



Legalization of Marijuana in the UK

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| ABSTRACT

The legalization of marijuana is a highly controversial issue in the UK today. The society is divided over this issue, with some strong supporters of marijuana legalization and their opponents, who believe that legalization can only do more harm. The aim of this paper is to prove that there are many reasons for legalizing marijuana in the UK and that the consequences of this would have several beneficial effects for the UK economy and the society. Marijuana has been used for centuries in different countries as a safe medicine that can help to cure numerous illnesses and health conditions. After legalization, marijuana would become even safer because the government, instead of criminals, would regulate it. Legalization of marijuana will undercut the black market which is associated with the crime and reduce spendings on law enforcement services. Moreover, because marijuana is in high demand, vast amounts of money will be pumped into the UK economy. The new emerging “marijuana industry” will also create thousands of new job opportunities thus increasing the government revenue. According to a research, the UK government would experience an increase of around in £900m in its budget.



Legalization of Marijuana in the UK



Since the end of the twentieth century, there has been a rising interest in medicinal and therapeutic benefits of marijuana, and a number of advocacy groups started to press the UK government to reform its cannabis policies. Thus, a petition to “make the production, sale and use of cannabis legal” has received more than 230,000 signatures, and the topic was debated on October 12, 2015. Although the government responded that it had no plans for legalizing cannabis because it was regarded as a harmful drug, citizens began to ponder the possibility of legalization, especially after such countries as the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, and several US states legalised access to medical cannabis. The legalization of marijuana is definitely a complicated and timely process, which requires careful attention to details. Therefore, marijuana should be legalised in the UK because of strong economic reasons, unquestionable medicinal and therapeutic benefits, and as a way to tackle criminal activity that has been always associated with marijuana.

Before analysing the problem of marijuana legalization, people must first be aware of what marijuana (also known as cannabis, weed, dope, or grass) is. Marijuana comes from a widely cultivated Asian herb called hemp. The hemp plant is a valuable natural resource that has many practical uses. Hemp fiber can be used to make rope, clothing, and paper. Hemp oils have many applications as biofuels, industrial lubricants, and



soaps. Marijuana has also been a useful medicine for centuries with the first references of its use dating back to 4000BC in ancient China. Apart from China, medicinal marijuana was widely used in ancient Indian, Greek, and Roman cultures (Barnes, 2016).

The leaves and other parts of the hemp plant produce intoxicating compounds called cannabinoids and among which there is a substance called THC, which causes the most intoxicating and mind-altering effects. Another important substance produced by cannabis plants is called cannabidiol, or CBD. This compound appears to reduce the risk of psychotic disorders by counteracting the psychoactive effects of THC. Recently, the government's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency has found that CBD compound of marijuana plants has a "restoring, correcting or modifying" effect on individual's "physiological functions" (Hooton, 2016). Researches that have been conducted in some other countries also provide a clear evidence that marijuana can be used as an effective treatment for the symptoms of many diseases. Currently, the only licensed drug in the UK, which has active CBD compounds of marijuana is called Sativex and can be prescribed as a treatment to relieve the pain of muscle spasms in multiple sclerosis ("Cannabis: The Facts," 2014). In other countries that have already allowed medical marijuana use, the list of illnesses and symptoms that can be potentially treated with marijuana is much bigger and it includes the following conditions: Rheumatoid Arthritis, Migraine, Hepatitis, Gastritis, Alzheimer's, AIDS, Cancer, Glaucoma, and other illnesses ("Medical Marijuana Helps People with These Conditions," 2009). Medical cannabis could be useful for chronic pain relief, spasticity, control of nausea and vomiting, and for the



treatment of anxiety. There is also evidence of its usefulness in appetite stimulation and in the treatment of sleep disorders. Many patients have found that medical marijuana has less debilitating side-effects than “regular” medicines prescribed by their doctor. The campaign group End Our Pain estimated that the number of people in the UK who take marijuana for medical reasons can be around one million. As the possession and the use of marijuana in the UK is illegal, all these people are at risk of prosecution (Barnes, 2016).

Many people who are against the legalization of marijuana claim that it is harmful and dangerous to an individual and cannot be legalized because it can develop addictions, cause mental injuries, and lead to crimes. However, there are always pros and cons in every situation, and people have to further study and analyse both sides of the problem in order to really see if their stand is correct. Some researches have shown that one in ten regular cannabis smokers become dependent on the drug, and this number increases for those who start using marijuana as teenagers (Sample, 2016). However, alcohol and tobacco are far more addictive, but they are legally available. Of course, further research is needed to analyse marijuana as the cause of injuries, but at the moment, there is no scientifically proven evidence that marijuana pushes individuals to being violent. Marijuana is a herbal drug, and the injuries are actually caused by harder drugs.

The first major reason why marijuana should be legalized is that its prohibition is a simple infringement of an individual’s liberties. People deserve the right to decide themselves whether or not they should use

marijuana as far as they know about the potential risks. It is necessary that the government respects each person's right to engage in any activity that is peaceful and does not harm other people. The government can only limit individual's choices or actions if they pose a significant threat to the public safety. Another good reason for legalizing marijuana is that there is no clear evidence that its prohibition actually decreases the use of the drug. Instead, marijuana is getting more accessible and is now a widely used illegal drug in the UK. Sometimes, it is getting easier for teenagers to obtain cannabis than alcohol. It is because the alcohol is legal, and its selling is regulated by the law. Selling of marijuana is illegal, which only increases harm and crime. Prohibition only creates empires of drug dealers who do not care whom they sell marijuana to. Also, nothing can stop people to simply go to Amsterdam and legally smoke marijuana there. Often, prohibition has the opposite effect and makes people, especially the youth, rebel against the law. If prohibition does not work, we should try a different approach to solve the problem.

In my opinion, we should make marijuana legal, but before that, we should start programs to educate people on the potential danger of drug consumption. Also, people with drug problems should have an easy access to treatment programs. There should still be the law that regulates the selling and use of marijuana similar to that of alcohol and tobacco, including age limits and quality control. Besides, there still should be prohibition, but only for drug advertising and driving under the influence of marijuana in order to ensure public safety. After legalization, the government, would regulate marijuana instead of criminals, and it would become even safer. People would have an opportunity to easily buy

cannabis in a shop, but they need to be fully aware of the potential danger of the drug. If people know all the risks associated with marijuana, they would not use it often, and health-conscious people will not want even to try it. Ideally, the drug consumption will be reduced.

Legalization of marijuana would mean a significant boost to the UK economy. If cannabis was legalized, the black market of the drug would eventually be wiped out and the black market money turned clean. Legal transactions of this money would bring in vast amounts of wealth. If the government can start taxing marijuana just like alcohol and tobacco, it will bring in new tax revenues. A new legal marijuana industry would also create job opportunities in production, distribution, and selling of the drug. Legalization of cannabis would also save money that are spent on law enforcement including the police, courts, and prisons. Currently, the government spends lots of money not only to arrest drug dealers, but also to chase peaceful people who made the erroneous decision of smoking marijuana. Then, a vast amount of money are spent on court costs, housing, food, health care, and other expenses to lock these people in prison. If marijuana was given a legal status, it would reduce crime rates and keep more space in prisons for real crimes. It would also lessen the workload of the police and courts that now have to deal with marijuana cases. If police officers won't have to worry about someone's cannabis possession, they will have more time to focus on much more serious crimes. According to one estimate, "Legalization of marijuana could bring in £900m in taxes every year, save around £400m on policing cannabis and create over 10, 000 new jobs" (Make the Production, Sale and Use of Cannabis Legal, 2015).

In conclusion, there are many clear reasons why marijuana should be legalized. First of all, people should have freedom to decide whether or not they should use marijuana, of course, if they are fully aware of the potential risks. Secondly, there is no evidence that prohibition of marijuana actually decreases its consumption; if prohibition does not work, we should try another approach to address this problem. The third reason is that because of its medical capabilities, marijuana can be used as an effective treatment for the symptoms of many diseases. Sick people should have the right to use the world's most ancient medicine not facing the risk of prosecution because marijuana is illegal. Finally, the last reason is that marijuana legalization would be beneficial to the UK economy and the society. It would wipe out organized crime, save money on law enforcement, create thousands of new jobs, and bring in new revenues.

APPENDIX

Estimated Prevalence of Last-Year Drug Use among Young Adults in England and Wales

Table 1

Proportion of 16-24-Year-Olds Who Report Using Selected Substances in the Previous Year (in Percent)							
DRUG	YEAR						
	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13	2014/ 15
Any Cocaine	5.1	6.6	5.6	4.5	4.2	3.1	4.8
Ecstasy	3.9	4.4	4.3	3.8	3.3	2.9	5.4
Magic Mushrooms	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.3	1.2	0.6	1.5
Heroin	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Methadone	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.0
Any Amphetamine	n/a	2.7	2.4	2.6	2.0	1.4	1.3
Cannabis	18.0	18.7	16.1	17.1	15.7	13.5	16.3

Source: "Drug Misuse: Findings from the 2014/15 Crime Survey for England and Wales"

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/462885/drug-misuse-1415.pdf

