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Background

- Marijuana is the most prevalent illicit drug used on college campuses today (Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2012).
- Young adults often initiate marijuana use during college (Suerken et al., 2014).
- The prevalence of marijuana use on college campuses over the past month averaged 26.2% (Pearson, Liese, Dvorak, 2016).
- College students reported being in favor of legalizing medical marijuana for physical or mental illnesses, legalizing recreational use in adults, and using marijuana is safer than consuming alcohol (Pearson et al., 2017).

Purpose

The objectives were to assess attitudes and beliefs about marijuana among undergraduate students at a faith-based university in the Midwest and identify aspects associated with recreational and medicinal use.

Method

- Data were collected during four focus groups of 6-12 students per group.
- Open-ended questions were used to facilitate discussion about attitudes and beliefs of marijuana.
- Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- Data were analyzed for trends and categories.

Sample

- 37 students, age 18-36 years old ($M = 19.9$).
- The majority of participants were white (76%), female (59%), and not in Greek life (70%).
- 19% used marijuana in the last 30 days.

Conclusion

Students reported increased exposure to marijuana-related content in various media sources. Students believed societal attitudes about marijuana use are becoming more relaxed, and they are accepting of its use for both medicinal and recreational purposes.

Categories

Five broad categories explained shared attitudes and beliefs.

Media Exposure

Students stated they saw an increase in marijuana presence in society including social media, clothing, celebrities, and television.

Attitudes Towards Use

Students perceived that marijuana has become more accepted over recent years and that marijuana is safer than alcohol.



Perceived Societal Benefits

Students believed legalization of marijuana would have a positive effect on the economy.

Reasons for Use

Students stated there are many positive reasons to justify using marijuana including relieving anxiety, alleviating health problems, and facilitating social interaction.

Legalization and Regulation

Students stated there should be regulations for age of use, driving under the influence, and the quantity of marijuana in possession if legalized.

"I think media had a lot to do with it. Like it became more popular in like movies and social media. So, people are like oh that's cool and they want to try it."

"I think also with social media it's being publicized a lot more so, people are being more open about it, whether they use it recreationally or medicinally so, I think it's more like opened everybody's eyes."

"Short term, I think marijuana is generally safer. I have yet to see an angry, violent pot-head. I've seen plenty of angry, violent drunkards."

"I feel like it's become more accepted among people, it's kind of become a little bit more of a -- I guess a cool thing."

"I feel like you smoke to the point where you just pass out because of how under the influence you are, but alcohol, you can drink until you get alcohol poisoning and that can be very fatal."

"Yeah, like since it's only openly used -- like so many people use, legalizing it will just -- I feel like it'd bring more positives than any negatives. Because people are already using it, if you legalize it then yeah, it's going to boost our economy, lead to like less incarceration rates and I just don't -- I don't see like big negatives to legalizing it now or like in the near future."

"I think if you're in chronic pain you should at least have the opportunity to try it. I definitely think cancer patients especially that are like really far along and just, maybe they're not going to make it but they just want to be comfortable."

"Definitely cancer and anxiety"
 "PTSD"
 "Seizures"
 "Depression"

"I think if it just improves their overall quality of life it's okay."
 "I think there should be limits on it though. Like for certain like medical illnesses."

"I think the regulations of it could be compared to alcohol use. Like you shouldn't drive under the influence of marijuana. You shouldn't go to work under the influence of marijuana, things like that."

"I think also, there should be restrictions on how much you can buy at one time. I feel like you can be excessive. There's no need to buy just like pounds of marijuana. I mean, it doesn't look good and it just -- in any circumstance, it's probably not the best idea."