A Qualitative Study: Undergraduate Students’ Attitudes and Beliefs about Marijuana

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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 legalizing 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.

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