

The Illicit Marijuana Market: Implications of Regulation on Canadian Youth

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Abstract

This research paper aims to explore the contributing factors and the continuous support of the illegal production and sale of marijuana by non-government bodies in Canada. Specifically, this paper analyzes why, even after the federal-wide legalization of marijuana in late 2018, there remains support for non-government-authorized marijuana commerce, especially among young adults in Canada who are younger than or have recently turned the legal age. By conducting two interviews, a survey and additional literature, this paper finds that the legal age to purchase recreational marijuana in Quebec is an important factor that drives young adult Canadians to affiliate with illicit markets or other sources that contribute to the underground economy for marijuana. Although there is support from the young adult age group for illicit marijuana markets in Canada, the exact statistical evidence is unclear.

Introduction

October 17, 2018, marked a historic day for Canada and for marijuana users worldwide when Bill C-45, also known as the Cannabis Act, took effect in Canada (Government of Canada, 2021). This Senate-enacted publication has many crucial components regarding the use of marijuana in Canada but is most commonly known for its structure outlining the federal-wide legalization of both medical and recreational marijuana in Canada. However, with legalization came specific regulations: stringent laws and guidelines to ensure the safe usage and sale of these products. These additional regulations were concerned with possession limits, public health concerns, limiting the promotion of products to youth, and the reduction of criminal activity (Government of Canada, 2021). Despite this, cannabis continues to be sold in black markets by dealers, contributing to an underground economy of marijuana sales within Canada. Awareness of this topic is vital to society, especially among Canadian adolescents and young adults who sit right below or at the age of legality—which ranges from 18-21 years old. Studies have found that marijuana usage is prominent among these age groups, as “19% of adolescents aged 15 to 19” and “33% of young people aged 20 to 24” have used recreational marijuana in Canada after legalization (Dojchinovska, 2022). There is a significant portion of the

population that obtains and uses marijuana products while underage and engages with non-federal endorsed cannabis retailers that support black markets of marijuana production and sales. As a result, the population considered in this study is Canadian young adults who partake in recreational marijuana, legally and illegally. As this is quite a general and broad population, the sample used for this study is McGill students aged 17-21 who use marijuana recreationally. This sample will represent the population of young adults in Canada and their engagement with the illegal production and sale of marijuana within Canada. The age range, 17-21, was chosen because it is the most common age group of students that attend McGill University from their first to last year.

With this in mind, the following two hypotheses have been formulated to further explore this research topic. The first hypothesis contends that illegal marijuana sales would reduce significantly if not supported by Canadian young adults aged 17-21, as they are the age group most likely to seek marijuana from illicit sources. The second hypothesis states that the inconsistency of the minimum legal age across the country causes young adults to turn to underground marijuana suppliers, rather than supporting government-funded retailers.

Literature Review

The first piece of literature used to support this research paper is an article titled “Four Years After Legalization, Illegal Cannabis Market Still Thriving in Canada”. Even with marijuana’s legalization in 2018, demand has yet to surpass that of the illicit market. Considering the main objective of the Cannabis Act was to “protect young people from an entrenched and dangerous criminal black market”, this article argues that this has yet to be achieved, and discusses how the rigorous guidelines set by the government that one must comply with to be a legally functioning cannabis supplier or producer could be at fault (Passifiume, 2022). The article cites academic experts, such as Mike Devillaer from McMaster University, who specializes in drug policy, Psychiatry, and Behavioural Neurosciences. He says that “The illegal trade, for the most part, was not comprised of the ‘gun runners’ and ‘street gangs’ we were told it was”. Devillaer further argues that this notion was disproven once it was clear that “Most growers and sellers did not break any laws other than producing and selling cannabis,” and because of this, “...many cannabis consumers did not see a great moral, ethical or safety advantage to switching from their benign, long-term providers to the new legal system” (Passifiume, 2022). Furthermore, the author discusses the harmful effects of overtaxing and up-charging legalized products that lead consumers away from legal markets and towards illicit ones. The upcharges are extreme, such as a “premium ounce for \$100 on the streets, whereas in a retail store, it would cost over \$250 for comparable quality...If the Canadian government’s goal is to stifle the black market, they have failed by their own hand by overtaxing the product in legal stores” (Passifiume, 2022). From this article, it is clear that the illicit market for marijuana remains in Canada even after its legalization. However, its increase in price has a direct effect on consumers, especially those who do not earn a high income or are not financially independent, such as youth and young

adults. This ties into this research paper's overarching themes as young adults may be more likely to source marijuana from more affordable sources, especially if they are underage.

The second piece of literature used in this paper is the 2021 Cannabis Annual Report from Deloitte which explores both the economic and social impacts of the cannabis sector in Canada. The use of input-output methodology from October 2018-2020 "estimate[d] the economic contributions of the Canadian cannabis sector, including those of licensed cultivators, processors, and retailers of both recreational and medical cannabis" (Diamandiev et al., 2021). With this methodology, they analyzed the economic contributions of the Canadian cannabis sector from the time of marijuana's federal legalization to the assembly of the report. This report and its underlying theory confirm the economic benefits provided by the legalization of the cannabis sector, which is of vital importance to this research paper. The report depicts and analyzes economic data regarding the cannabis sector in Canada following legalization, such as revenue and contributions to federal GDP, especially since legal marijuana sales are taxed. It was found that "the industry has generated \$11 billion in sales nationwide and made \$29 billion in capital expenditures...[and] contributed \$43.5 billion to Canada's GDP...since legalization. Moreover, the industry has sustained 98,000 jobs annually across Canada and put \$15.1 billion into government coffers" (Diamandiev et al., 2021). Furthermore, cannabis sales in Canada have risen from \$1.6 million for the year 2018 to \$3.9 for the year 2021. Of the \$11 billion total marijuana sales, "two-thirds (67.8%) of which was for recreational cannabis", with the rest representing medical marijuana sales (Diamandiev et al, 2021). It is clear that revenues stemming from Canadian cannabis sales are gradually growing. The GDP contributions from this industry mostly include the rise of labour and capital needed for setting the industry up. Also, according to the report, "For every dollar of revenue and capital expenditure, the industry adds approximately \$1.09 to Canada's GDP" (Diamandiev et al, 2021). From this, one can assume that the Canadian cannabis sector has earned significant revenues. However, revenues made from illegal cannabis sales are not included, meaning the number could be significantly larger if all sales were done legally. This is a more quantitative source, but it holds the underlying theory that the legalization of marijuana has been aiding the Canadian economy. This brings attention to the implications that illegal sales and production may be having on Canadian revenues and GDP. The inclusion of the economic implications of the cannabis sector is a crucial component to consider when analyzing the effect of marijuana black markets in Canada on the economy, and how possible interaction between Canadian youth and the black market can be harmful.

The third piece of literature used in this research paper is an article from CTV News titled "Quebec Raises Legal Age for Cannabis to 21; Critics Say it Will Only Drive Illegal Sales". This article explains how, following federal legalization, Quebec has increased the legal marijuana usage age from 18 to 21. Previously, every province and territory had set the legal age to use or purchase cannabis products legally at age 19, except for Alberta and Quebec which both had a legal age of 18. However, as of January 1, 2020, the age in Quebec rose to 21 following the adoption of Bill 2, going from one of the provinces with the lowest legal ages to the country's highest. The justification behind this shift, according to Junior Health Minister Lionel Carman,

was that it was designed to “protect young, developing brains from the risks associated with cannabis use” (Jones, 2019). This article is of importance as it includes statements and testimonials from experts who explicitly disapprove of this motion due to its implications on young adult marijuana consumers, leading toward a dependency on the black market regardless of legal age, and an increase in illegal sales following federal legalization. Quebec Cannabis Industry Association spokesperson Michael Temperio stated, regarding this shift in legal age, that it completely contrasts the Cannabis Act’s purpose of providing regulated and safe marijuana to Canadians and eliminating the marijuana black market in Canada (Jones, 2019). Furthermore, considering the age for consuming alcohol is 18 in Quebec, Limoges points out the obvious stigma surrounding marijuana as opposed to alcohol within the province (Jones, 2019). The author includes Limoges as an advocate for the Cannabis industry in Canada, but also to show that this shift to a higher age will achieve the opposite result that the Cannabis Act was supposed to have. In addition to this, Marianne Dessureault, a spokesperson for Quebec's Association of public health, has further criticized the Bill, saying that it has a “populist appeal” that “doesn't have [a] place in public health policy”, and lacks scientific data on the impact of marijuana on this age group (Jones, 2019). By an age shift of a few years, this Bill opened the opportunity for further activity in the Quebec underground economy relating to marijuana.

The fourth piece of literature used was the academic article titled “Prevalence and Use of Cannabis Products and Routes of Administration Among Youth and Young Adults in Canada and the United States: A Systematic Review”. The objective of this detailed report was to “systematically and critically review the literature on the prevalence and use of routes of administration, cannabis products and devices used among youth and young adults in Canada and the US” while examining 26 studies conducted post-legalization in Canada (Wadsworth et al., 2022). The study emphasizes the different forms of cannabis that can be obtained and the different methods with which it can be used, such as “smoked, vaped, dabbed, sublingually, and ingested orally”(Wadsworth et al, 2022). All of these approaches are included in the review. This literature and its theories are of importance to this research paper and its correlating hypotheses as it directly involves the population and sample, and the connection they have with the illicit marijuana market within Canada. Since recreational marijuana usage is highest for the age group of 16 to 24, which this sample is a part of, it is likely that not all the marijuana is being obtained legally, meaning a heavier reliance on black markets and illegal activity.

Methods

The method used to conduct research on the sample – students attending McGill University from the ages of 17 to 21 – was administered through the use of two interviews and a survey. Both interviews included two separate sit-downs with anonymous McGill students who shared their experience with obtaining marijuana in Canada, more specifically Quebec, and their motivations behind choosing either government-endorsed retailers or illegal drug dealers. From these methods, the findings obtained will either support or refute the proposed hypothesis

concerning the significant support for illicit marijuana markets by young adults, and the second hypothesis regarding the discrepancy of minimum legal age federal-wide being a contributing factor. The first interview was with a 21-year-old fourth-year finance student, who purchases recreational marijuana from the SQDC. The second interview was with a 19-year old student in their second year studying international development, who sources marijuana from illicit markets. Both were asked various questions about their usage and buying habits, both in Quebec and outside the province.

However, two randomized students are not a fair representation of the entire young adult population in Canada. Therefore, an additional survey was administered and sent to McGill students. Sent at random, students were encouraged to pass around the survey to their friends to obtain a larger and more representative sample and reduce biases in survey answers. Note that anonymity in the survey was guaranteed so the students' answers could be transparent and honest.

The survey's first question asked which province or territory the student is from or considers to be 'home'. There is also an option for participants that are from outside of Canada and are in the country solely for their studies. The second question asks whether the recipient has ever used marijuana recreationally. This is important as it helps to determine the percentage of students in this sample who have ever used this substance. The third question asks whether the recipient is of legal age to purchase recreational marijuana according to Quebec laws. For clarification, this age is 21. Considering students usually enter university at age 17 or 18 and graduate at age 21 onwards, there should be variety in this answer if administered correctly. The fourth question asked is "If not from Quebec, are you of legal age to purchase marijuana from your home province/territory?". This connects back to the literature review where it was analyzed whether the increase of the minimum legal age for purchasing marijuana legally in Quebec could be problematic. This is also important to compare whether the majority of marijuana users who took this survey are legal outside Quebec, where the age is lower (except for the United States). The fifth question asks whether the participant had used recreational marijuana prior to 2018. This examines whether this sample has been introduced to marijuana usage before its legalization in Canada in 2018. The sixth question asks "If you are NOT legal in Quebec to purchase marijuana, where do you frequently obtain it from within Quebec?". A list of options is provided, but the two most important answers for this study out of the selection are 'from the SQDC' or 'from a dealer'. The final question asks "Where is your *preferred* source of obtaining marijuana?", as it may be easier to obtain recreational marijuana from drug dealers, especially if underage, rather than the SQDC. This survey was randomly administered by sending the survey link to a McGill student association with the impression that it was non-mandatory and anonymous, and with the encouragement to pass along the survey to their fellow peers at McGill, regardless of their marijuana preferences. Between a variety of pre-established data and literature from outside sources, the two interviews and this survey including these 7 specific questions, there is plenty of evidence to aid in the process of validating or invalidating the hypotheses.

Findings

Qualitative Data

In terms of the qualitative data found, excerpts were used from Interviews 1 and 2.

Excerpts from Interview 1:

- I. When asked whether they source their marijuana from the SQDC or a dealer
 - i. “It just depends on the occasion...sometimes you’ve had a long day of studying or classes and you just want an evening joint. Usually, my [preferred source] is the SQDC but they close pretty early, regardless of weekends or weekdays. It’s not hard to find weed in [the McGill ghetto], so sometimes [texting a dealer] is just the easier option and I can understand why people would do that. However, being legal is something I do try and take advantage of...”
- II. When asked if underage peers come to them to purchase SQDC marijuana on their behalf
 - i. “Yeah, I’ve been asked. I don’t mind doing it because I’m sure they’d do the same for me. And it’s more trustworthy since it’s coming straight from the government and I think people find comfort in that.”
- III. When asked their opinion on the difference in legal age within Quebec versus the rest of Canada
 - i. “I’m not originally from here so it was a shift coming to Quebec and you can go to a bar and order a pint but can’t get caught with a joint. And I know a lot of people were frustrated with that increase and had to go back to asking their dealers or their legal friends. I don’t think it’s keeping weed out of young adults’ hands, it’s just helping them be smarter and find other ways to get it. Just something to think about I guess?”
- IV. When asked what government policies could target these black markets
 - i. “I think it’s a matter of consistency. It’s very much like [the United States of America] where it varies from state to state. [Young adults are] a volatile age group and if they are told ‘no’, they don’t give up, they just find a different way...in a way, it’s almost funny how the government does this to get rid of black markets and instead these markets are being fueled by the people they don’t want weed to be accessible for.”

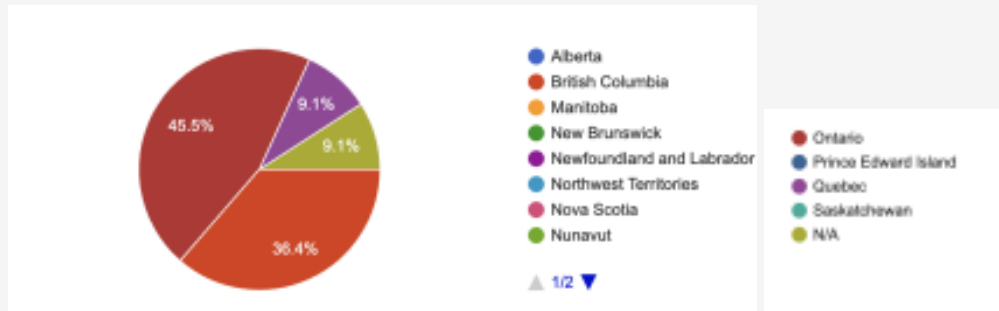
Excerpts from Interview 2:

- I. In response to being asked why they turn to the illicit market for marijuana
 - i. “It’s not like I enjoy doing it the illegal way... it’s stressful and it’s not easy finding a reputable dealer where their [marijuana] is safe and not laced. But it’s college, so luckily everyone knows someone, especially when all of us are like underage and used to buying our own weed. Obviously, it’s risky, but I don’t really think I’d get caught if I’m doing it at home...”
 - ii. “...going to the SQDC would be ideal, but I’m not even legal here. But I am at home so I’ll go to the dispensary by my house, but Quebec just has such a different layout it’s honestly annoying...I think my dealer here is definitely cheaper than government [marijuana]...That’s what my friends told me”
- II. When asked if they think there is a difference in cost between legal and illegal marijuana
 - i. “Being a student can be expensive, and I’ll save where I can... I have friends that are legal that could just get me stuff and I pay them back but it’s almost double what I pay. It’s just a hassle honestly.”
- III. In response to being asked if the legal age in Quebec is too high compared to other substances
 - i. “I think everyone talks about Quebec and how low the legal age is for drinking but marijuana is like, 3 years more of waiting. I don’t really get the reasoning behind it [because] if you’re gonna let us buy alcohol and drink it and that’s fine, I don’t see why weed is a lot older. They’re not dumb, they know that [stuff] comes hand in hand, especially at this age and this kinda social scene... and if we can’t get it from the government it’s not like there aren’t other ways. It’s just weird...”
- IV. When asked how the government could improve their policies to regulate illicit marijuana markets within Canada
 - i. “Know your target audience.”

Quantitative Data

From the survey administered, the following results were found from the 22 respondents

Figure 1: Provinces/Territories In Canada Respondents Are From



This pie chart corresponds to the first question of the survey. Only 9.1% of respondents are originally from Quebec, with the highest percentage of respondents being from Ontario at 45.5%. Another 9.1% accounted for students from outside Canada, which also acknowledges the large international student population at McGill, and in Canada in general.

Figure 2: Percentage of Students Who Have Partaken in the Activity of Using Recreational Marijuana



100% of respondents answered yes to this question. Recreational drugs are often experimented with in university, which may explain the overwhelming 'yes' answers.

Figure 3: Percentage of Participants of Legal Minimum Age to Purchase and/or Use Recreational Marijuana according to Quebec Laws

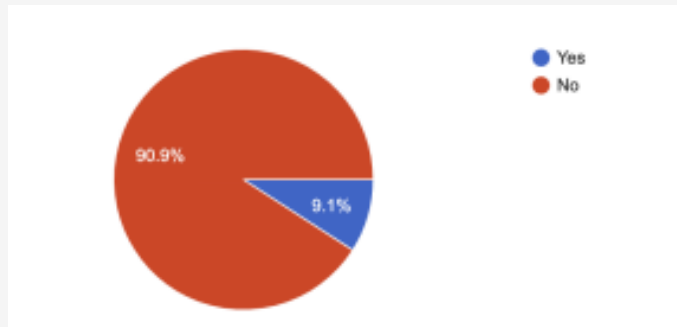
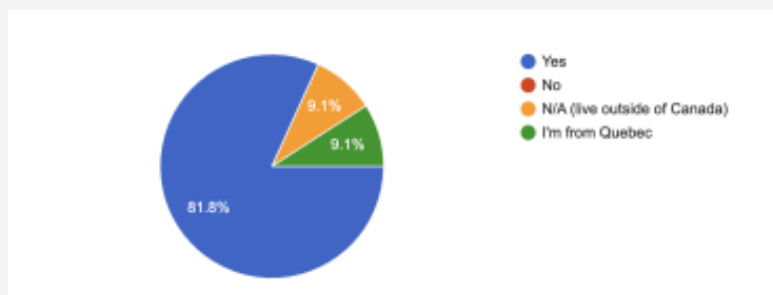
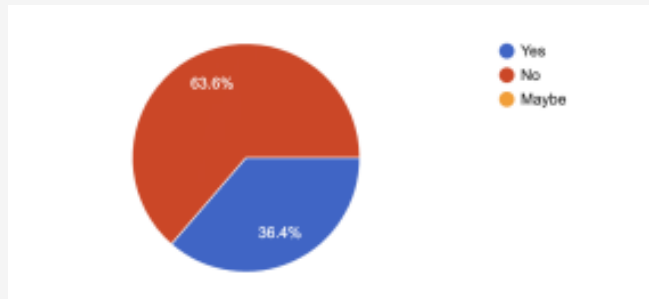


Figure 4: Whether Participants are of Legal Age to Purchase Recreational Marijuana Legally in their Home Province/Territory



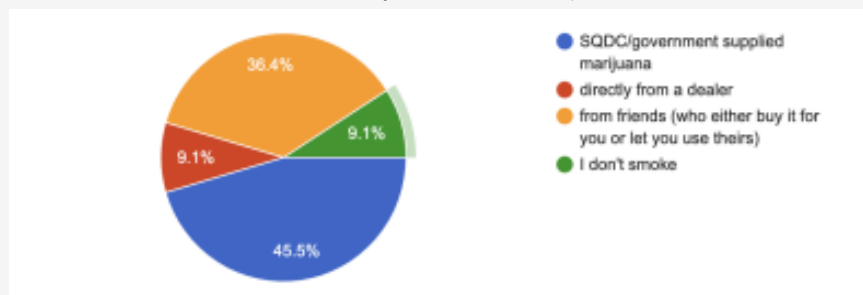
Surprisingly, 90.9% of participants who took the survey are under 21 and are therefore not legally allowed to purchase marijuana within Quebec (Figure 3). However, in terms of whether they were of legal age anywhere else in Canada, specifically their home provinces/territories, 81.8% said yes (Figure 4).

Figure 5: Usage of Recreational Marijuana in Canada Prior to 2018



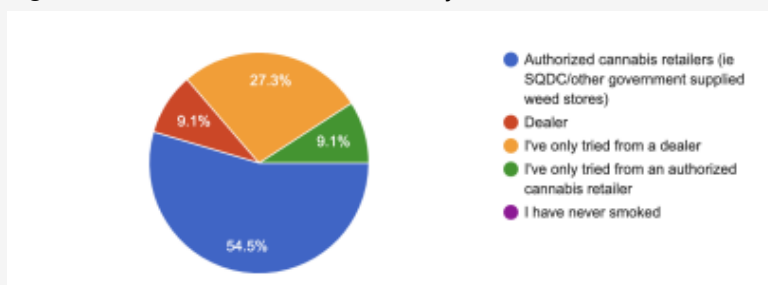
This figure is important for two reasons. The first is that this recreational usage occurred prior to legalization in 2018, and therefore was done illegally. Secondly, considering nearly 82% of participants of the survey are under the age of 21, not only did 36.4% source their marijuana illegally, but they were also underage when legalization occurred four years ago.

Figure 6: Where Participants Usually Source Their Marijuana From in Quebec



45.5% of participants get their marijuana from the SQDC. The next majority get it from their friends, although it's not clear where their friends source the marijuana from. Only 9.1% source their marijuana directly from a dealer.

Figure 7: Preferred Source of Marijuana



54.5% of participants prefer SQDC marijuana. However, over a quarter have only tried marijuana from a dealer.

Discussion

Based on the evidence from the literature review, the qualitative data from the two separate interviews conducted, and the quantitative data from the survey administered, such findings allow for discussion on whether the hypotheses presented earlier are valid. Ever since its legalization, cannabis is slowly and steadily becoming a significant economic sector in Canada, as discussed in the literature review of the Deloitte report. From GDP contributions of \$43.5 billion CAD from 2018 to 2020 to sustaining almost 100,000 jobs, legalization has had extensive economic benefits, and such benefits are projected to increase over the years (Diamandiev et al., 2021). Yet, this only counts the measured benefits of legal marijuana operations. Based on the evidence shown that clearly states there continues to be an illicit marijuana market in Canada, not only could these numbers be higher, but this illicit market is preventing further potential economic growth. However, recreational marijuana legalization has failed to complete crucial goals set by the federal government, such as eradicating the black market and keeping marijuana out of the hands of youth (Government of Canada, 2021). Evidently, these two problems seem to work hand in hand, as illegal consumers are often found turning to illegal sources to obtain recreational marijuana. From the survey administered, 36.4% of participants admitted to using recreational marijuana prior to 2018 (Figure 5). Not only was the use of recreational marijuana illegal before 2018, but the lack of legal dispensaries or shops where this marijuana could've been purchased during this period draws us to the conclusion that 36.4% engaged in marijuana usage from an illicit market or source. The illicit marijuana market, which was prevalent before legalization, seems to still have a substantial presence in 2022. In the first source of the literature review, it was mentioned that “43 percent of cannabis users [are still] opting to source their weed from illicit and grey market sellers”.

However, it does not specify which age group turns to illicit market sellers the most (Passifiume, 2022). Furthermore, the article titled “Prevalence and Use of Cannabis Products and Routes of Administration Among Youth and Young Adults in Canada and the United States: A Systematic Review” from the literature review provided further insight into the target age groups for this research paper. From this review, it was found that during the years “2019 and 2020, Canadians between 16 and 24 years old reported double the past 12-month cannabis use compared with Canadians over 25 years old” (Wadsworth et al, 2022). Considering the legal minimum age in Canada ranges from 18 to 21, a large population of Canadian youth were obtaining marijuana illegally, as well as more frequently than their of-age and legal counterparts. In addition to this, the review found that “Smoking cannabis had the highest prevalence of use among youth and young adults across all routes of administration and products” (Wadsworth et al., 2022). From these two statistics, it is clear that youth and young adults support the marijuana underground economy, especially in terms of smoking the substance, as the marijuana usage for age group 16 to 24 was twice as much as those who were of age and able to obtain marijuana the legal way. Furthermore, the survey conducted earlier with McGill students in 2022 shows that 36.4% of participants either prefer marijuana from a dealer or have only ever tried marijuana from a dealer (Figure 7).

In addition to this, 9.1% continue to source marijuana from a dealer, and 27.3% obtain marijuana from their friends (Figure 6). Whether these friends are of age and obtaining it straight from the SQDC, or are the individuals brave enough to bear the consequences if found buying directly from a dealer or illicit market source, is not clear. However, unless you have a federal license to sell recreational marijuana, giving marijuana to each other, especially if underage, is legally prohibited and contributes to illegal activity surrounding marijuana in Canada. From this, it is clear that there remains to be a marijuana black market in Canada, fueling yet another underground economy in 2022. While the findings and literature examined whether there continued to be an illicit market for marijuana post-legalization and the involvement in youth, much of the literature and findings coincided with the discussion of the minimum legal age and its effect on illicit markets and illegal marijuana consumption. Alexandra Mae Jones's article regarding the shift of the minimum legal age in Quebec raised important questions regarding whether this increase contributed to the outsourcing of marijuana from the illicit market by young adult consumers.

Despite professionals advising against the change after the provincial government of Quebec originally established the legal age to be 18 back in 2018, both the interviewees and respondents of the survey seemed to have answers that aligned with the second hypothesis. As said by interviewee #1, "I don't think [the age increase is] keeping weed out of young adult's hands, it's just helping them be smarter and find other ways to get it". Interviewee #2 expressed disdain for the difference between the legal drinking age in Quebec – which is 18, and one of the lowest in the country among the other provinces and territories – and the legal minimum age to obtain and use recreational marijuana. Considering the sample is a specific range of McGill university students who live in Montreal, it's no question whether they have been exposed to the social scene in the city. Recreational marijuana is often used, and readily available for purchase – unless the user is below the age of 21.

From the survey results, 90.9% of the participants are underage to purchase recreational marijuana legally in Quebec (Figure 3). However, this 90.9% is able to purchase marijuana legally everywhere else in the country. This demonstrates how unbalanced this line of decision-making was. It was clear that the decision made by Quebec in terms of the acceptable age to legally obtain recreational marijuana could not be the standard for the country, and could possibly lead to contradictory behaviour. This discrepancy is confusing, as in some parts of the country young adults are of age, and in others, they are not. However, they are allowed to consume and obtain alcohol products in Quebec, at an earlier age than in every other province or territory – except for Alberta, which also has a minimum legal age of 18. With a population of young adults that are able to purchase marijuana legally in their 'home' provinces and territories, being underage leads to an increased dependency on friends, dealers, or illicit market sources. Furthermore, 45.5% of participants get their marijuana from the SQDC, which is surprising considering almost 92% of the survey's participants are underage (Figure 6). This could involve the use of fake IDs, which shows support for another illicit market, and underage Canadians interacting with illicit activities. 36.4% of participants claimed they usually obtain marijuana from their friends (Figure

6). There are multiple scenarios this statement could explain, whether it be passing around a joint at the park, or taking bong hits in a more intimate social setting; the source of this marijuana remains unclear. It is highly plausible that some of these individuals are of age and are sharing it with their underage friends, or that these friends obtain marijuana from a dealer. This theme is found with interviewee #1, as they admitted to being asked to buy recreational marijuana for their underage friends, justifying the notion by claiming "...I don't mind doing it because I'm sure they'd do the same for me. And it's more trustworthy since it's coming straight from the government and I think people find comfort in that?". There seems to be a general consensus among young adults that government-endorsed marijuana is safe, which interviewee #2 mentioned as well in their doubts over reliable dealers. It seems that young adults prefer marijuana that is guaranteed to be clean and authentic, rather than trust a dealer and take the risk that "their [marijuana] is safe and not laced". Although of the illicit methods, having of-age friends source marijuana from the SQDC on an underage individual's behalf is the smartest way to obtain recreational marijuana, this action is illegal. Selling or sharing marijuana with a minor, or being found in possession of recreational marijuana as a minor, are both criminal offences and can be criminally prosecuted.

The hypotheses presented earlier vary in validity. The first hypothesis, which states that illegal marijuana sales would reduce significantly if not supported by Canadian young adults aged 17-21, is not supported enough by the research to be considered valid. While from the literature review, there is an obvious demand for marijuana for the age group of 16-24, there is not enough data presented from the literature reviews, interviews, and surveys to confirm whether the illicit market would significantly diminish without the support of the 17-21 Canadian population. While it can be agreed that a portion of this age group is in fact obtaining marijuana in differing illegal ways, there is no clear statistical estimate, nor is there enough qualitative data, to confirm how many underage Canadians support the marijuana black market and whether their support for it is substantial enough to assist its production. The second hypothesis, which contends that the inconsistency of the minimum legal age across the country causes young adults to turn to underground marijuana suppliers, is supported by the three research methods done in this paper and therefore is valid. The discrepancy in minimum legal age within Canada poses an issue for young adults in Canada, as their legality changing from province to territory may cause them to seek out different ways to obtain marijuana, as it is something that is readily accustomed to in their home province/territory. Whether it be asking a legal friend, purchasing a fake ID, or sourcing directly from a dealer, there are numerous ways underage young adults can obtain marijuana in Quebec. While not all of them are technically illicit markets, these notions support an underground economy for marijuana that the government does not regulate or benefit from.

Conclusion

In conclusion, only one of the two hypotheses introduced for this research paper was supported and validated by the theoretical, qualitative, and quantitative evidence from the literature,

interviews, and data from the surveys. The majority of respondents were not of the minimum legal age required in Quebec to obtain recreational marijuana, yet were of legal age everywhere else in Canada. From survey findings that gave further insight into where this marijuana was illegally obtained, it is clear that this high age discrepancy causes young adults in Canada between 17-21 to look for other sources. Whether this source is from friends or a specific dealer, Canadian youth clearly associate with underground sources in order to obtain marijuana in Quebec. Therefore, the second hypothesis, the inconsistency of the minimum legal age across the country causes young adults to turn to underground marijuana suppliers, is supported by this paper's findings. However, the first hypothesis, that illegal marijuana sales would reduce significantly if not supported by Canadian young adults aged 17-21, does not have enough supporting data to be considered valid. It is difficult to approximate this estimate when working with such a specific sample in Quebec - McGill students aged 17-21. This may be one issue with this study. Another challenge faced when conducting this report was to reduce biases when sending out the survey and choosing interviewees. To avoid only sending the survey to friends, the link was also posted on Facebook with clear guidelines of age and attending McGill explicitly stated. However, many individuals who first received the link were wary to answer as they did not want to get into trouble for admitting to illegal behaviour, despite the contents of the study being anonymous. Even with its legalization, discussion of one's marijuana habits and preferences continues to be a sensitive topic in Canada, especially in an academic environment among peers. Additionally, taking into account the number of international students at McGill proved to be a challenge. According to the data, only 9.1% of respondents were from outside Canada (Figure 9), which is not proportional to the McGill population. However, regardless of nationality or citizenship, their opinions would have only aided the study rather than confound it.

Another potential study that could be developed based on the findings of this research paper could be focused on what the legal minimum age should be in Quebec and across the country. Furthermore, whether having a standardized age on the federal level could help reduce the amount of contact Canadian young adults do business with the illicit market. Furthermore, in terms of this specific study, it would be interesting to see the preferences and opinions of these participants once they have all reached the legal age, and whether they will turn towards obtaining legal marijuana from an SQDC instead of an illegal source, or continue to support the black market.

Conducting this study and the accumulation of this research paper provided a better understanding of Canada's marijuana laws and the intricacy of legalization. Further, the connection between Canadian young adults and recreational marijuana, especially among university students, was emphasized. It is clear that integrating a-once illegal substance into society is not a quick measure, and it may be decades before it can be said with confidence that this decision has in turn effectively reduced the existence of the marijuana illicit market in Canada.

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