and academic performance of each individual student. Those who have been found with positive results are assisted by the school counselor and are enrolled in a drug-education program. This would better help the student to alleviate his drug dependency and so that he may perform better academically.

Also with the information that as much as 23% of American drug dependents are teenagers and perhaps in school, this could directly affect the entire school population. Peer pressure is the one of the primary causes of drug dependency. Without mitigation from the administration, drug dependency among the students would undoubtedly rise. Another cause for concern is that substances such as stimulants induce violence and aggression.

This would mean that the well-being of the whole school population could be jeopardized. Therefore, mandatory drug testing is the most effective way not

only to prevent drug-dependent students from harming themselves but also to prevent violence and harm to the public. Implementing it in schools in the swiftest time possible would efficiently prevent and reduce the number of drug use among the American student population. (What You Need to Know About Drug Testing in School).

In sum, legalizing marijuana could potentially lead to more crime and more drug addicts. It also is sending the wrong message to our young people. Giving young people the impression that drugs are okay is setting a bad example. If young kids believe that marijuana use is not any more serious than smoking a cigarette, this could lead to serious circumstances and habits for them in the future.

## Conclusion

Adolescents in virtually every era have been risk takers, testing limits and making shortsighted judgments. Today, the consequences of choosing a course of risk-taking are possibly more serious than they have ever been. Indeed, marijuana must not be legalized, lest we want our children to be dependent on them and ruining their lives over the long haul.

## Sources

### Internet

1) [www. norml. org](http://www.norml.org) NORML (National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws)

2) National Institute on Drug Abuse. " Marijuana Abuse: Research Report Series". July 2005. Retrieved November 10, 2006 ; [https://www. drugabuse. gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/letter-director;](https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/marijuana/letter-director;).

#### Magazine

1) Time Magazine " Is America Going to Pot?" (issue: November 4th, 2002)

2) Newsweek magazine " The War Over Weed" (issue: March 16, 1998)