

Merits and Demerits of Legalizing Marijuana in the US

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Marijuana is derived from drying the seeds, stems, flowers, and leaves of *Cannabis sativa*. Once dried, it assumes a greenish-gray color. Marijuana is consumed in several ways. For instance, it can be smoked in pipes or hand-rolled as cigarettes, brewed in tea, or added to foods like candies or cookies (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2021). Marijuana is considered a drug because it contains a chemical called delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, which is psychoactive and alters the mind. It can be used for medicinal or recreational purposes (Keyhani et al., 2018). The drug is illegal in most states, and the debate on its legalization continues to be divisive due to its potential merits and demerits.

One of the drug's merits is that it is vital in pain management. Ravi et al. (2018) noted that marijuana could alter the perception pathways of pain in the brain and help in minimizing pain. This may be significant in conditions like cancer which generally result in chronic pain. The drug is also believed to reduce inflammation. This may be vital in managing inflammatory conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn's disease (Keyhani et al., 2018). Also, the drug is believed to treat mental and neurological disorders like epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, anxiety, and multiple sclerosis (Ravi et al., 2018). Lastly, it is considered to be useful in sleep management. According to Pearson et al. (2017), the drug produces relaxing effects, which may aid in managing sleep disorders like insomnia. The enhanced sleep may also take place when marijuana is used to reduce pain.

Turning to the potential demerits of marijuana, NIDA (2021) observed that marijuana could affect the brain both in the long term and short term. The short-term effects include psychosis, delusions, hallucinations, impaired memory, difficulty solving problems, mood changes, and altered senses. The long-term effects arise when the drug impairs brain

development. According to Sabet and Winters (2018), when individuals commence using marijuana in their teenage, it may impair learning, memory, and thinking functions during adulthood. For instance, a study conducted by Duke University researchers established that individuals who smoked a lot of marijuana in their teenage years lost 8 IQ points on average between 13 and 38 years of age. The people who continued smoking marijuana into adulthood did not regain their lost mental capabilities (NIDA, 2021). Marijuana has serious effects on the brain.

Marijuana use also poses serious physical effects. Once smoked, it can increase heart rate within three hours (Pearson et al., 2017). Second, the smoke can also cause heart irritation, resulting in phlegm and daily cough (Sabet & Winters, 2018). Third, it can complicate the development of a child during pregnancy and after pregnancy. Fourth, its use during pregnancy can cause lower birth weight and propagate the risk of behavioral and brain complications in children. Finally, exposing infants to marijuana before birth may also cause problems with memory and attention after birth (NIDA, 2021). Its use has adverse physical effects on the body.

To conclude, the demerits of marijuana outweigh its merits; hence it should not be legalized. Although marijuana is reported to help in pain and sleep management, it can cause severe effects on the development of the brain, resulting in psychosis, delusions, and hallucinations. It can also cause impaired memory, difficulty with solving problems, and mood changes. In addition, it can cause altered senses in the short term and impair learning, memory, and thinking functions in the long term. It may also increase heart rate, cause breathing complications, and complicate child development. These reasons should inform the long-standing debate on the legalization of marijuana. They are solid grounds for governments not to legalize the drug.

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