

Cannabis: what does the data tell us?

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Cannabis in Europe

Cannabis is the illicit drug most likely to be used by all age groups. The drug is generally smoked and, in Europe, is commonly mixed with tobacco. Patterns of cannabis use can range from the occasional to the regular and dependent.

The increasing variety of cannabis products available on the market makes it more complex not only to analyse patterns of use but also to assess the long-term consequences of cannabis use. This is further complicated by variations in the relative concentrations of THC (the active ingredient) and CBD (an anti-psychotic) in the various products users have been exposed to over time. Moreover, the analysis of cannabis potency data may not be representative of the current markets as it is based on a subset of seizures. Overall, market dynamics, such as the shift in the demand for cannabis in Europe from resin to (domestic) herbal cannabis, suggest that over a period of time users have been exposed to different products with significant variation in content, specifically in terms of potency and contamination.

Innovations in cannabis production in recent years are cause for concern, with growers cultivating plants high in THC but low in CBD. While the potency of both forms of cannabis has risen since 2006, relatively sharp rises in the potency of resin have been seen between 2011 and 2012.

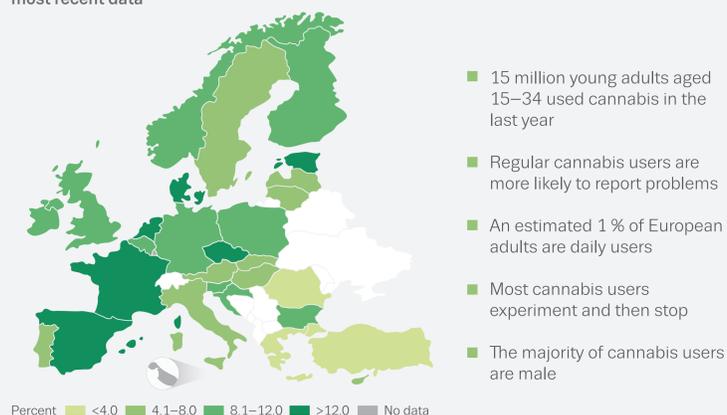
Adverse effects caused by cannabis consumption are often associated with specific groups of users and patterns of use. The amounts used and the frequency of use have been commonly associated with health risks, and dependency is increasingly identified as a possible consequence of regular and intensive cannabis use.



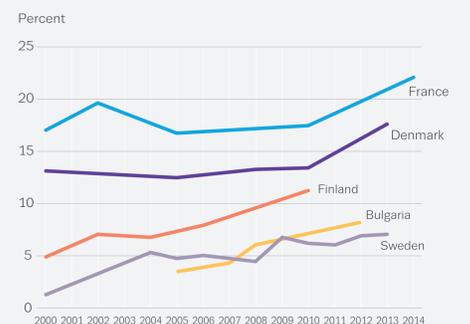
Cannabis-related indicators

Prevalence of use

Last year prevalence of cannabis use among young adults (15–34): most recent data

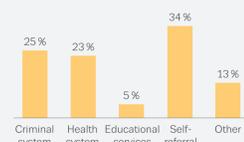


Last year prevalence of cannabis use among young adults (15–34): countries with statistically significant positive trends

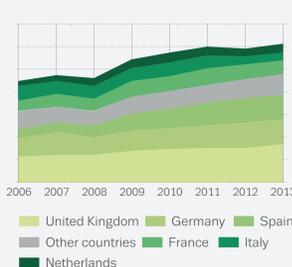


Treatment

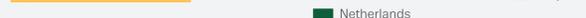
Source of referral



Trends in first-time entrants



The most frequently reported drug by new treatment entrants



Source: EMCDDA Statistical Bulletin 2015.

Price and potency

Resin

Price (EUR/g)



Potency (% THC)



Indexed trends: price and potency



Herb

Price (EUR/g)



Potency (% THC)



Indexed trends: price and potency



What are the adverse health effects of cannabis?

Increased risk of road traffic crashes

- Cohort and case control studies show a 2-fold increase in risk
- Laboratory simulations produce impairments in driving performance
- Toxicology from crash victims uncertain due to potential confounding

Dependence syndrome

- The existence of dependence syndrome was disputed in the 1990s
- Recent cohort studies suggest 1 in 10 regular cannabis users can develop dependence syndrome
- Clients seeking cannabis treatment report withdrawal syndrome

Probable adverse effects of regular use

Sustained daily cannabis use from adolescence to adulthood may lead to

- Poorer educational achievements leading to poorer occupational outcomes and welfare dependence
- An increased likelihood of using other illicit drugs
- Poorer mental health, with some evidence regarding psychoses and weaker evidence for depression and anxiety

Reference

Hall, W. (2015). 'What has research over the past two decades revealed about the adverse health effects of recreational cannabis use?', *Addiction* 110(1), pp. 19-35.

Notes

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