

Clearing the Garden of the Weeds

by Reece Tappan

Nine out of every one hundred marijuana smokers die every year... almost one out every ten people. The debate over recreational marijuana has become a hot topic in social media and the news. According to a recent Gallup poll, 51% of Americans support legalization of marijuana, while 47% oppose pot's recreational use. According to Dr. Stuart Gitlow, the president of the American Society of Addiction Medicine, in an article he wrote recently for CNN, "It is almost as if we have to burn our fingers again to be convinced the stove is still hot." Dr. Gitlow is referring to the idea that we have to try marijuana once more in order to truly understand and prove that it is a harmful drug and will ruin the lives of those who use it. Cannabis should not be federally legalized for recreational use due to the harm it does to the body, and the safety risk to society.

Marijuana, also known as cannabis, is a "mind-altering" drug that is considered to be extremely dangerous among doctors and scientists. Through research, scientists have discovered that marijuana smoke is similar to that of tobacco smoke. Benzopyrene, an organic compound, is 70% more voluminous in marijuana smoke than tobacco smoke. The organic compound is known to lead directly to cancer. Carbon monoxide, hydrogen cyanide, and nitrosamines are also toxic chemicals found in cannabis smoke. There is 50% more tar in marijuana smoke than tobacco smoke, leading to a much greater risk of developing lung disease, tooth decay, gum cancer, and other health conditions. According to the American Lung Association, there are 33 chemicals in marijuana that lead to cancer.

The deadly drug has been proven to damage the entire human body no matter how much you smoke. The respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, and the nervous system are three main systems the body relies on. Cannabis causes damage to all these systems. Heavily smoking marijuana causes inflammation and pre-cancerous changes to the airways. A Cannabis smoker, who smokes four joints a week over a duration of eight weeks, will have visible obstruction to their upper airways, such as their sinuses and larynx. When smoking marijuana, your heart rate and blood pressure are altered from their normal values. The increased workload on the cardiovascular system is equivalent to that of a person under "real stress." As the heart increases its rate, it needs more oxygen. Cannabis increases the amount of carbon monoxide in the blood, not allowing the supply of much needed oxygen to be delivered to the heart.

Not only are marijuana smokers putting their own lives at risk, they are putting innocent people in jeopardy. Because the chemicals in a Cannabis joint inhibits neurotransmitter function, brain activity is suppressed putting the drug user as well as the people surrounding them at risk for dangerous behaviors. Chemicals in the smoke of cannabis also impairs motor coordination, the smoker's tracking ability, and sensory and perceptual functions. These disabilities of the brain majorly affects day-to-day life. The dysfunction of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine and the lack of tracking ability, puts the risk of getting into a deadly automobile accident through the roof.

Advocates for recreational marijuana defend their stance with it is their right to smoke weed. No where in the U.S. Constitution does it give citizens the right to do whatever they want to without regard to their own safety or the safety of other citizens. It is for these reasons that our elected officials create laws to protect ourselves, as well as our fellow citizens. Because marijuana and its use has been associated with not only personal health risks, but injurious behavior, laws have been created to protect people from making potential harmful choices which supersede individual citizens rights to do as they wish. Just as the government creates laws requiring people to wear seat belts, wear helmets while riding bicycles or motorcycles, or car companies to have to reduce harmful emissions to the environment, the government also has laws prohibiting the use of marijuana for recreational purposes due to its harmful effects.

The interest in recreational marijuana has even reached an international debate in the Western Hemisphere. Yet debate leaves no promises. Recreational marijuana should not be legalized due to the health risks and injurious behavior the users have. Marijuana, dope, ganja, pot, weed, whatever you call the injurious drug, is destructive to the cardiovascular system, the nervous system, and the human body's airways. Also, the drug's injurious chemicals affecting the brain cause many day-to-day life disabilities, consequently proving deadly. What makes life sadder is that people go looking for happiness, but true happiness is not achieved.