Marijuana Should be Illegal

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Current debates regarding the possibility of marijuana legalization show us that the public is not always aware of all the negative consequences of drug abuse. Though marijuana is considered a mild drug used for recreational purposes, it has been associated with a broad spectrum of detrimental effects on one’s health, both physical and mental. Aside from the harmful effects on health, the consumption of marijuana also represents a severe social issue regarding the popularity of the drug among young people. This paper argues that marijuana should remain illegal despite the controversial evidence of its beneficial properties.

Marijuana, also known as cannabis, is a plant-derived drug that has defined psychoactive properties. The drug affects people through the biochemical interaction of the tetrahydrocannabinol with corresponding receptors in the human brain and nervous system. These cannabinoid receptors have been found in exceptionally high concentration in such brain areas as the cortex, hippocampus, basal ganglia, cerebellum, thalamus, and amygdala. The wide distribution of cannabinoid receptors throughout the brain makes it highly susceptible to the psychoactive properties of the drug. Moreover, there have been numerous scientific confirmations of the adverse effects of cannabis on long and short-term memory among those consuming the drug.

When assessing the effects of cannabis on human memory, it is essential to note that memory is not a single apparatus but rather a complex neurological system comprised of various subsystems that store, process, and encode information that can be recalled later (Bhattacharyya & Schoeler, 2013). Most of the studies on the effects of cannabis on human memory have emphasized declarative memory, which requires one to consciously recollect facts and events (Bhattacharyya & Schoeler, 2013). The results of the studies have shown a noticeable disruption in episodic and working memory caused by cannabis use. Worth noticing is that occasional cannabis users experience powerful adverse effects on memory when compared to chronic users, thus making adolescents a particularly vulnerable demographic group regarding the negative consequences of drug abuse (Bhattacharyya & Schoeler, 2013). Moreover, casual use of marijuana among adolescents and young adults also raises the risk of becoming a chronic abuser, which leads to more serious adverse effects on memory.

Aside from immediate or acute reactions to cannabis consumption, people tend to suffer serious long-term consequences that follow the chronic abuse of the drug. Chronic abusers of marijuana develop long-term memory impairments that tend to persist even after the cessation of cannabis consumption (Bhattacharyya & Schoeler, 2013). In particular, one study has shown that long-term memory impairment tends to continue past the period of intoxication (Pope, Gruber, Hudson, Huestis, & Yurgelun-Todd, 2001). For their study, two groups of people with chronic marijuana users in one and non-users in another were given several tests to assess their neurocognitive parameters. Cannabis users have performed significantly poorer in comparison to the control ground and showed severe learning and recall deficits (Bhattacharyya & Schoeler, 2013). However, though the follow-up studies tell that some individuals show signs of memory recovery, they have also proved that specific damage to the memory system persists, nonetheless pointing to a more complex effect of cannabis on the human neural system as a whole.

Cannabis consumption is also damaging to physical health. It is the second most commonly smoked substance in the world after tobacco. Cannabis exerts similar detrimental effects on the lungs in particular and the pulmonary system in general. Over the past decades, a substantial number of studies on chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPD) have shown a strong association between marijuana consumption and high morbidity and mortality (Tashkin, 2009). Smoking marijuana has been observed to lead to proximal airway damage that does not differ in marijuana-only users compared to tobacco smokers (Tashkin, 2009). An epidemiological study has shown that marijuana smokers develop lung complications that are also similar to those observed in heavy tobacco smokers. Furthermore, casual smokers of marijuana have higher risks of developing bronchodilation despite the occasional nature of drug abuse (Tetrault, 2007). A systematic review of 34 studies on the effects of cannabis smoking on the human pulmonary system has primarily concluded that long-term marijuana smoking is associated with a wide range of negative consequences (Tetrault, 2007). Chronic bronchitis has also been associated with marijuana consumption.

The use and abuse of marijuana undermine academic performance among adolescents and college students. According to statistics, cannabis is the second most popular drug among young people after alcohol (Cdc.gov, 2016). The use and abuse of marijuana have been associated with poorer academic performance and difficulties with learning and processing new information. Cannabis consumption is presumed to correlate with educational achievements directly; more specifically, an increase in marijuana use predicts a decline in GPA (Arria, Caldeira, Bugbee, Vincent, & O’Grady, 2015). Some studies have also shown that frequent users of marijuana tend to delay their enrollment or have a higher probability of dropping out of college (Arria et al., 2015). Thus, it is possible to say that the use of marijuana is associated with poor academic achievements and, as such, should not be promoted through legalization.

It is also necessary to mention the arguments expressed by the proponents of cannabis legalization. Numerous claims have been made regarding the beneficial medical properties of marijuana and presumably low risks of adverse effects associated with its recreational use (Müller-Vahl & Grotenhermen, 2012). Several studies have claimed that the therapeutic potential of cannabis should be thoroughly investigated and used in a healthcare setting. However, there has been no substantial proof of the medical effectiveness of cannabis, especially in comparison to conventional drugs (Müller-Vahl & Grotenhermen, 2012). Speaking of the social implications of cannabis legalization, it is still necessary to mention that any form of promotion of harmful substances will not benefit public health.

To conclude everything mentioned above, marijuana should remain illegal as a drug with prominent harmful properties. Not only is marijuana dangerous to one’s physical health, but it is also associated with severe mental complications. Both chronic and occasional users of the drug have higher risks of developing memory impairments. Chronic marijuana users are also risking irreversible damage to their long-term memory. Cannabis is also dangerous to physical health, especially to the pulmonary system. Additionally, the use of cannabis is associated with poorer academic performance and higher rates of dropouts among heavy users. Thus, marijuana should not be legalized.

References

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