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**COM 822 Persuasive Communication**

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April 5, 2024

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PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION ESSAY – CORE 2

PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION/ARGUMENTATIVE OVERVIEW

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**THESIS TITLE**: Medical Marijuana Laws Fail to Address Teens' Mental Health Needs

**THESIS STATEMENT** – Advocates for Medical Marijuana Laws overlook the profound effects of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in cannabis on the mental well-being and cognitive functions of teenagers and young adults.

**KEY WORDS:** delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), Psychosis, cannabis, depression, (MML), (MM), medical marijuana laws, medical marijuana, RML) recreational marijuana laws, bidirectional, (AYA), adolescents and young adults, incarceration, gateway effect, cognitive, (CUD) cannabis use disorder.

In a troubling omission, current medical marijuana laws are neglecting the critical issue of teens' mental health (Gabaglio et al., 2021; Ganesh & D’Souza, 2022). Despite the growing acceptance of medical cannabis, the specific needs and vulnerabilities of teenagers are ignored. The development of the human brain reaches full maturity by the age of 24.(Fischer et al., 2020; Scheier & Griffin, 2021). Advocates for Medical Marijuana Laws overlook the profound effects of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in cannabis on the mental well-being and cognitive functions of teenagers and young adults. THC is the component of the cannabis plant that induces a sense of euphoria in many users (Siegel &Starbuck 2021).

Teenagers and young adults (ages 20-24), use marijuana to relieve depressive symptoms (Amen, 2015; Mason, 2022 ; Leone, 2022). Research showed that marijuana can lead to depression, indicating a bidirectional effect of the drug (Wallis et al., 2022). Mennis et al. (2024) suggests that young individuals are susceptible to cannabis use disorder. Despite MML not granting legal access to drugs for teens, they still manage to obtain them (Cort, 2017).

States endorsing marijuana laws aim to help patients with cancer-related nausea, AIDS patients needing appetite stimulation, and individuals with Multiple Sclerosis seeking pain relief, among other health issues (Sabet, 2021). Critics argue that Medical Marijuana Laws (MML) act as a guise for promoting recreational use by aligning Recreational Marijuana Laws (RML) (Williams et al., 2024). Advocates argue that legalizing cannabis may lead to decriminalizing those arrested for possession, which reduces the prison population (Mohr-Avitia, 2024). Nevertheless, there is a notable lack of focus on the vulnerable population.

Supporters of marijuana laws, whether for medical or recreational purposes, should consider the potential health risks for youth when advocating for cannabis regulation to move beyond decriminalization (Plunk et al., 2019). Additionally, statistic shows that 80% of adolescents and young adults do not perceive cannabis as a health risk (Sabet, 2021). This lack of awareness should be a cause for concern not only for parents and society as a whole, emphasizing the need for further education and awareness campaigns.

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