The Impact of Cannabis Legitimation on Teenagers—Set the US as an Example^{*}

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Nowadays, cannabis has become the most prevalent using drug in most Western countries. With Canada become the second country following Uruguay to legalize recreational cannabis using, cannabis legalization is likely to become the trend in Western world. Though both Uruguay and Canada, as well as the states in the U.S. that legalized recreational cannabis using have the age restriction, a recent research indicated that cannabis using is spread among teenagers. With regard to the widespread use of cannabis and the legalization of recreational cannabis using in Canada and some states of the U.S., this study focuses on the effects of the legalization of cannabis using among teenagers to explore the reasons why teenagers use cannabis, why cannabis can be legalized, and what effects the legalization of cannabis may have on teenagers.

Keywords: cannabis, legalization, teenagers

Introduction

Cannabis was first introduced to the West in the early 1920s and became widespread in the late 1960s. According to the *2017 World Drug Report*, there were 1.83 billion people using cannabis among the world in 2015 and cannabis has become the most prevalent using drug in most Western countries. With Canada become the second country following Uruguay to legalize recreational cannabis using, cannabis legalization is likely to become the trend in the Western world. Though both Uruguay and Canada, as well as the states in the U.S. that legalized recreational cannabis using have the age restriction, a recent research indicated that cannabis using is spreading among teenagers. According to a study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* by a research group led by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, among American students aged 12 to 18, one in 11th people have used cannabis products in electronic cigarettes. Further analysis indicated that one third of high school students and one quarter of middle school students have used cannabis products.

Nowadays, a growing interest in studying cannabis use has aroused. Most studies suggested that cannabis use was related to political opposition, hippie culture, and specific preferences in music. Later, quite a few studies were focused on the mental health effect of using cannabis. Negative effects were the prevalent concerns. Evidence has shown through several experimental and clinical studies that drug dosing was likely to produce transient psychotic experiences (Thomas, 1996), and the risk of schizophrenia may increase due to cannabis use and scientists suggested more positive measures taken should be increased to against cannabis using.

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Researches at many fields such as psychiatry, clinical psychology, and biomedical disciplines give concerns to cannabis studies. In addition, there are few longitudinal studies based on population that provide basic information in sociology discipline. Few studies have been conducted on the connection between cannabis use and social class and social marginality. Some studies are interested in finding out whether recreational drug use has something to do with the interrelated processes involving the education system, the employment, marriage, and the family. A Norwegian study further proved that teenager cannabis users were commonly in relation to parental socioeconomic background. Another study comparing adolescent cannabis users in Switzerland and Sweden indicted that cannabis users in both countries were bound to conventional society with a high level of delinquency and weaker association with parents and school (Sznitman, 2007).

With regard to the more prevalent use of cannabis nowadays and the legalization of recreational cannabis using in Canada and some states of the U.S., this study focuses on the effects of the legalization of cannabis using among teenagers to explore the reasons why teenagers use cannabis, why cannabis can be legalized, and what effects the legalization of cannabis may have on teenagers.

The Reasons Why Teenagers Using Cannabis

With the increasing using of cannabis among teenagers, the reasons underlying the phenomenon cannot be overlooked.

A Way to Escape the Reality

It is argued that cannabis using is closely related to high level of parental education and poor family functioning. The former research showed that teenagers with high level educated parents and strong family bonds were exposed to less odds of cannabis using than otherwise. On the other hand, teenagers suffered from parental divorce, parental alcohol problems, lack of parental support, and poor parental monitoring were likely to use cannabis. This trend may be explained by the characteristics of using cannabis. Using cannabis would generate a sense of joyousness. According to the descriptions of the cannabis users, they got excited and the surrounding became blurring, unrealistic, and fantastic. A high proportion of teenagers with family problems use cannabis to escape from the solitude and the sense of being abandoned.

A Way to Deviate from the Mainstream

Studies have shown strong associations of cannabis using and preferences for experimental music, attendance at rock concerts, and positive attitudes to oppositional youth groups. At the meantime, a preference for traditional music was strongly inversely associated with cannabis use. When cannabis was first introduced into the West, people who used them most were hip-poppers, in this case, using of cannabis marks a distance between the denigrated other and the “mainstream”. Teenagers in adolescent years may experience a period of time of rebellion which they are eager to be distinctive and be noticed by others. Usually, teenagers who are fans of hip-pop and heavy metal music are more likely to be those emotional and rebellious ones.

Ignorance of the Harm of the Cannabis

Qualitative studies confirm that young users of illegal drugs have the feeling they are in control of their consumption. Based on prevalent understanding, cannabis is much less addictive compared with most other drugs. Teenagers who have not developed complete cognition to the surrounding may be lured to cannabis using while believing cannabis is not drug and is unarmful. Some cannabis users believe that unlike heroin, which is understood to lead to ultimate destroy to those who take it, cannabis does not endanger health or cause

addiction and these cannabis users believe they situate their practice in a recreational and collective framework. Though using cannabis would generate happiness in the following several hours, people would become frustrated, dizzy, and sick the following day. To get away from the symptoms, people may dose again and fall into a vicious circle of dosing drugs.

Influence of the Living Environment

Teenagers are likely to suffer from peer pressure, when recognized by others are of great importance to them. One way to be recognized by their peers is to act the same. Some teenagers are forced to use cannabis to get involved though they may not really want it.

The Legalization of Cannabis

With respect to the mix using with cigarettes, cannabis is more likely to become overdosed narcotics. Back in 1996, California, the most populated states in America at that time, has published the law of legalized medical marijuana, which made California the first state to partly legalized marijuana in the history of America. After California, more and more states have held referendum on legalizing cannabis using or have published relative laws. By the end of 2014, among the 50 states in America, 23 states allow personal using of cannabis for medical purpose along with Columbia. In recent years, some states further agreed motion on legalized marijuana for recreational use. There was a surge of legalizing cannabis in the 1960s with the lead of the hip-poppers, but the cannabis legitimization campaign this time is more influential with a larger population base and actual legal results.

The public supporting cannabis legalizing has enlarged greatly. According to a survey conducted by Pugh Research Center, an American independent polling agency in 2013, 52% of Americans are in support of owning personal cannabis. This supportive in cannabis using has further been proved by the survey conducted by Gaipro poll. The poll suggested that 58% of people nationwide agreed that the cannabis should be legalized.

Furthermore, the population supporting legitimization of cannabis has changed in terms of age and racial which indicated the social influence of cannabis legitimization has enlarged. In the *Development Situation of Drug Analysis Report* published by the Drug Enforcement Administration in 2012, white people held a proportion of over 35% among the population in support of cannabis legitimization which is much higher than the proportion 20 years ago.

The trend of cannabis legitimization is developed not alone in America. In 17 October 2018, Canada became the second country legalized recreational cannabis using after Uruguay in the world. It has become the major trend in the West.

The Reasons for Cannabis Legitimation

Though there are no clear reasons why countries legalized cannabis using, there are several suggestions.

The Influence of the Social Environment

During the time, the society suffering from the instability or the society is in transition or facing financial depression, people especially the younger generation would hold political dispositions that are freer, opener, and tend to be more rebellious. In recent years when terrorism becomes more furious, the liberalism rises and wins the support of more and more population. With the growing population support the liberalism, cannabis legitimization, abolition of death penalty, and legalization of same-sex marriage become the main assertions.

Early in 2005, death penalty was announced to be violated to the constitution and becomes the prompt to the general abolition of death penalty. And over 30 states in America have claimed legalization of same-sex marriage ever since 2013. The rapid progressions in the abolition of death and legalization of same-sex marriage indicate that liberalism cater to the social ideological trend. As cannabis legitimation, abolition of death penalty and legalization of same-sex marriage suggest the same core values of respecting the value of life and personal choice, following personal inner thoughts and pursuing instinct life experience and diversified lifestyles, the three campaigns stimulate each other. The success in the other two campaigns creates a social environment of liberalism and further prompts the cannabis legitimation.

The Economic Factors

The economic factors are important prompts to cannabis legalization. The financial environment in the West is not so positive and the financial income is decreasing while the unemployment rate keeps increasing. As cannabis industry is an undeveloped industry with great output value, countries may seek into the industry for economic profit. A survey conducted by Colorado's Marijuana Industry Group in 2014 reported the states that legalized marijuana made a direct income of around 16 billion dollars 2013 the whole year. Apart from the direct profit, as marijuana is regulated product, there are heavy tax levied on producers and sellers without tax allowance and exemption. The development of the cannabis industry is likely to result in the development of the related industries and make an increase to employment. A survey conducted by Caro Institute in 2012 indicated that once the cannabis is legalized, related industries including selling, advertisement would embrace a development and create more job positions.

Judicial Factors

Firstly, the judicial cost is too high. According to the data provided by the National Institute of Drug Abuse Research of the U.S. in 2014, the financial expense for federal government to restrict cannabis planting, selling, and using was 300 to 400 billion annually in the past 10 years, which is about 15% of the total budget for criminal law enforcement. Furthermore, with more and more states legalizing cannabis use, the law contradiction between states laws and federal laws would increase the law enforcement. Secondly, the consequence of the law restriction in using cannabis is not optimism that the prisons are full up. By the end of 2013, around 214,000 of people were sentenced to prison because of cannabis which corresponds to the total population of all the prisoners of other drug using. The full up of prisons not only costs great human and facility resources but was detrimental to the prison management and the recovery of the prisoners. Thirdly, there is the contradiction between cannabis restriction and civil rights protection. It is hard to collect enough proof to issue search warrant to drug dealers without infringing upon human rights.

The Effects of the Legalization to Cannabis Using among Teenagers

The effects of the legalization of cannabis using may have great influence on teenagers.

Firstly, the cannabis legitimation may be a threat to prohibition of other drugs. Cannabis is currently regarded as drug in most Western countries. Cannabis legitimation is a violation to the general law, which may devour the public recognition and legal achievements in social issues. With possible negative effect on the prohibition of other drug, teenagers may be exposed to more risks and opportunities in drug abusing. As teenagers have not developed mature recognition ability, this blur in cannabis and drug using may cause severe problems. If one recognizes cannabis as drug, the allowance of recreational drug opens the door to other drug

using. If one considers cannabis not as a kind of drug, with the similar characteristics after using cannabis with other drugs, the legalization of other drugs may be expected and social disorder may be caused. Though the supporters of cannabis legitimization claim that the addiction to marijuana and the physical as well as psychological harm are much less than hard drugs, like heroin and cocaine, cannabis results in psychological and physical dependent to users in similar way. Besides, like other drugs, cannabis has resistance to itself and users have to increase dose to keep the expect effect of using it. A great number of hard drug users are initiated from cannabis using. As a result, the legitimization of cannabis is likely to increase the number of teenagers using hard drugs which will have much severe negative impact to users.

Secondly, cannabis legitimization may cause division in society. People in support of the legitimization and oppose it hold great divergence which may cause the instability of the society. In America, there are instinct conflicts between states towards different view towards cannabis using. Teenagers who grow up in such great divergence are likely to be confused which is detrimental to their development. They may less confident in themselves with the uncertainty to the surroundings and may become temperament and sometimes extremity in response to the conflict around.

What is more, the influence of cannabis legitimization to different races and classes is different. For the majority of white people, especially those have teenage children; they are tended to consider more on the harm of the cannabis using. Researches have indicated that teenagers using cannabis will result in a 6%-8% of irreversible shortage in IQ compare to their non-cannabis using counterparts. However, when it comes to black people and minorities, they are more likely to approve the legitimization given the fact that teenagers in these groups are the biggest victims. As the judicial department in U.S. dealing with the accusation concern with cannabis using unfairly, most of the punishment fell on black people and minorities, their recidivism rates are high. Based on the report released by American Civil Liberties Union in 2014, though cannabis using rate in some white people groups is no lower than that in black people, the proportion of colored race arrested due to cannabis using is eighth fold to that of white people. The criminal record would accompanied those colored race and result in difficulty in finding jobs and houses. The diffident opinions towards cannabis legitimization are likely to increase the racism. Teenagers grow up in the disparity would not develop mature enough. Teenagers being despised are lack of confident in themselves and will be treated unfairly which may cause inferiority and their abandon themselves. Teenagers that are unfairly treated good and given more opportunities may grow the sense of priority and arrogance. They may not be as hard-working and may not be able to seek the advantages in others to improve themselves. Furthermore, cooperation may be hard to generate among them. The overall effect will be detrimental to the society.

Finally, cannabis legitimization may do harm to international anti-drug cause. The legalization of cannabis will result in the global drug producing and smuggling to increase. And the global anti-drug legislative system will be in danger of collapse. Teenagers all over the world are likely to be negatively impacted.

Conclusion

Though the objective instability of social environment accompanied with the financial income and higher employment rate as well as the difficulty in judicial are in support of cannabis legitimization, the legalization of cannabis may not considered an optimal solution given the negative effects it would have on the society especially the teenagers. The violation to the prohibition of drug may result in increasing number of hard drug users among teenagers. The further instability of society caused by different opinions among the society would

cause the frustration of teenagers. And the unfairness existed in punishment relating to cannabis using among races would cause increasing social disparity when it comes to the discussion on cannabis legitimation which will be detrimental to the development of teenagers of all the races. What is more, the legalization of cannabis in the West is likely to impact the development of teenagers worldwide.

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