

The Negative Impacts of Marijuana Legalization

Langdon: Marijuana Legalization

Overview

Marijuana is a psychoactive drug used for both recreational and medical purposes which can be smoked or consumed. It is a term for the dried flowers and leaves of the plant *Cannabis sativa*. This drug is used by millions of individuals across the United States, both legally and illegally. While some of these users are smoking prescribed medical marijuana (CBD-based) to treat concerns such as anxiety, epilepsy, and pain, the majority of marijuana usage is recreational (THC-based). Within the past several years, more and more states have been continuously legalizing this drug in both its medical and recreational form. These decisions have created several controversies and issues regarding whether legalization is beneficial to society. Marijuana should not be legalized because it negatively impacts the public health, is unethical and unmoral, and contradicts the federal law.

Relevant Past Data

Colorado was one of the first states to legalize recreational marijuana and, with that, there is sufficient data on the major impacts this decision caused. Since the time of legalization, traffic deaths involving drivers who tested positive for marijuana more than doubled from 55 in 2013 to 115 people killed in 2018. This equates to one person killed every 3 days compared to one person ever 6.5 days. Adult marijuana use increased 94 percent and college age marijuana increased 18 percent, putting a greater population at risk of addiction and the long-term effects. Regarding public health, the yearly number of marijuana related hospitalizations increased 101 percent after the legalization of recreational marijuana. The percent of suicide incidents in which toxicology results were positive for marijuana has increased from 14 percent in 2013 to 23 percent in 2017 (The Legalization of Marijuana in Colorado.) The data of Colorado's attempt to legalize marijuana has statically failed in numerous ways. Likewise, its known and dangerous factors should prevent more states from choosing to legalize marijuana.

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Public Health

Marijuana use leads to several negative effects on the public health of society. One major area of risk is the impact marijuana has on the brain, specifically in adolescents. There is a major correlation between the use of marijuana and the development of psychosis. Psychosis is a mental condition in which one may not know what is real, hallucinate, or experience paranoia. Individuals with a history of marijuana use tend to develop psychosis at a much younger age than those who have never used this drug. In fact, those who use marijuana more than fifty times, are six times more likely to develop psychosis. People who use marijuana carry a specific variant of the AKT1 gene. This gene codes for an enzyme that affects dopamine signaling in the brain which leads to the development of psychosis. Additionally, marijuana use has been shown to worsen the course of illness in patients who already have schizophrenia (Vadhan et al.) This correlation can be detrimental to adolescents whose brains are still in the developmental process. Legalizing this drug, allowing greater access, may increase this dangerous correlation on young children.

Law

As certain states are slowly legalizing this drug, marijuana remains illegal under the federal law. The federal government classifies marijuana, along with drugs such as heroin and cocaine, as a Schedule I drug with a high potential for abuse and little to no medical benefit. They prohibit the manufacture, distribution, dispensation, and possession of marijuana. Therefore, when an individual uses marijuana legally under state law, they are simultaneously violating the federal law (Sacco and Finklea.)

Ethical Concerns

A huge ethical concern regarding legalizing this drug is the way in which marijuana is marketed. Companies are using advertisement designed to appeal to the youth and adolescent age groups. They are using young models or cartoon characters to draw attention and is marketed with promotions and discounts for young individuals with budget limitations. Considering so many children use social media, marijuana companies should morally be advertising to only an older population. However, because there are such high sales in this age group, dispensaries don't care (D'Amico et al.) This is alarming as the youth population is still in their early years of schooling. In fact, a study was conducted to test the effects of marijuana use on students GPA and time to graduation. Usage was heavily correlated with skipping classes which ultimately resulted in a lower GPA and a longer time to graduation. Using marijuana commonly impairs memory function which is a major skill required as a student. (Arria et al.) Considering companies are aware of the effects of marijuana and remain to target younger populations for greater sales, legalization is an unethical danger.

References

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