

We young people are the losers if you legalize cannabis

Big business sees an opportunity to make money on cannabis legalization – they want to make profits while we, the young, and society at large will bear the real costs.

It has been claimed in the Swedish debate that the first step to achieve a sustainable drug policy is to have an open and objective debate. The Swedish Youth Temperance Organization, UNF, agree completely. We need a debate based on facts and a debate that also listens to young people.

We agree that there is no need to exaggerate the negative impacts of cannabis and it only lowers credibility when adults tell horror stories. Young people prefer reasonable arguments and evidence based information. For example one study of Meier et al. that followed over 1000 person for almost 40 years. It is one of several new studies that show that smoking cannabis while young will decrease several functions in the brain and will lower IQ. We need to listen to research, there is clear and solid evidence that cannabis can damage IQ and memory, impair motor skills and lead to addiction. The proven effects are foremost connected to the young brain. We are the ones with the most to lose if cannabis becomes legal and accepted in society.

As many cannabis advocates point to alcohol is a legal drug and is accepted as a natural part of life – sometimes also for the young. The benefit of legalization of cannabis is often argued by claiming that it will decrease the consumption of alcohol and other drugs, this is not true. UNF works daily to break the norm around alcohol and we struggle to make the adult world take responsibility so no adults provide alcohol to young people. No one is happier than UNF if we can discuss the negative impact of alcohol among young people and in society as a whole.

But trying to exchange one drug with another is doomed to fail. Surveys show that young people who smoke cannabis also drink more alcohol. The best way to protect youth from the harms of drugs in an evidence based way, as many in the debate claim they want, is to focus on low availability and high prices.

The idea that a restrictive drug policy is in conflict with humane and effective treatment is also wrong. A restrictive policy leads to fewer persons in addiction and more resources to help and treat those who need support from society. The ones who benefit from a legalization of cannabis are not the persons with addiction or the young. It is big companies and entrepreneurs who see the opportunity to make money on the cannabis industry. That is the reason why George Soros gives millions of US dollars to advocacy organizations to work for legalization in the US. They want to get the profit while the young and society will pay the price.

The creation of a legal industry around cannabis will not help people with addiction. But there is a lot more Sweden can do and UNF wants to be a part of the work for improved addiction treatment. We are convinced that our treatment centers will not have an easier task if there are more legal substances available and more people with addiction.

Young people like us are not naïve, and our voice should be heard in the debate on cannabis. The loud proponents of cannabis legalization are often young but the majority of young people see the risks with cannabis and want cannabis to stay illegal. In a Swedish survey only 14 percent of people under 30 answered that it should be legal to smoke cannabis.

Alcohol, cannabis and other drugs are vital issues for young and decriminalization and legalization is not the solution. A continued restrictive policy together with improved treatment and preventive

measures are important initiatives supported by experience and research. Sweden as well as other countries can do more and we in UNF are willing to join and fight for this, together with as many young people as possible.

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