Perceptions of the Harmful Effects of Marijuana Use: A Comparison Between Graduate and Undergraduate College Students

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The purpose of this study was to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use among graduate and undergraduate college students. Data were collected from 30 graduate and 30 undergraduate college students who currently attend Coppin State University. The mode of measurement consisted of a modified version of the Monitoring the Future Survey. Data from the study were coded numerically and analyzed using an independent t-test. Results indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference between graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use.

Keywords: Marijuana, substance abuse, illicit drugs, harmful effects of marijuana

INTRODUCTION

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the United States. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2005) reported that an estimated 97.5 million Americans ages 12 or older have tried marijuana one or more times. This represents over 40% of the U.S. population for that particular age group. Though there was a decline in marijuana usage in the 1980s, there has been an increase since the early 1990s among youth (Higher Education Center, 2006). Results from the 2006 Monitoring the Future Survey indicate that 42.3% of twelfth graders reported lifetime use of marijuana, compared to 44.8% in 2005. Fifty-seven percent of the twelfth graders recognized that smoking marijuana regularly was a “great risk” (National Institute on Drug Abuse and University of Michigan, 2006). According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse and University of Michigan, approximately 49.1% of college students and 57% of the young adults (ages 19 to 28) surveyed in 2005 reported lifetime use of marijuana.

These statistics are of great importance because marijuana may serve as a “gateway” to the use or abuse of other illicit and/or highly addictive drugs (Higher Education Center, 2006). These statistics are also critical because they appear to highlight that American society has created a culture of social acceptance and normalcy regarding the uses of marijuana. Because of the
prevalence of marijuana use in the United States, one may be led to believe that there are distorted perceptions related to the harmful effects of its usage. Perceptions of effects (harmful or otherwise) may be further conflicting and complicated as literature is reviewed on the medical uses of marijuana. It has been proposed that marijuana has the potential to treat a number of medical conditions including (but not limited to) nausea, glaucoma, pain, and multiple sclerosis. There are multiple factors that may influence one’s perceptions on the harmful effects of marijuana usage. Many of these factors, no matter how contradicting or controversial, have been said to shape views about marijuana as well as other drugs. This study brings light to some of these factors, thus highlighting what role if any they have on perception.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is intended to identify whether college students perceive that there are harmful effects associated with marijuana usage based upon their attitudes and beliefs. Thus, graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana usage will be explored. For the purpose of this research, harmful effects is a multifaceted term and will be used to explore perceived risks. Harmful effects is defined according to these dimensions and factors: (1) personal consequences or physical harm (physiological effects, additions); (2) social consequences (parental disapproval, peer disapproval); and (3) legal consequences (likelihood of committing crime, likelihood of arrest).

The research question that will be addressed in the context of this investigation is as follows: Is there a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use between graduate and undergraduate college students?

The following hypothesis stated in the null form is there will be no statistically significant difference in perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use among graduate and undergraduate college students.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There have been countless studies done on marijuana and its effects. One fact behind this may be its normalcy and popularity of use in the United States. Another factor could be the apparent controversies and contradictions that surround the dangers (or lack thereof) of marijuana use. The basis for understanding any phenomenon begins with education and/or knowledge. Therefore, this study will seek to establish whether education influences one’s perceptions and views on risks associated with marijuana use. Researchers also draw from societal views such as social acceptance and medical uses of marijuana to further assess perceptions of harm. Assisting individuals and correlating a parallel between education and perceived risks of harm could possibly motivate one’s desire for acquiring more knowledge and education, thus leading to a decrease in the number of individuals in the United States who regularly or sporadically use marijuana. This study may also contribute to the possibility of a greater emphasis being placed on prevention of substance use and abuse by way of education or higher learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As formerly stated, marijuana is an illicit drug that is prevalently used in the United States. According to a report released by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (2004), marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug, with an estimated 14.6 million active users. With such alarming figures, one must wonder what motivates the indulgence.
There are many conflicting views regarding the harmful effects of marijuana use.

Some health professionals claim that marijuana is helpful, as for centuries it has been used in many instances for medical treatment. The Mayo Foundation of Medical Education and Research (MFMER) reported practices of using marijuana for medicinal purposes that have existed for thousands of years and have even had continued existence in modern America (2006). The MFMER further reported that, at one time, “Marijuana was listed by the U.S. Pharmacopeia, the organization that sets quality standards for approved drugs in the United States.” To highlight some of the conflicts that exist with regard to marijuana use, the MFMER also adds that the U.S. government recognizes marijuana as one of the most dangerous drugs and is not in agreement with doctor’s and patient’s views on its legitimate uses.

From a social perspective, many people perceive that because marijuana comes from a plant (Cannabis sativa), it is natural and has no negative physiological and psychological effects. However, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (2007) reported that marijuana use is associated with a number of health conditions including frequent respiratory infections, impaired memory, irregular heart rates, panic attacks, anxiety, and learning impairments. These data coupled with social as well as legal consequences speak directly to the apparent harmful effects of marijuana use.

Due to the numerous views that society has adopted, perceptions are relative to individual life experiences. One key factor that can assist with establishing sound perception and judgment about the harmful effects of marijuana use is education. Thus, this study will attempt to compare similarities and differences regarding perceptions of harmful effects of marijuana use between undergraduate and graduate students.

For the purpose of conducting this study, the researcher has compiled a number of empirical articles to explore research findings on various marijuana-related issues.

Information listed in the articles will be used to support data compiled within this researcher’s framework. The following is a review of the literature contained in 14 empirical journal articles.

In the following study, Bowen-Reid and Rhodes (2003) explored marijuana use patterns among students attending historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU). The purpose of this study was to determine whether various coping sources such as spirituality and social support have an impact on one’s choice to engage in unhealthy practices such as marijuana use. Within the study, a sample population consisting of 1,013 African American, undergraduate students were randomly chosen from two HBCUs. Among the sample, 614 students were chosen from a college in a large community while 399 were chosen from a small college in a rural community. The instrument used in this study was a 95-item self-reporting survey called the “Assessment of Behavioral Patterns in College Students Survey” (ABPCSS), which was devised by one of the researchers. According to the researchers, the ABPCSS is a comprehensive survey that measures background demographic, current and past substance use, religious/spiritual orientation, social influences, social support, and other psychosocial factors (Brown-Reid et al., 2003) The design of the study was quantitative in nature, assisting the researcher with finding differences in how various supports including religiosity and social support impact psychosocial behaviors for those who never used marijuana, those who discontinued use over a period of at least 1 year, and those who use marijuana regularly.

Results of the study partially supported the hypothesis in that “The protective factors are positively associated the invulnerable (nonusers) and resilient (reformed users) groups.” However, the findings showed that “those who continue to use marijuana had lower spiritual scores compared to those who have stopped (resilient) as well as those who never used marijuana at all (invulnerable).” The data corroborate findings that individuals affiliated with a religious or spiritual orientation are more likely to have lower rates of drug use than those not affiliated with a religious or spiritual orientation (Bowen-Reid et al., 2003)

Simons and Carey (1998) conducted a study on college students’ attitudes toward alcohol and drug use. For the purpose of the study, the researchers examined how the affective and cognitive dimensions of attitudes impacted marijuana use. The sample was composed of 316 randomly
chosen introductory psychology students, both male and female, who were of varying race and age. In the methodology, attitudes were measured using the Semantics Differential Scale. The design of the study was quantitative in nature, using a correlation design to assess the effective and cognitive dimensions of attitudes on prevalence of alcohol and marijuana use. According to the researchers, the results of the study indicate that there is a forced relationship between attitude components and behavior. This suggests that attitude structure is an essential component to consider when comparing relationships between attitudes and drug use (Simons & Carey, 1998).

Similar to the study done by Bowen-Reid and Rhodes (2003), Stylianou (2004) conducted a study on religiosity and drug use. The purpose of the study was to determine whether religiosity caused attitudes of opposition toward drug use. Regarding the sample for this study, 276 undergraduate and graduate students of mixed gender, race, and age were randomly chosen from a large state university. According to the researchers, all students were chosen through systematic random sampling from a printed version of the student directory. The methodology used for this study was a questionnaire that was administered in the form of an electronic text message. Eighteen focal behaviors were presented within the questionnaire. Causal analysis was the research design used in this study in order to estimate direct and indirect effects of religiosity on control attitudes.

The results indicated that religiosity affects control attitudes indirectly through perceived immortality (Stylianou, 2004).

Bourassa and Vaugeois (2000) explored the impact of marijuana use on creativity (otherwise referred to as divergent thinking) as well as frequency of use and its impact on levels of creative thinking. One hundred male participants between the ages of 21 and 30 were randomly chosen based on their responses to a questionnaire on marijuana consumption. The participants were broken down into subgroups of 60 and identified (based upon questionnaire responses) as nonsmokers or smokers. The instrument used for this study was the Torrence Test of Creative Thinking. The researchers also used marijuana as well as a placebo of marijuana within the methodology. Participants were expected to use (ingest by way of smoking) the substances as a part of the experimental design. The study was qualitative in nature through use of a correlation design. The results of the study revealed that marijuana use had no positive effects on creative or divergent thinking in non-users, while a significant reduction in creativity was noted in users.

In a study on perceived risks of harm from marijuana use, Danseco, Kingery, and Coggshell (1999) sought to establish how risks of harm from marijuana use are perceived based upon age and gender. The researchers also attempted to establish how existing nationally representative surveys and status of use influence perception. The sample consisted of a population of school-age students who had taken various surveys to assess their responses to questions to further gather conclusions regarding perceived risk of harm. The instrument most notably used in surveys reviewed was the Monitoring the Future survey of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research. The design of the study was causal comparison, which was used to determine perceptions about risk of harm (which included parent disapproval, physical harm, fear of legal issues, and peer disapproval) based upon gender/age, history of use, and reports from survey results. At the conclusion of the study the research findings indicated the following:

- Females tend to have higher levels of perceived risk than males, while younger students have higher perceptions of risk than older students;
- Perceptions of risk based upon the four noted areas of risk tend to be much higher for nonusers than for users; and
- Words such as “harm,” “danger,” and “risk” were most often used (with risk being the most popular).

This fact, which highlights more emphasis being placed on physical harm, indicates how studies can possibly influence perception and attitude (Danseco et al., 1999).
In a study on how information is shared and its effects on decisions, Van Swol (2007) proposed to determine how various factors influence the significance that is placed on information discussed in groups. This study was likened to the fact that laws and policies are often passed as a result of group exploration. Therefore, based on this premise, an attempt was made to establish how various methods of sharing information in a group setting could influence decisions. For the purpose of the study, the researcher proposed that various factors affect the perceived importance of information. These include bias on shared information, shared or previously mentioned information, unshared information (information specific to the group member prior to the group that he or she elects not to share), reiteration (repetition of information that is used to form biases that favor popular opinion), and confirmation bias, which develops when group members gravitate toward shared information that supports their preconceived opinions. The population in this study consisted of a random sample of 129 college students majoring in communications. The sample group was divided into subgroups of 43 based on their views of being for or against the decriminalization of marijuana. Opinions on the subject varied within each subgroup. In the methodology, participants were given literature on the issue of the decriminalization of marijuana. The participants were expected to review the literature prior to the group discussion. They then rated their views on the subject from 1 to 9, ranging from total opposition to full support of decriminalization of marijuana. From the findings, groups were established with random samples of minority/majority consensus. The results of this comparison study indicated the following:

- Shared information mentioned by a group participant was rated as more important than shared information not mentioned;
- There was no noted difference in the importance of shared information discussed versus unshared information being discussed;
- Repetitive information was not noted as being more important;
- Participants showed bias for information that supported their opinions as well as the group’s overall opinion; and
- The presence of a minority opinion in the group decreased confirmation bias (Van Swol).

Apostolidis, Fieulaine, Simonin, and Rolland (2005) explored relationships between time perspective (TP) and risk perceptions associated with marijuana use. The purpose of the study was to verify the links between TP and substance use, to explore TP as it relates to marijuana risk perceptions, to explore perceptions related to consumption levels and perceived risks, and determine how TP impacts the link between marijuana consumption and perceived risks. A total of 198 male and female undergraduate students from two French universities were chosen on a voluntary basis to participate in this study. All participants were human science majors between the ages of 18 and 25.

The participants were administered the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory scale, which is a self-report questionnaire. The study was qualitative in nature through use of data analysis. The results of the study indicated that TP had a significant impact on psychoactive substance use and frequency of marijuana use. The findings also showed significant links between consumption and risk perception. Last, the findings indicated that TP is a protective factor between marijuana use and risk perception (Apostolidis et al., 2005)

Amonini and Donovan (2005) sought to examine the relationship between youth moral and legal perceptions of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use. A sample of 611 youth ages 14 to 17 years of age were used in this research. Participants were administered a questionnaire that was given to assess responses to various questions. Through an exploratory qualitative analysis, the researchers established that use of marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco was directly related to moral perceptions. Results from the study further demonstrated that participants who considered the use of substances “wrong” were least likely to indulge in substance use than those who considered use
to be “okay under some or any circumstances.” Also, substance use also related legitimacy perceptions. If participants were for laws regarding alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana use, then they were least likely to be users than those who were against the laws. Longitudinal studies would assess the protective effect of morality perceptions to further enhance the findings of this study (Amonini & Donvan, 2005)

In a related study, Derzon and Lipsey (1999) explored the relationship between marijuana use with delinquent and problem behaviors. The purpose of this study is to determine whether marijuana use influences criminal behaviors. Through a process called “snowball” sampling, 30 independent longitudinal studies were identified. Information contained in the studies met eligibility criteria and presented information on marijuana use and delinquent behavior. Meta-analysis was used in this research to summarize the evidence and findings in each longitudinal study. The findings in this study indicated the following:

- Marijuana use is positively correlated with delinquent and problem behavior (it is likely that this relationship exists as a result of co-morbidity);
- Co-morbidity indicates that “early” marijuana use is strongly correlated with delinquent and problem behaviors versus “later” use, which shows no significant relationship;
- Age is a factor, as evidence indicates that when age increases the correlation factor tends to decrease;
- The overall lack of information on the relationship between marijuana use and problem behavior is highlighted in the current research; and
- The idea that marijuana use in early adolescence causes later antisocial or delinquent behavior is not supported in the findings of this study.

In a study conducted by Page and Scanlan (1999), an attempt was made to determine the perception of the prevalence of using marijuana among college students. In the second component of their study, the researchers set out to explore the relationship between this perception and current marijuana use. The findings of this research were as follows:

- Estimations of the prevalence of those who use marijuana exceeded the actual percentage of those who reported current use;
- “Students estimated that 34.9% of male students and 27.7% of female students used marijuana in the past month” (Page & Scanlan, 1999, p. 8); the actual reported number for males was 29.6% while for females the number was 19.6%;
- Marijuana users gave significantly higher estimations of the number of those using marijuana;
- Students who normalized perceptions of smoking marijuana on campus were at greater risk of using marijuana;
- Those who used marijuana were at greater risk of progressing to other substances as well as deviant sexual activity; and
- Female users were more likely to have eating disorders or be suicidal.

This study highlights the need for college students to have accurate information on marijuana use (Page and Scanlan, 1999).

In a study conducted by Bachman, Lloyd, Johnston, and O’Malley (1998), attempts were made to examine whether increases in marijuana use among students is related to perceived risks and disapproval of use. Multivariate regression analyses were used on data from a large annual nationwide survey of high school students from 1976 to 1996. The study consisted of 61,000 seniors, 87,911 eighth-graders, and 82,475 tenth graders. Findings of the study are indicated as follows:
• There was a significant correlation between individual lifestyles (including grades, truancy, religious commitment, and recreational activities) and marijuana use. This particular finding, however, did not explain the historic changes in marijuana use.

Decreases in perceived risk of harmfulness and disapproval can account for recent increases in all three grades and for earlier decreases among seniors.

• Perceived risk and disapproval are both important determinants of marijuana use (Bachman et al., 1998).

Golub and Johnson (2001) conducted a study on progression from alcohol and tobacco use to marijuana use. The purpose of the study was to determine the likelihood of progression through each stage (from alcohol and tobacco to marijuana and from marijuana to hard drugs). Information obtained from the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (1979–1997) was also used to aid in this study. Special attention was given to the nature of substance use and progression, sampling procedures, and reliability of self-report data (Golub & Johnson, 2001). The participants interviewed in this study were at least 26 years of age. Logistic regression was used in this research to examine the variation in progression from (1) nonuse of alcohol and tobacco to (2) use of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana to (3) from marijuana use to hard drug use. Results of the study indicated that with participants born before World War II, progression to marijuana and hardcore drugs was uncommon. The concepts of progression or stages became significant with the baby boomers and those born around 1960. Overall, the study indicates that progression risks increased among young initiators of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana users. The recent increase in marijuana use is moderated by lower rates of progression to hardcore drugs (Golub & Johnson, 2001).

With regard to the controversy on the medicinal uses of marijuana, Page and Verhoef (2006) conducted a study on the use of marijuana as a form of treatment of persons with multiple sclerosis (MS). The purpose of the study was to determine whether marijuana is effective in treating MS. In the methodology of the study, a survey that examined the use of marijuana and complementary and alternative medicines was mailed to 780 patients from an MS clinic database. The participants identified themselves after receiving this mailed survey and invitation. After eligibility was determined, non-random purposive sampling was done to recruit the final sample of participants. The final sample consisted of six men and eight women who were diagnosed with MS. The design of this study was of a qualitative nature, and data were collected by way of semi-structured interviews. Each participant discussed his or her medical uses of marijuana in a one-to-one interview. Overall, the experiences of using marijuana and the amount of use varied among participants, as amount of use was impacted by individual symptoms. Employment status and social interaction were also factors that impacted quantity of use. Specifically, employment tended to decrease the opportunity for marijuana use, while social interactions increased the opportunity for marijuana use. Finally, the perceived benefits were similar to other research and literature. The benefits included “reduction of pain, spasms, tremors, nausea, numbness, sleep problems, bladder and bowel problems, and fatigue and improved ability to eat and/or drink, ability to write, and sexual functioning” (Page & Verhoef, 2006, p. 1). The negative effects of marijuana use included “problems with cognition, balance, and fatigue, as well as the feeling of being high” (Page & Verhoef, 2006, p. 1). Despite the adverse effects, participants indicated that the benefits of smoking marijuana outweighed negative effects. The results of this study further indicate that more research is needed on the effects of marijuana use on patients diagnosed with MS (Page & Verhoef, 2006).

Fried, Watkinson, James, and Gray (2002) conducted a study in an effort to determine the effects of marijuana on IQ in young adults. The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of marijuana on cognitive functioning. Regarding the research design, 70 individuals between the ages of 17 and 20 were used as the sample population. Participants’ status of marijuana use was established both by self-report and urinalysis screening. A longitudinal approach was used, as IQ test scores of participants were compared from when they were between the ages of 9 and 12
Differences in IQ scores were then compared among current heavy users (five or more joints a day), current light users (four or fewer joints per week), former users (abstinent for at least the last 3 months), and non-users (who never smoked more than once per week and had not smoked in at least the last 2 weeks).

The results of the study indicated that there was a significant correlation between marijuana use and decline in cognitive functioning over the ages studied. Data indicated that there was an average decrease in IQ among heavy users of 4.1 points, while gains were noted for light current users (5.8 points), former users (3.5 points), and non-users (2.6 points). In summary, the study showed a negative effect on global IQ scores for individuals who smoke five or more joints per day (Fried et al., 2002).

Based upon data presented in the literature review, it is evident that there are many factors that impact attitudes and beliefs about the harmful effects of marijuana use. Studies conducted established links between marijuana use and personal consequences to include physical and psychological effects. Data were also generated to support the influence of family and peer interaction on marijuana use. Last, articles presented in the literature review also generated data supporting the notion that there is a correlation between legal consequences and marijuana use. Another factor that is of equal significance are the various attitudes and perceptions concerning risks associated with marijuana use. Data generated in the articles indicated varying attitudes and perceptions that were based upon age, gender, educational status, and social interaction.

In support of this researcher’s topic, there appears to be a number of external factors that contribute to one’s attitude about perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use. Thus, this study will attempt to establish the influence (if any) that higher education has on attitudes and perceptions of harmful effects.

METHOD

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to identify whether college students perceive that there are harmful effects associated with marijuana usage based upon their attitudes and beliefs. This study will also attempt to identify what impact if any education has on attitudes and perceptions of risks associated with marijuana use. The research will address the following question regarding perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use to include the following:

Is there a statistically significant difference in perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use between graduate and undergraduate college students?

Participants

Upon receiving permission from the instructors, 60 participants of predominantly African American descent were chosen from a total of six classes (three undergraduate classes and three graduate classes) and broken into two groups of 30. A simple random sample of male and female students ranging from 18 to over 35 years of age were chosen from each class during class time upon giving consent by way of raising their hands.

Chosen participants were given consent forms to sign, which confirmed their participation.

Materials

Once participation was confirmed, participants were administered a modified version of the Monitoring the Future survey, which is a self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire is composed of 25 questions. Ten of the questions are administered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from
“never” to “always,” while the remaining questions are answered by checking true/false, yes/no, or agree/disagree. All questions posed will assist participants with rating the likelihood that negative consequences will result from marijuana use. Reliability is good, in that questions are designed to measures what is proposed (perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use). In an article from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Johnson and colleagues (2007) report that the MTF survey offers strongly supportive inferential evidence, which indicates that the questions used produce valid data. Given the research topic, “Perceptions of the Harmful Effects of Marijuana Use: A Comparison Between Graduate and Undergraduate Students,” the harmful effects of marijuana use is the independent variable while students’ perceptions is the dependent variable.

Procedures

The researcher contacted and obtained permission to use the instrument from the University of Michigan: Institute for Social Research: Survey Research Center. The researcher obtained permission from Dr. Rolande Murray, chairperson of the Department of Applied Psychology and Rehabilitation Counseling, to conduct the study at Coppin State University. Approval to conduct the study was granted by Coppin State University’s Institutional Review Board. Informed consent forms were distributed to participants to sign in order for them to participate in the study. The researcher then distributed the instruments to the participants to complete. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher reviewed the results with the participants.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, specifically through use of an independent t-test. The researcher implemented a .05 level of significance. The purpose of the independent t-test was to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions on the harmful effects of marijuana use.

RESULTS

An independent t-test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use. Table 1 depicts the differences in graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use. A .05 level of significance was used.

Mean scores on the modified version of the MTF can range from a low of 10 to a high of 28. The mean score of the graduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use was 12.93 (SD = 4.4095).

In comparison, the mean score for the undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use was 14.13 (SD = 4.4469).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions</td>
<td>-1.050</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>.298*</td>
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Note. The table illustrates that there was not a statistically significant difference between graduate and undergraduate students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use. *Not significant at .05 level.
The results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference between graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use, $t(60) = -1.050, p = .298$.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine if graduate and undergraduate students perceive the harmful effects of marijuana in the same manner or differently. The original sample consisted of a simple random sample of 60 college students who currently attend Coppin State University. Among the sample, 30 were graduate students and 30 were undergraduate students. Perceptions were measured using the MTF.

The data were collected and analyzed using the SPSS 15.0 database. The participants’ identities were concealed by way of coding and entering the data numerically. The analyses of the data were processed sequentially as follows. First, descriptive analyses of the data were implemented to include calculating the means and standard deviations of graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use. Second, an independent $t$-test was used to determine any statistically significant differences between graduate and undergraduate college students’ perceptions of the harmful effects of marijuana use.

Based on the study’s limitations (small sample size, self-report instrument, and lack of diversity of population), the researcher recommends the following: A larger sample size is needed to increase the power of the independent $t$-test used. Also, qualitative interviews should be conducted in order to strengthen the results of future studies. Furthermore, a more diverse population should be utilized in future studies (i.e., instead of limiting the study to just a historically Black college/university, randomly select students for colleges that are more mainstream), in order for the results to be more generalizable to the population. Last, significant differences in perceived risk of harm from smoking marijuana could more likely be measured with comparing participants who smoke marijuana to participants who do not.

Thus, in the study conducted by Danseco et al. (1999), there was no significant difference in perceived risk of harm from marijuana use unless participants were active users. Also pointed out in this study was the finding that gender impacted perception, as females tended to have a higher perception of risk factors associated with marijuana use than males. In yet another study conducted by Apostolidis et al. (2005), results also indicated that active marijuana use is a factor of perceived risks. For future reference, this researcher suggests that educational institutions place more emphasis on the harmful effects of marijuana as well as other drug use as a means of educating and alerting students on the realities of the known risks associated with drugs. Doing so may provide more concrete information on risk factors, thus increasing perception of risk and decreasing prevalence of use.

REFERENCES


