Attitudes Toward Marijuana: A Survey

Hanna E. Morzenti, Criminal Justice
Gary Keveles, Ph.D., Department of History, Politics and Society

ABSTRACT

The study examines a difference in the attitudes toward marijuana among criminal justice majors when compared to other majors. Few studies have been conducted to determine the difference between criminal justice employees’ and other members of the general population attitudes toward marijuana. Criminal justice majors in this study will act as surrogates in lieu of the criminal justice employees. It is assumed that many of the criminal justice majors will some day be employed in the criminal justice system, and therefore their attitudes would be similar to those of criminal justice employees. This research studies the attitudes of college students toward marijuana, specifically its risks, legalization and decriminalization. Are the attitudes different among students depending on their major or other demographic factors? This study examines and analyzes previous studies, as well as data that has been collected from voluntary participants on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, Superior. It is important to study the attitudes of criminal justice majors and employees, because they are the ones working to enforce the laws that are presently in place for marijuana. Criminal justice employees and students are directly involved with the problems caused by marijuana, as well as other drugs that affect the criminal justice system. Knowing if there is a difference between the attitudes of criminal justice students and other students toward marijuana will help to influence future research on marijuana, as well as the criminal justice system, and those involved with it. Findings from the survey reveal that there is a slight difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors compared to non criminal justice majors. There is an even bigger difference with the attitudes of criminal justice students in the present survey and criminal justice employees in a past survey.

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to determine if a difference exists in the attitudes toward marijuana held by criminal justice majors and other majors. The attitudes of criminal justice employees toward marijuana are intriguing, as they are the ones enforcing the laws against marijuana, but more importantly, because they are the ones that would probably be quite knowledgeable about marijuana especially its uses and problems (Weisheit, 1992, 55). It is important that those enforcing the laws against marijuana
truly believe that those laws should be in place. Being involved in the criminal justice field requires employees and students to learn more than the average person about marijuana. Criminal justice employees and students learn about different types of drugs, their uses, and problems. Their knowledge affects enforcement patterns.

A paucity of studies statistically show that there is no meaningful difference in the attitudes of criminal justice employees and the general public toward the legalization and decriminalization of marijuana (Weisheit, 1992, 57). Criminal justice majors at a four year university will act as surrogates in lieu of criminal justice employees. It will be assumed that many of the criminal justice students will one day be employed in the criminal justice system, and therefore their attitudes would not be significantly different from those currently employed in the criminal justice field. Therefore, there should be no significant difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and other majors at the University of Wisconsin, Superior, toward marijuana, specifically risks, legalization and decriminalization.

*Legalization* refers to removal of all criminal penalties of an illegal act or substance. The legalization of marijuana then would mean that all criminal penalties for the use of marijuana would be removed. *Decriminalization* refers lessening the punishment of an illegal act or substance. This means that the use of marijuana would have a less severe punishment than that which is currently in place. For example, jail time would be reduced to a small fine. This study also looked at the risks associated with marijuana. This study examines what risks people associate with marijuana, and how that compares to their attitudes toward legalization and decriminalization.

One study has looked at criminal justice employees and the general public's attitudes toward marijuana. Prior research has usually focused on the general public or specific groups other than criminal justice employees. Although the main focus of most past research has not been on legalization and decriminalization of marijuana, it does address it. Past research has generally focused on a variety of attitudes toward marijuana, such as the harm it causes, as well as feelings toward medical marijuana (Khatapoush, 2004, 751). (i.e., medical marijuana is marijuana used in the aid of suffering medical patients) (Khatapoush, 2004, 752-53).

For purposes of this research is that the attitudes of criminal justice major’s will be compared to other student’s attitudes toward marijuana, specifically legalization and decriminalization. It is also important to look at the risks associated with marijuana, and to include other variables that could affect attitudes. Independent variables that could be used include: gender, race, age, social status or even religious affiliation (Lenton, 1996,
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784). Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study we are only looking at gender and age as independent variables.

**Literature Review**

Marijuana has been a controversial topic of discussion for many years. In 1970, President Richard Nixon created the Nation Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse. In 1972, the Commission issued its report, “Marijuana: A Signal of Misunderstanding,” which recommended the elimination of criminal penalties for possession of small amounts of marijuana (Hyde, 1998, 68). It is not surprising then, that many studies have been done to look at the public’s attitudes toward the legalization of marijuana (Weisheit, 1992, 53).

Several studies have looked at physicians’ attitudes toward marijuana. Results show that physicians are more in favor of legalizing marijuana than they are other illegal drugs, such as cocaine, LSD, heroin, and amphetamines (Linn, 1989, 717). The opinions of physicians are important and should be taken into account in formulating any policy regarding how illegal drug use should be handled by society (Linn, 1989, 718).

Attitudes toward drug legalization among drug users have also been studied (Trevino, 2002, 91). The attitudes of drug users were compared to the attitudes of non drug users. Sixty eight percent of the drug users were for the legalization of marijuana. Forty three percent of the non drug users also supported the legalization of it (Trevino, 2002, 101). Only one study however, has compared the attitudes of criminal justice employees to those of the general public, and results show that there was no significant difference in their attitudes (Weisheit, 1992, 63).

It is essential to find out what knowledge people have about marijuana and what knowledge supports their decisions. It will be surprising to see if people in the current study believe marijuana to be physically addicting. Marijuana is not physically addicting like most other drugs (Smith, 1991, 51). Past research shows that over 80% of the general population thought that marijuana was physically addicting, while over 60% of criminal justice employees felt the same (Weisheit, 1992, 76). Another study that was conducted in California showed that over 44% of participants thought that there was a low risk and low harm in using marijuana (Khatapoush, 2004, 762). Attitudes toward the addictiveness of marijuana have been an immense topic of discussion, and that is why it is important to see what people believe about it. Although marijuana is illegal, in 1942, the *American Journal of Psychiatry* suggested that marijuana was not as habit-forming as alcohol or tobacco (Mendelson, 1986, 79). *High Times Magazine*, for example, routinely publishes a full-page advertisement sponsored by the National Organization for the Reform
of Marijuana Laws (NORML) which shows a glass of hard liquor, a tobacco cigarette, and a marijuana cigarette. The heading for the advertisement reads: “Ask your doctor which of these is least harmful to your health…Now ask your Congressman why it’s illegal.”

Research has not proven if marijuana makes people more or less violent while under its influence. However, in 1944 a group of New York scientists published the “LaGuardia Report,” which concluded that although marijuana lowered inhibitions, it did not lead to aggressive behavior (Mendelson, 1986, 79). One-fourth of criminal justice employees in a past study believed marijuana to make people less violent; only 16% of the general public thought the same (Weisheit, 1992, 76). The American Medical Association denied that marijuana caused violent behavior (Mendelson, 1986, 79).

Looking at the “gateway drug” theory is also essential. This theory is based on the idea that if a person tries marijuana they are more likely to go on and use harder drugs. There has been continuous debate about this topic (Weisheit, 1992, 55). Ongoing research is being performed on the “gateway drug” theory, but results have not been conclusive (Miron, 2001, 840). Over ninety percent of criminal justice employees and members of the general public surveyed in past research believed that using marijuana makes people more likely to try other drugs (Weisheit, 1992, 76). In surveys of the general public conducted in Australia, it was shown that attitudes there were different. Less than 25% of the Australians surveyed thought that marijuana leads to harder drugs (Lenton, 1996, 794). Do people in the current study believe that by using marijuana people are more apt to try stronger types of drugs? General education on marijuana is important, because there are many different ways to learn about marijuana; sometimes what is heard about marijuana may or may not be true. It is also helpful to know what knowledge people have about marijuana, and what supports their decisions.

When looking at attitudes toward marijuana it is necessary to ascertain the attitudes towards the harm caused by marijuana. For example, do those who believe that marijuana should not be legalized believe it because it is immoral (Weisheit, 1992, 66)? Research has shown that there is a small difference in the attitudes of criminal justice employees and the general public when they were asked if using marijuana was morally wrong. Sixty percent of the criminal justice employees surveyed and over sixty percent of other members of the general public thought that marijuana use was morally wrong (Weisheit, 1992, 76). In a study conducted in Western Australia, over 40% of the participants thought that marijuana was not that harmful (Lenton, 1996, 794).

When looking at attitudes toward the legalization of marijuana, it is important to look at different areas of legalization. For example, should
marijuana be legalized for medical use (as opposed to personal use)? The medical use of marijuana is not new. Five thousand years ago, the legendary Chinese Emperor Shen Nung was said to have prescribed marijuana for ailments such as gout, malaria, rheumatism, and even gas pains (Hyde, 1998, 19). Likewise, until 1937, Americans considered marijuana a recognized medicine in good standing, distributed by leading pharmaceutical firms, and on sale at many pharmacies (Hyde, 1998, 19). Medical marijuana is still being disputed today with the 2005 Supreme Court decision to prosecute medical marijuana violators under federal law, even if their state has legalized medical marijuana. What the Supreme Court will not do is settle the question of whether or not there should be medical use of marijuana (Zwilich, 2005, 1). Scientific evidence has shown that marijuana does have medical benefits, specifically for patients with AIDS and cancer. The Institute of Medicine has determined that nausea, appetite loss, pain and anxiety all can be mitigated by marijuana (Newman, 2005, 1).

Although most polls show that the general population is not in favor of legalization of marijuana (Bowman, 2001, 65), a shift has been observed in the attitudes toward the legalization of it, especially medical marijuana (Paul, 2003, 18). Past studies that have looked at attitudes toward marijuana demonstrate that people favor legalization of medical marijuana more than legalization for personal use (Khatapoush, 2004, 762). More research is being done on marijuana than ever before, and doctors and scientists are finding that it may not be as harmful as once thought (Linn, 1989, 716). Recently, the Office of National Drug Policy has pledged to consider more serious clinical research on marijuana, especially medical marijuana (Hyde, 1998, 70).

It is also important to consider the amount of marijuana when discussing legalization. For example, people may support the legalization of small amounts and may not support the legalization of large amounts of marijuana.

Marijuana has been studied regarding legalization and/or decriminalization in many different countries throughout the world. For example, marijuana has been decriminalized in places such as the Netherlands (de Kort, 1994, 417), Canada and Jamaica, as well as in Australia and New Zealand (Makkai, 1993, 409). One study done in Australia shows that a large majority of the population feels that marijuana should be as legal as alcohol. The study also shows that the participants thought that it may be less harmful than tobacco and alcohol (de Kort, 1994, 427).

Marijuana has been studied in the country of Thailand. Police officers in Thailand were studied regarding their attitudes toward drug use. The article showed that the Thai police officers believed marijuana was not
a harmful drug. The article also demonstrated that police officers surveyed thought that poverty and unemployment pose more serious social problems than any drugs did (Cheurprakobkit, 1998, 94).

Marijuana has been decriminalized or legalized for different reasons in different countries. These reasons range from personal freedom in the Netherlands and Canada (de Kort, 1994, 418), to finding that harm caused by marijuana is less than alcohol, in places such as New Zealand and Australia (Makkai, 1993, 409). Researchers have argued that marijuana prohibition does not deter its use (Cussen, 2000, 526).

**Research Design/Methodology**

To ascertain the nature of the difference, if any, between criminal justice students’ and other students’ attitudes toward marijuana, a survey has been conducted at the University of Wisconsin, Superior during the month of May 2005. Approximately 2,000 students are enrolled at UW-Superior. The survey aimed to capture 3%-7%, or 80 to 100 students, including criminal justice students. A “snap shot” opportunity sample of available students in a variety of classes at UW-Superior was used to gather participants in the survey. The survey that was conducted was completely voluntary and confidential. Those participating in the survey, were given a brief description of legalization and decriminalization, enabling them to enhance their understanding of the questionnaire.

The survey included three criminal justice classes, and three other classes, including anthropology, mass communications, and elementary education. The information that was gathered from the attached survey included: the age, sex, number of credits and major/minor of all participants, their attitudes toward marijuana, specifically the legalization, decriminalization and risks. In order for this data to be collected, participants were asked to complete a 15 item questionnaire (see Appendix “A”)

Students who chose to participate in the study were first asked to listen to the definitions of legalization and decriminalization. Legalization was defined as the removal of all criminal penalties for an illegal act or substance. Decriminalization was defined as lessening the punishment of an illegal act or substance. Students were also encouraged to ask questions if there was something that they did not understand. Participants were then asked to fill out the questionnaire that was distributed to them. The questionnaire had the definitions of significant words in the survey, these words included: *legalization, decriminalization, and marijuana paraphernalia*. Participants were asked to complete the entire survey, trying not to leave any answers blank. Approximately fifteen minutes were allowed for participants to complete the survey.
Many of the questions that were included on the questionnaire are similar or identical to those questions that have been given in numerous polls to the American public on the topic of marijuana. An additional source of questions used was from an article entitled “Exploring the Dimensions of Support for Decriminalizing Drugs” (Weisheit, 1992).

The first three questions on the survey asked participants about risks associated with marijuana. Respondents were questioned about whether they thought marijuana was physically addicting, if it made people less violent, and if they believed that people who tried marijuana were more likely to try other drugs. The two other categories of questions involved legalization, and decriminalization.

In the legalization category, participants were asked if they believed marijuana should be legal for personal use or medical use. They were also asked if they thought only small amounts (three ounces or less) of marijuana should be legalized.

In the section on decriminalization, participants were first asked if they thought marijuana penalties should be softened, then they were given punishments for different marijuana law violations and were asked to respond with one of these three choices: “too harsh, about right, or too light.”

**Results/Findings**

A total of 107 surveys were completed. More than half of the respondents, 59% (N=63) were criminal justice majors, while 41% (N=44) were non-criminal justice majors. Criminal justice majors were slightly younger on average than the non criminal justice major (24 v. 25). A marginal difference existed in the gender of participants in the survey, over 60% of both criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors were female. Nevertheless a large difference in the average number of total credits was found: criminal justice majors had an average of 93 credits, while non criminal justice majors had completed on average only 58. In short, the average criminal justice major is younger and has more credits than the average non-criminal justice major.

**Risks**

When criminal justice majors were asked if they believed marijuana was physically addicting, 33% agreed, while 54% of non criminal justice majors agreed (See Table 1). This is over a twenty percent difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors. This is a meaningful difference, as 41% of criminal justice majors felt that marijuana was not physically addicting.

When asked if marijuana makes people less violent, more criminal justice and non criminal justice students were neutral, than were opposed or
agreed with this statement (See Table 1). Yet, 27% of criminal justice majors and 40% of non criminal justice majors disagreed with this statement. Students that responded to this question as neutral commented that they “have heard that marijuana calms people down, but they had never seen it for themselves.”

Participants were asked a question that was related to the gateway drug theory. They were asked if they thought marijuana made people more likely to try harder drugs. Fifty three percent (N=24) of criminal justice majors believe that using marijuana makes people more likely to try other drugs, 67% (N=23) of non criminal justice majors believe the same (See Table 1). A 14% difference was seen in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors. Criminal justice majors commented that “the gateway drug theory is an immense topic of discussion, because studies are still being done to see what the facts are.” Although there are numerous studies that have been conducted on why people move on to harder drugs, it is not known why they do (Miron, 2001, 840). Many participants thought that some people move on to harder drugs because they are looking for a stronger high, while for others it may be because they are risk takers.

When asked if marijuana or the use of marijuana was immoral, 64% of criminal justice majors and 57% of non criminal justice majors disagreed with this statement (See Table 1). No criminal justice majors strongly agreed with this statement; however five percent of non criminal justice majors strongly agreed with this statement. The answers received from this statement are understandable, because immoral was not defined within the survey. Some participants believed that “judging if marijuana was immoral was on a religious level that should not be brought into government.”
Table 1: Risks
(N=107)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Criminal Majors</th>
<th>Non Criminal Justice Majors</th>
<th>Meaningful Difference (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana is physically addicting.</td>
<td>33% agree</td>
<td>53% agree</td>
<td>20% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16% neutral</td>
<td>21% neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41% disagree</td>
<td>26% disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana makes people less violent.</td>
<td>30% agree</td>
<td>14% agree</td>
<td>16% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44% neutral</td>
<td>46% neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26% disagree</td>
<td>40% disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using marijuana makes people more likely to try other drugs.</td>
<td>55% agree</td>
<td>66% agree</td>
<td>No meaningful difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21% neutral</td>
<td>13% neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24% disagree</td>
<td>21% disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana should not be legalized because it is immoral.</td>
<td>4.5% agree</td>
<td>13% agree</td>
<td>No meaningful difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32% neutral</td>
<td>30% neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63.5% disagree</td>
<td>57% disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Legalization**

When criminal justice majors were asked if marijuana should be legalized for medical purposes, 68.2% of them agreed, as compared to 71.4% of non criminal justice majors (See Table 2). Only a small difference was noticed in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors toward medical marijuana. One-fifth of criminal justice students were neutral on this statement, as they stated “research on medical marijuana is still ongoing.”
Table 2: Legalization
(N= 107)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Criminal Justice Majors</th>
<th>Non Criminal Justice Majors</th>
<th>Meaningful Difference (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana should be legalized for medical purposes.</td>
<td>68% agree 23% neutral 9% disagree</td>
<td>71% agree 16% neutral 13% disagree</td>
<td>No meaningful difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana should be legalized for personal use</td>
<td>48% agree 18% neutral 34% disagree</td>
<td>33% agree 26% neutral 41% disagree</td>
<td>15% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only small amounts of marijuana (three ounces or less) should be legalized.</td>
<td>21% agree 36% neutral 43% disagree</td>
<td>16% agree 48% neutral 36% disagree</td>
<td>No meaningful difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana should be fully legalized with no criminal penalty.</td>
<td>33% agree 26% neutral 41% disagree</td>
<td>21% agree 27% neutral 52% disagree</td>
<td>No meaningful difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked if marijuana should be legalized for personal use, 47.8% of criminal justice majors agreed, while only 33.3% of non criminal justice majors agreed (See Table 2). Almost a fifteen percent difference was noticed in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors, which is meaningful.

Thirty six percent of criminal justice majors were neutral when asked if only small amounts of marijuana should be legal (See Table 2). Forty eight percent of non criminal justice majors were also neutral with this statement. Participants gave different reasons for neutral support or opposition to this statement. Many thought that “the amount should not matter, it should all be legalized.” While others thought that “if small amounts were for medical use then it was acceptable, otherwise it should still be illegal.”

When asked if marijuana should be fully legalized with no criminal penalty, 32.6% of criminal justice majors agreed, while only twenty percent of non criminal justice majors agreed (See Table 2). Forty percent of criminal justice majors and 52% of non criminal justice majors disagreed with this statement. There is a twelve percent difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors toward full legalization of marijuana.
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Decriminalization

Regarding decriminalization, fifty six percent of the criminal justice majors agreed when asked if the punishment for marijuana should be lessened, while only forty three percent of non criminal justice majors agreed with this statement (See Table 3). That is a thirteen percent difference in their attitudes, showing another meaningful difference. Less than 37% of both criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors agreed or strongly agreed when asked if people who are arrested with small amounts of marijuana should only have to pay a small fine. Participants commented that “the amount should not matter, or that there should be no penalty at all.”

The last part of the survey that dealt with decriminalization of marijuana asked participants to state if they thought the punishment for the crime was too harsh, about right, or too light.

When asking participants what they thought of the following statement: “First arrest for possession of marijuana paraphernalia can lead to a maximum penalty of 30 days in jail and up to a $500 fine,” 25% of criminal justice majors, and 48% of non criminal justice majors felt that this punishment was about right (See Table 3). Sixty eight percent of criminal justice majors and only 46% of non criminal justice majors felt that this punishment was too harsh, resulting in over a twenty percent difference for this statement.

When participants were asked what they thought of this statement: “First arrest for possession of marijuana in Wisconsin carries a maximum punishment of up to 6 months jail and a fine of up to $1,000,” 80% of criminal justice majors, and 55% of non criminal justice majors felt this punishment was too harsh (See Table 3). Almost thirty percent more of the criminal justice majors thought that this punishment was too harsh. This is a considerable difference in their attitudes.

When participants where asked about the following statement: “First arrest for selling up to one pound of marijuana can lead to a maximum punishment of up to 5 years in prison and up to a $25,000 fine,” 55% of criminal justice majors and 41% percent of non criminal justice majors felt that this punishment was too harsh. This is approximately a thirteen percent difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors. Over half of the criminal justice majors, those that will be enforcing and regulating the laws, feel that the punishment given for the crime is too harsh.
### Table 3: Decriminalization
(N=107)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Criminal Justice Majors</th>
<th>Non Criminal Justice Majors</th>
<th>Meaningful Difference (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana should be decriminalized.</td>
<td>56% agree</td>
<td>43% agree</td>
<td>13% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19% neutral</td>
<td>16% neutral</td>
<td>16% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25% disagree</td>
<td>41% disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who are arrested for possession of small amounts of marijuana (three ounces or less) should only have to pay a small fine (one hundred dollars or less).</td>
<td>37% agree</td>
<td>33% agree</td>
<td>14% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28% neutral</td>
<td>18% neutral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35% disagree</td>
<td>49% disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Arrest for possession of marijuana paraphernalia can lead to a maximum penalty of 30 days in jail and up to a $500 fine.</td>
<td>67.4% too harsh</td>
<td>46% too harsh</td>
<td>21.4% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.6% about right</td>
<td>47.6% about right</td>
<td>22% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% too light</td>
<td>6.4% too light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First arrest for possession of marijuana in Wisconsin carries a maximum punishment of up to 6 months jail and a fine of up to $1,000.</td>
<td>78% too harsh</td>
<td>55% too harsh</td>
<td>23% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.5% about right</td>
<td>40% about right</td>
<td>19.5% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5% too light</td>
<td>5% too light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First arrest for selling up to one pound of marijuana can lead to a maximum penalty of 5 years in prison and up to a $25,000 fine.</td>
<td>54% too harsh</td>
<td>41% too harsh</td>
<td>13% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39% about right</td>
<td>50% about right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7% too light</td>
<td>9% too light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First arrest for growing more than 50 plants of marijuana can lead to a maximum penalty of up to 15 years in prison and a fine up to $100,000.</td>
<td>61% too harsh</td>
<td>39% too harsh</td>
<td>22% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34% about right</td>
<td>46% about right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5% too light</td>
<td>15% too light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upon conviction of any of these offenses, the offender’s driver’s license may be suspended for up to 5 years</td>
<td>68% too harsh</td>
<td>49% too harsh</td>
<td>19% difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27% about right</td>
<td>36% about right</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5% too light</td>
<td>15% too light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants were asked what they thought of this statement: “First arrest for growing more than 50 plants of marijuana can lead to a maximum penalty of up to 15 years in prison and a fine up to $100,000,” only 34% of criminal justice majors and 46% of non-criminal justice majors thought this punishment was about right. Nevertheless, 61% of criminal justice majors felt this punishment was too harsh, while only 39% of non-criminal justice majors felt the same. Here is another overwhelming difference in criminal justice majors’ attitudes toward decriminalization of marijuana: 30% of criminal justice majors that felt this punishment was too harsh.

The final question on the survey asked what participants thought of this statement: “Upon conviction of any of these offenses, the offender’s driver’s license may be suspended for up to 5 years,” seventy percent of criminal justice majors and fifty percent of non-criminal justice majors felt that this punishment was too harsh. Although over fifty percent of both majors felt that this punishment was too harsh, here is again a meaningful difference, as twenty percent more criminal justice majors thought that the punishment for the crime was too harsh.

**Discussion**

Only thirty-three percent of criminal justice majors believed that marijuana is physically addicting. Studies show that marijuana is not physically addicting (Smith, 1991, 51). Nevertheless, more than half of the non-criminal justice majors believed that marijuana is physically addicting. If there is an addiction, it is more of a psychological one (Smith, 1991, 51). Forty-one percent of criminal justice majors thought that marijuana was not physically addicting. This may be because criminal justice majors have more experience and knowledge in the subject area of marijuana due to their major or area of study. The *American Journal of Psychiatry* also looked at addictiveness of marijuana and suggested that marijuana was not as habit-forming as alcohol or tobacco (Mendelson, 1986, 79). Whether or not marijuana is addicting has been less controversial in recent years (Hyde, 1998, 67). Additionally, using marijuana is seen as a non-serious crime or discouraged, but it is generally not seen as a serious crime (Stylianou, 2002, 132). The survey results show that criminal justice majors know more facts than myths about the physical addiction of marijuana. One past study shows that there was a large majority of both criminal justice employees and other members of the general population that thought marijuana was physically addicting. Over sixty percent of criminal justice employees thought that marijuana was physically addicting, another 87% of the general population also thought that marijuana was physically addicting (Weisheit, 1992, 66). A survey done in Western Australia showed that those surveyed in the general population thought that marijuana was about as harsh as alcohol and tobacco (Lenton, 1996, 794).
Criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors alike were neutral on the idea that marijuana can make people less violent. There are very few participants from past studies who feel that marijuana makes people less violent. Less than a quarter of criminal justice employees, and even less of the general population felt that marijuana made people less violent (Weisheit, 1992, 76). A very small percent of those surveyed in this study thought that marijuana makes people less violent: 30% of criminal justice majors, and 14% of non criminal justice majors.

Although there is no conclusive evidence that shows that marijuana makes people less violent (Simons, 2000, 325), it is conclusive that marijuana does not lead to aggressive behavior (Mendelson, 1986, 79).

Over fifty percent of criminal justice majors agreed that those who use marijuana are more likely to move on to harder drugs, likewise 67% non criminal justice majors agreed as well. A past study shows that over ninety percent of criminal justice employees and other members of the general public thought that marijuana makes people more likely to try other drugs (Weisheit, 1992, 76). Such a large difference in the past study and present study is noticed, this may have to do with the age, and life experience of the participants. Nevertheless, there has always been a large controversy over the “stepping stone or gateway drug theory.” According to the Harvard Medical School report on addiction, almost anyone who uses an illegal drug smoked marijuana first, just as almost anyone who smokes marijuana has drank alcohol first (Hyde, 1998, 67). Although evidence is non conclusive on the “gateway drug theory,” it is important to see what participants thought of it.

In the current study, over sixty percent of criminal justice majors and over fifty percent of non criminal justice majors believed that marijuana was not immoral. The use of marijuana is not a question of morality (Slaughter, 1988, 444). Around thirty percent of both criminal justice and non criminal justice majors were neutral with this statement. One past study shows that over fifty percent of criminal justice employees and other members of the general public thought that marijuana use was morally wrong (Weisheit, 1992, 76). A slight difference is noticed in the attitudes in past studies and those of the present study. This may be because of the age range in these studies. Those participants in the present study are college students with an average age of 24-25. The past study was of older adult members of society, with an average age of 34 (Weisheit, 1992, 59).

Sixty eight of criminal justice majors thought that marijuana should be legalized for medical purposes, and 71% of non criminal justice majors agreed as well. A larger percent of criminal justice majors were neutral on this statement than non criminal justice majors. Criminal justice majors
commented, “Research on medical marijuana is ongoing and still susceptible to criticism.” Medical marijuana is not a new controversy in the United States. In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 215, the Compassionate use Act, which allows patients to cultivate and use marijuana for medical purposes with the written or oral recommendation of a doctor (Khatapoush, 2004, 22). Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont and Washington State have laws similar to those of California (Holland, 2005, 1).

Whether or not marijuana should be legalized for medical use can not be concluded from this survey. This survey addressed only the attitudes or beliefs about specific marijuana related questions. There is no controversy over the fact that there are medical uses of marijuana; the controversy is that it is presently an illegal drug. A recent Supreme Court decision in the case of *Ashcroft v. Raich*, dealing with medical marijuana would not settle the question if there are medical uses for marijuana; however they did decide to prosecute those patients that use medical marijuana legally under state laws, because federal laws are currently in place that make marijuana illegal (Zwilich, 2005, 1).

The percentages for both criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors decrease in support of the legalization of marijuana for personal use. Nevertheless, nearly half of the criminal justice majors are in support of it. Seeing this difference is surprising, as past research has shown that there is not a significant difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors/employees and others (Weisheit, 1992, 55). A 15% difference in this study was noticed in the attitudes of participants toward legalizing marijuana for personal use. If criminal justice majors do know more about marijuana than other majors, are their attitudes showing others that it may be all right to use marijuana?

Smaller percents of both criminal justice majors (20%) and non criminal justice majors (16%) were in support of legalizing only small amounts of marijuana. The comment section on the questionnaire revealed that most who disagreed, disagreed because “it referred to only small amounts;” some other comments included, “It should all be legalized,” or “Quantity should not matter.” A meaningful difference does not appear in the attitudes of both majors here; there is only a 4% difference. Past research shows that there is almost a twenty percent difference in the attitudes of criminal justice employees and those of the general public. Forty two percent of criminal justice employees were not for legalizing small amounts, while 60% of the general population was also not for legalizing it. A comment section was not included on the past study, so it is impossible to see what reasoning supported the participants’ decisions (Weisheit, 1992, 75). Even in studies done on the general public, less than
40% indicated that they would be in favor of legalizing small amounts of marijuana (Bowman, 2001, 63).

A larger difference however is noticed in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors when the question was asked “Should marijuana be completely legalized with no criminal penalty?” Almost 33% of criminal justice majors answered positively, while only 20% of non criminal justice majors did. The main reason for both criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors to stay neutral or disagree with this statement is because they believe “marijuana should be regulated similar to alcohol and tobacco, because it is about as harmful as those.” A larger percent of the population in Australia is in support of legalizing marijuana. Studies done in Australia, show that almost 40% of the general population would like to see marijuana made as legal as alcohol. Those from Australia who feel it should be as legal as alcohol thought this because “it is about as harmful as alcohol” (Lenton, 1996, 793).

When asked about decriminalization of marijuana, over fifty five percent of criminal justice majors agreed to decriminalize it, while only 42% of non criminal justice majors did the same. Here again there is a 13% difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors when compared to non criminal justice majors. Those who agreed with this statement also supported their answers with comments of “early alcohol prohibition, and agreeing with decriminalization only if legalization was not an option.” Similar comments were noticed from a survey done in Australia. Reasons for decriminalization included that it was no worse than alcohol or tobacco and also that it is not a harmful drug (Lenton, 1996, 794). Decriminalization has always been a topic of discussion with regard to marijuana. In a past study done on decriminalization, it shows that over 40% of the general population surveyed was in support of decriminalizing marijuana (Lenton, 1996, 791). This percentage is similar to those found in the present study.

Although a strong portion of both criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors support the decriminalization of marijuana, a smaller portion of both agreed with the following statement: “people who are arrested for possession of small amounts of marijuana should only have to pay a small fine.” Only 37% of criminal justice majors and 34% of non criminal justice majors agreed with this statement. In studies done on the general population, results show that nearly 40% of the population surveyed supports the decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana (Bowman, 2001, 64). Although percentages are similar, the results from the present study were surprising, as with the last question more than half of the criminal justice majors thought that it should be decriminalized. Comments for this question show that those who disagreed thought that there should not be a fine to pay or that it should be legalized and no fine.
It was important to have a comments section down so that participants could support their answers, so that their answers were not misconstrued.

In past studies done on decriminalization, those surveyed were more likely to be in favor of decriminalization when the current penalties associated with the crimes were described (Lenton, 1996, 791). For the present study, penalties were described for different violations. The first asked participants if they thought this punishment was too harsh, about right, or too light: “that first arrest for possession of marijuana paraphernalia was a maximum penalty of 30 days jail and up to a $500 fine.” Over 67% of criminal justice majors and 46% of non criminal justice majors thought this punishment was too harsh. A past study revealed that only a quarter of criminal justice employees and other members of the general population thought that this penalty was too harsh (Weisheit, 1992, 64).

The present study asked participants what they thought of the following statement: first arrest for possession of marijuana carries a maximum punishment of up to 6 months jail time and up to a $1,000 fine.” Seventy eight percent of criminal justice majors and over 54% of non criminal justice majors thought this punishment was too harsh. Nevertheless, in a past study, not even ten percent of the general population thought that this penalty was too harsh. The number was closer to twenty percent for criminal justice employees (Weisheit, 1992, 64).

A very small percent of participants in past studies have thought that the punishment for selling up to one pound of marijuana was too harsh (Weisheit, 1992, 64). While over fifty percent of criminal justice majors in the present study, and forty one percent of non criminal justice majors thought that this punishment: a maximum of 5 years in prison and up to a $25,000 fine, was too harsh for the crime committed.

A past study shows that not even 10% of the general population thought that this punishment was too harsh. “First arrest for growing more than 50 plants of marijuana can lead to a maximum penalty of up to 15 years in prison and a fine of up to $100,000.” Just fewer than 20% of criminal justice employees that were surveyed in the past study also thought that this punishment was too harsh (Weisheit, 1992, 64). Nevertheless attitudes in the present study showed a meaningful difference from those of past studies. Sixty one percent of criminal justice majors and 40% of non criminal justice majors in the present study felt that this punishment was too harsh.

**Conclusion**

The present study revealed that a difference exists in some context between criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors. It appears that there is a meaningful difference in the attitudes toward marijuana
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among criminal justice majors and non criminal justice majors. Although past research does not support a significant difference in attitudes, it does support the idea that criminal justice students/employees have more knowledge on this subject (Weisheit, 1992, 59).

This study was designed differently than a past study, mainly because it studied criminal justice and non criminal justice students, and not criminal justice employees and the general public. Criminal justice students acted as surrogates for this study in lieu of criminal justice employees. It was assumed that a majority of the presently surveyed criminal justice students would one day be employees of the criminal justice system.

The attitudes of criminal justice majors and those of criminal justice employees are different. It must be taken into account that the attitudes of these students may change once they are subjected to real life encounters with drugs and marijuana. Nevertheless, the criminal justice student’s average age is 24, which means that they do have some life experiences that may help support their decisions. It may be helpful to study the difference in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and those of the employees of the criminal justice system, because then it can be shown if there is a difference in their attitudes, or if they do act as good surrogates for each other.

It is important to take into account the number of surveys completed, 107. This is only a small portion of the population at UW-Superior. Additionally, this survey was not a random sample of students; it was more of an opportunity sample. Although a difference in attitudes is seen from this study, these results do have some limitations. The income, age, race, and culture of the population in the study and the geographical area of the study may also have had some effect on the results. Despite these limitations, the results of this survey are valid. The results are valid, because they accurately reflect the concept it is intended to measure (Babbie, 2005, 148). The concept that was intended to be measured in this study was criminal justice and non criminal justice majors’ attitudes toward marijuana. The results of this research did in fact demonstrate the attitudes of criminal justice and non criminal justice majors’ attitudes toward marijuana. All research was conducted in an ethical manner and results were interpreted with little bias. All information was measured with no misrepresentation of what was being measured (Babbie, 2005, 259). The survey’s purpose was to measure the attitudes of criminal justice and non criminal justice majors’, and that is what the survey did. In conclusion to the findings of this study and the review of past research, some evidence exists to support a finding of meaningful differences in the attitudes toward marijuana of those studying criminal justice and those of the general population. These differences in the attitudes of criminal justice majors and
non criminal justice majors will need to be studied more to see how these differences are created, if it is in fact that criminal justice majors have more knowledge on the subject of marijuana.

This study specifically focused on marijuana, but most past research has focused on a variety of illegal drugs, such as cocaine and methamphetamines (Weisheit, 1992, 65). It would be extremely influential for those interested in studying the conflict between attitudes toward marijuana among criminal justice employees and the general public, to do more in-depth research on past studies done on this subject. It would also be helpful to select a larger, more diverse population, whether studying students or employees.
REFERENCES


