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Weed Be Better With It, or Without It?

Weed is the devil’s lettuce, is incredibly unhealthy for you, and makes you into a terrible person… or not? The controversy of marijuana has always been a popular topic of conversation and debate, but recently, there has been a big change. Pot has been illegal since 1937, and ever since then, and even prior to that in certain states, smoking weed was a punishable crime. However, something new has come along and changed the game: Proposition 64, which has legalized recreational marijuana use and purchase in the state of California. Arguments for and against this proposition have been made, and proponents of both sides have valid reasons to oppose or encourage the legalization of *Cannabis Sativa*, such as the physical/mental effects on an individual, financial implications, and the effects on society, which makes it hard to discern if it should be legal or not. However, there have been states that have already legalized recreational marijuana use, and these states have some more pros than non-legal-weed states, but also more cons. So, are is the increase in good things worth the increase in bad things?

One of the first states to legalize weed was Washington. In Washington, pot has generated over $250 million in legal marijuana stores, and over $70 million in taxes. Also, violent crime has dropped by roughly 10%, and the Murder rate has gone down by 13% (Swanberg)! However,it has also given rise to a 28% increase in marijuana related DUI’s (Swanberg).This illustrates almost perfectly how cannabis can have both a wonderfully positive *and* a harshly negative effect. However, it significantly decreased crime rates, and while it has increased the amount of DUI’s, that doesn’t mean it has increased the amount of harm dealt by pot.

The next important thing one should look at is the amount of minors ingesting marijuana,since it has a variety of harsh effects on the brain, such as slowing the cerebral cortex’s development (which only develops during puberty, so if someone ingested enough cannabis in their youth, they could live their whole lives without a fully developed cerebral cortex). It is especially dangerous to teens because their brains are still development and marijuana can not only hinder development, but also cause it to stop altogether (Too Smart to Start). This is becoming a larger problem due to children ingesting much more weed than prior to legalization. For example: In Oregon, a weed-legal state, the amount of 12th graders who smoke pot has gone up by 13% since legalization, the amount of 8th graders has gone up 8% since legalization, and the amount of 10th graders has gone up 14% since legalization (Robert).

Over 4.2 million people in the U.S. fit the criteria for abuse of marijuana, and those 4.2 million people have an addiction.Well, maybe not a chemical addiction that is the first thing that comes to mind when most people think of addiction, but a “habitual addiction”, which is similar, because once you stop ingesting pot, you go through a withdrawal. We know this because not only have animal subjects shown symptoms of withdrawal from a “habitual addiction” to marijuana (Common symptoms of withdrawal from a “habitual addiction” include anger, decreased appetite, irritability, nervousness, and sleep difficulties ), but many people have reported going through it as well. To put it simply, if you form a habitual addiction and go through a “withdrawal”, you get cranky for the next couple of days (Watkins).

Pot has some other threats to health as well. The two major problems directly related to bodily health is that pot has been known to cause cancer in the lungs if it is smoked and that 49% of all emergency department visits involving illicit drugs involve marijuana. The majority of the rest of the problems are with the ecosystem or contamination. For example, many growers get rid of natural vegetation by clearing it with fire to make room for farms. This destroyed more than 89,000 acres in 2015 (National Drug Control Policy).

There are a lot of cons to cannabis, but many of these cons aren't as bad as they may seem. The negative effects that marijuana has on the brain are almost exclusive to brains that belong to those that haven't finished puberty, which generally happens ages 21-25. Harvard Medical School teachers concluded that there is *no* long term effects of marijuana on a human adult brain. They also found that there was no difference in test scores between those who had never smoked weed and those who smoked weed after the age of 25. Also, DUI’s related to marijuana (which is the biggest issue with weed-legal states) can be easily avoided by either not driving while high, or by taking CBD, a chemical that counteracts the psychoactive properties of THC (the main chemical in cannabis) (Armento).

I interviewed a man named Jackson, and whose last name will remain confidential. He is a 22 year pot-smoker who has been smoking for 4 years. He expressed how much he appreciates the legalization of marijuana, though he told me of some cons of smoking cannabis. He told me that, “Weed has kinda taken [his] drive away… it’s like [he] has almost no motivation to go to school or progress in life.” Jackson went to college for 6 months, and then dropped out because he simply didn’t feel a need to go. Another major issue he had with smoking pot is that, “it took all of [his] money. It never seemed too expensive, but now that I look back on it, it what i spent most of my spare cash on.” Despite all of this, Jackson is very happy with his life and does not regret starting a pot smoking “career”.

Before one decides if weed should be legal or not, one must review the “standard” for what is already legal. In both weed-legal and non-weed-legal states, alcohol is a legal drug. Alcohol is toxic and can kill a full grown adult at a 0.4% BAC (Blood Alcohol Content (Marijuana Policy Project), while there has not been a single recorded case, despite efforts from researchers, of any amount of marijuana killing even a mouse (Marijuana Policy Project). Roughly 15% of alcohol users are addicted to alcoholic beverages, and there are 37,000 annual deaths attributed to use of alcohol use according to the CDC (Marijuana Policy Project). On the contrary, fewer than 9% of pot users or “dependent” on cannabis, and the CDC has recorded zero cases where pot has killed somebody (excluding DUI situations, which alcohol still has a higher body count and DUI conviction than pot in) (Marijuana Policy Project). It is also proven to cause a variety of cancers, most notably in the liver (Marijuana Policy Project).

It is apparent that weed causes the same amount of cons as it causes pros, if not more. However, alcohol causes significantly more issues and is legal everywhere. The “trial-runs”, or states the have legalized, weed, haven't seen many major issues and supply a significant amount of money to the government solely from their weed sales. Even if pot was still illegal, a huge amount of people would still ingest it. From 1995 to 2015, 12 million people were arrested due to marijuana (Marijuana Policy Project). Long story short, while legalizing pot does cause change in criminal activities, the total amount of criminal activities stays pretty much the same, and its health effects aren't as bad as those of alcohol, not to mention cigarettes, *and* it supplies money for government projects. So, should it *really* be illegal?

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