

**Should Federal Law Legalize Marijuana?**

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### **Should Federal Law Legalize Marijuana?**

Currently, marijuana is illegal in the US at the federal level. Like cocaine and heroin, marijuana is classified as a Schedule I drug, with very little or no medical benefit and a high potential for abuse. Several US states, such as Alaska, Maryland, Michigan, and Hawaii, have legalized marijuana for medical purposes. Nonetheless, public opinion about its legalization remains divided. International treaties and local and national laws across the globe forbid the use of marijuana. The debate about the legalization of marijuana cuts across many facets, such as moral beliefs and economic factors. Legalization would require the law to change and make the production, sale, and possession of marijuana legal (Morgan, 2011).

On the morality spectrum, some people oppose the legalization of marijuana because it changes the mental state of people who use it and consequently leads to addictions and dangerous actions. They advocate for federal law to keep marijuana illegal to avoid rebellious behaviors, addiction, laziness, and irresponsibility. This will safeguard family values, and productivity among people will not be affected. These people also believe that the legalization of marijuana might contribute to economic growth in the short term. However, they opine that the growth will be nullified by increased crimes from people using the drug. This will lead to more resources being channeled to prisons, the police force, and personal security to protect the public from drug addicts (Morgan, 2011).

Proponents believe that federal law should legalize marijuana since it is the moral right of every individual to decide what is wrong or right and what they do with their lives. These people believe that the prohibition of marijuana violates their freedom to make life choices. Unlike the people who oppose the legalization of marijuana, these proponents believe that the drug is not harmful. They suggest that the resources spent arresting and prosecuting offenders should be put

to better use. Furthermore, proponents say that the time spent tracking marijuana users should be used to track more dangerous criminals within communities (Morgan, 2011). According to Leyton (2016), arrests lead to social stigma and loss of employment opportunities. Often, minority groups are victims of laws that are enforced disproportionately.

Caulkins (2012) has suggested ways to liberalize the use of marijuana instead of legalizing it fully. For instance, using the drug can be permitted, and its sale and production can remain forbidden. Penalties for the use and possession of small amounts of the drug should be treated as civil cases and not criminal, a process known as decriminalization. According to Marion and Hill (2019), research has also shown that the number of people who oppose the legalization of marijuana has gone down in the last 25 years. As support for its legalization increases, the support for the war on drugs decreases. Opponents suggest that the war on drugs is a waste of time and resources (Marion & Hill, 2019).

Just like alcohol, the occasional use of marijuana could generate significant benefits among mature adults. However, it could also cause harm among young adults. Federal law needs to consider this heterogeneity in the use of marijuana whenever the debate of its legalization arises. There is also a need to establish the type of population which consumes marijuana and the frequency at which they consume it. Herein lies the accurate measure of marijuana consumption. This will help in structuring policies that will enhance economic and social gain from the legalization of marijuana. Additionally, legal markets for marijuana are developing, hence the need to assess the consequences of its legalization by federal law. Policy designs on the legalization of marijuana should maximize the benefits of legalization while looking at ways of minimizing harm (Pacula & Smart, 2017).

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