Is Marijuana Safe?

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Modeled example for week 1 assignment

In recent years, many states have voted to legalize marijuana, both for medical and recreational uses (Sanders, 2018). However, federal law still prohibits the use or sale of marijuana in the United States, allegedly because of negative health effects (Ripley, 2017). With the recent decision by the Justice department to crack down on marijuana distribution (Johnson, 2018), an important question is whether those federal laws have sound medical science on their side. This paper will begin to explore the specific question of whether marijuana use is harmful to health. It will explore articles that argue on each side in an effort to evaluate the quality of the reasoning of each.

**Article Against the Use of Marijuana**

The first article to appear when searching ‘Marijuana is Harmful” is a web site from an anti-drug non-profit organization called the Foundation for a Drug Free World. The article argues that marijuana is harmful based on several studies showing multiple sources of danger to the user and to society. The reasoning given contains these key premises:

Premise 1: Studies show that Marijuana use diminishes attention, memory, and learning.

Premise 2: Studies show that Marijuana use increases the likelihood of traffic accidents, including fatalities.

Conclusion: Marijuana use is bad for the health of the user and for society (Foundation for a Drug Free World, n.d.).

**Evaluation of the Quality of the Argument Against the Use of Marijuana**

The argument given appears to make strong points in favor of the conclusion. The first premise seems to demonstrate that marijuana use is bad for the user, and the second seems to show that it is bad for society, thereby supporting the truth of both parts of the conclusion.

For these premises to adequately support the conclusion, however, we need to assume that there is nothing to outweigh these two negative factors. For example, suppose that someone is using marijuana to combat the effects of chemotherapy or to prevent glaucoma. In such cases, the negatives of reduced attention, memory, and learning could be outweighed by the medical benefits. Furthermore, such a person might be sure not to drive after using it. In cases like those, the premises of this argument could be true and the conclusion false. Therefore, even if the premises are true, the argument does not adequately support the conclusion that marijuana use is *always* bad, only that it has some bad effects.

A second concern about the argument is the lack of support given for the premises. If studies demonstrate these results, it would be easy to provide references to them. This website, however, gives no citations or references to the studies in question. It only instructs those seeking the references to contact the Foundation for a Drug-Free World for that information (Foundation, n.d.). It is strange that a web site would make it so difficult to check its sources. The lack of clear support for the premises substantially weakens the argument presented here.

**Article Supporting the Safety of Marijuana Use**

An organization calling itself Americans for Safe Access advocates for legal marijuana use. It hosts a web site summarizing a substantial amount of research addressing the safety concerns about the use of marijuana. It makes a sustained case that marijuana may be used safely and healthfully.

Premise 1: A report from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration states that there has never been a death recorded from the use of cannabis (Americans for Safe Access, 2018).

Premise 2: Scientific research has shown that marijuana use is safer than many foods and legal medications (2018).

Premise 3: Research has shown no negative effects on lung function for those who smoke marijuana moderately (2018).

Premise 4: Marijuana has been shown to be far less addictive and less prone to abuse than many legal drugs (2018).

Premise 5: Negative side effects of smoking marijuana are relatively minor and can be mitigated with common sense precautions (2018).

Conclusion: Marijuana use is relatively safe compared to other medications.

**Evaluation of the Quality of the Argument in the Pro-Marijuana Source**

The argument makes very strong points on many topics, attempting to address nearly all of the main concerns about marijuana. However, the studies cited do not show that there are no long term negative effects from cannabis use. For example, the article includes a reference to a study stating that “there might be decrements in the ability to learn and remember new information in chronic users” (Grant, Gonzales, Carey, Natarajan, & Wolfson, 2003).

The conclusion of the argument, therefore, needs to be understood in the context of such statements (which are de-emphasized on the website). The conclusion should not be understood to mean that marijuana is harmless, only that it is perhaps less harmful that commonly thought or than many legal drugs.

There are many studies referenced in support of the premises. However, the references are not given on the page. A link on the page states that the resources are available to members only (and one is invited to sign up). Enough information is given in text that it is easy to find the studies used, and all appear to be of high quality. However, the page would benefit from making that information easier to access on the page itself.

Overall, the arguments on this page appear to be quite strong overall in support of the conclusion given, as long as that conclusion is understood in the limited sense indicated above.

**References:**

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