

CHEMISTRY



# Marijuana Abuse and College Students

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## Abstract

This paper reviews the problems associated with marijuana abuse and marijuana dependency among college students (Ratini, 2014). It also explores their progressive use of marijuana, causing addiction, and then turning them towards rigorous self-healing through treatment as a personal commitment, and a positive approach towards successful recovery. This paper gathers information on marijuana abuse, leading to addiction and the recovery of a college student. Marijuana Anonymous (MA) organization focuses on the Twelve-step program of recovery that incorporates a belief in a Higher Power as essential for recovery (Marijuana Anonymous, 2016). The National Institute of Drug Abuse explains marijuana and its usage as an illicit drug ("Drugfacts:marijuana," 2016). According to an article on "Marijuana Use and its Effects," there are serious psychological, physical, and social effects of marijuana on an individual (Ratini, 2014). Research also indicates a link between childhood trauma and marijuana abuse (Khoury, Tang, Bradley, Cubells, & Ressler, 2010, pp. 1077-1086). The individual experiences of Mike H. are addressed in each section to address the elements of addiction, intervention, and successful recovery.

*Keywords:* marijuana, marijuana abuse, effects of marijuana, Marijuana Anonymous, marijuana dependency, substance abuse and college students

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## Marijuana Abuse and College Students

This paper examines the effects and outcomes of college students falling into marijuana addiction (Ratini, 2014), the factors that initiate abstinence and treatment, and the steps that influence lasting recovery (Marijuana Anonymous, 2016). Throughout, Mike H. shares his experiences as a college student who had long been addicted to marijuana, finding a motivation for treatment which led to his successful recovery (personal communication, May 25, 2016). The Addiction section addresses the link between childhood trauma and marijuana abuse (Khoury et al., 2010, pp. 1077-1086), the factors associated with marijuana abuse, and severe consequences of greater substance abuse by the user (Ratini, 2014). The Intervention section particularly focuses on Mike H.'s personal motivation to change. The Successful Recovery section outlines various treatment recovery models based on elements of hope, love, caring relationships, guidance, and ideally a spiritual awakening.

## Literature Review

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**Addiction.** Marijuana contains a powerful psychoactive chemical delta-9-tetrahydro-cannabinol (THC) which can alter brain chemistry causing a “high” feeling, pleasant euphoria, and a sense of relaxation. It can be used in the form of smoking, vaping, within foods or extracts. Because it carries incredible euphoria and sense of relaxation, there is very high potential for its abuse (“Drugfacts:marijuana,” 2016).

Mike H. (personal communication, May 25, 2016) was twelve years old when he first smoked marijuana. Studies suggest that there is a link between marijuana abuse and childhood trauma (Khoury et al., 2010, pp. 1077-1086). The pleasurable chemicals in marijuana evened out Mike H.’s emotions and soothed down a deep rooted isolation, depression, anger, and insecurities from the pain and trauma caused by his violent father and childhood adoption. His marijuana usage increased all through his college years with the opportunities to smoke marijuana whenever he hung out with his friends and its easy availability through marijuana dealers. He also lived in close vicinity to a medical dispensary with numerous varieties of marijuana when he moved to Seattle. All these factors only fed his addiction. At the time, he believed that marijuana aided him in becoming a great writer. Once married, he realized it became an issue. He spent \$300-\$400 a month on buying marijuana while he could use the same to buy mortgage for his family. When he recognized how smoking marijuana affected his little kids, family and friends, he knew it was a serious problem.

**Intervention.** According to The National Institute of Drug Abuse, marijuana abuse can cause changes in mood, anxiety, sensory distortion, short-term forgetfulness, and increased heartrate, meaning a higher risk of heart attacks (“Drugfacts:marijuana,” 2016). Its dependency can have serious outcomes such as tolerance, irritability, sleeplessness, craving, and persistent use of marijuana even after attempts to quit (Ratini, 2014). Having two miniature heart attacks under a heavy influence of marijuana, Mike H. feared that his children might lose a father figure in their lives. He realized that his negligence as a husband was a primary cause of tension with his wife and how marijuana abuse affected everyone else around him. So, he was determined to seek abstinence and recovery (personal communication, May 25, 2016).

**Successful Recovery.** Mike H. has been sober for 18 months now. He realized that smoking marijuana would affect his children, so embracing good values and becoming a “better dad” became his priority. Mike H. had heard of the Marijuana Anonymous support groups and began attending MA meetings on a regular basis. As a part the of the 12-step recovery program, he was willing to make amends by whatever means necessary with making the first amendment to his mother who had undergone pain in seeing her son smoke marijuana. He also found it helpful to work with other addicts who suffer to achieve the same freedom because it constantly reminded him of the challenges he faced as a marijuana addict. MA meetings encouraged him to be rigorously honest with himself regarding its adverse consequences. He also believes that admittance to a Higher Power has been a “spiritual miracle” for him as it has relieved any craving he had for smoking marijuana. He feels that he can never say he’s fully cured because “just one joint” could put him back to where he was (personal communication, May 25, 2016).

## Discussion

There is a general agreement that marijuana abuse can lead to serious problems. The National Institute of Drug Abuse calls attention to the effects of the mind-altering chemical in marijuana ("Drugfacts:marijuana," 2016). The article on "Marijuana Use and Its Effects," explains its powerful impact on the user (Ratini, 2014). Treatment and recovery however, are perceived in varying ways. Some emphasize on the acceptance of a Higher Power as the strength gained from caring and being a part of the community, others believe that a Higher Power is a religious entity or deity who can embrace spiritual healing and recovery (Marijuana Anonymous, 2016). There are varying perspectives on Higher Power means to different people.

#### **Conclusion and Future Studies**

Marijuana can be a progressive illness because it brings intense short-term pleasure at the cost of far-ranging consequences. Currently, the 12-step program provides hope to the addicts seeking treatment and long-term recovery. But more research will be needed to confidently recommend reliable therapies tailored towards the different dynamics of the individual's needs intended to enhance self-control, abstain from drug use, and spread awareness of other problems co-occurring with them in order to reduce the use of marijuana, potentially among heavy users. These individuals would then be able to live wholesome and more empowered lives in society.

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