Cannabis use among people entering drug treatment. A growing phenomenon?

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Cannabis use in Europe is an issue of growing importance for public health and drug policy

**Why?**

- Increased prevalence
- Increased potency
- Changing consumption patterns
- Increased concerns about public health impact of cannabis use
- New developments in cannabis policy
- Synthetic cannabinoids
- Medical cannabis

Increases in cannabis treatment demands since beginning of 2000 in most European countries
16% young adults (15–34 years old) used cannabis in the last year (19.1 million). 1% daily users.
Cannabis use in Europe (THC concentration %)

Increasing potency and price of cannabis in Europe, 2006–16

Tom P. Freeman¹,², Teodora Groshkova³, Andrew Cunningham¹, Roumen Sedefov³, Paul Griffiths³ & Michael T. Lynskey²

Freeman, et. al., Addiction, 2018
First-time treatment entrants, 2017

- Cannabis is the drug most often reported as the main reason for entering treatment
- 46% of new entries
- 155,000 all entries
- 83,000 new entries
Profile of cannabis clients entering drug treatment in Europe

**CANNABIS USERS ENTERING TREATMENT**

- **Characteristics**
  - 17% Female
  - 83% Male
  - Mean age at first use: 17
  - Mean age at first treatment entry: 25

- **Frequency of use in the last month**
  - Mean use: 5.3 days per week
  - Daily: 50%
  - 2 to 6 days per week: 22%
  - Once a week or less: 9%
  - Not used in last 30 days: 19%

- **First-time entrants**: 83,000 (58%)
- **Previously treated entrants**: 59,000 (42%)

*European Drug Report, EMCDDA, 2019*
Overall increase from 28% to 48% of all first-time treatment demands
From 40,000 to 70,000 demands with cannabis as main substance
First-time treatment entrants by primary drug (2006-2017 countries with available data)

- Cannabis (54%)
- Cocaine (23%)
- Heroin (17%)
- Amphetamines (7%)

Statistical Bulletin, EMCDDA, 2019
Joinpoint regression is a statistical method used to identify points where the trend line changes significantly in magnitude or direction.

The technique fits a log-linear model using Poisson regression and Monte Carlo permutation to test if a change in trend is statistically significant (Kim, Fay, Feuer, & Midthune, 2000).

These regression models produce an Annual Percent Change (APC), which characterizes trends over time.
Trend by country: 11 increasing countries

Austria

Denmark

France

Germany

Lithuania

Greece
Trend by country: 11 increasing countries

Portugal

Romania

Luxembourg

Slovakia

United Kingdom
Trend by country: increase followed by decrease

Cyprus

Data chart showing an increase followed by a decrease in data over the years.

Netherlands

Data chart showing an increase followed by a decrease in data over the years.

Spain

Data chart showing an increase followed by a decrease in data over the years.
Trend by country: decreasing / mixed

Hungary

Czechia

Finland
Main findings

- Increase in number and percentage of first treatment demands: number of clients more than doubled during the period of analysis.

- **Country variations**
  - Group of countries with linear increases
  - Group of countries decreasing
  - Group of countries with increases followed by decreases in more recent years.

*Montanari et. al., European Addiction Research, 2017*
Possible explanatory factors

- Increasing trends in cannabis use in the general population
- Rise in intensive cannabis use
- Changed risk perception

- Increase of cannabis availability
- Rise in cannabis potency
- Increase availability of treatment provision for cannabis problems
- Improved data collection

Montanari et. al., European Addiction Research, 2017
Limitations

- 17 out of 30 countries included
- All cannabis clients included in the analysis: no distinction by severity of dependence and/or cannabis problems
- Use of absolute number in join-point regression
- Not included secondary drugs
- Coverage issue: only outpatient setting, variable coverage by country
- No harmonised definition of cannabis treatment
- Changes and improvement of the reporting system over the years

Montanari et. al., European Addiction Research, 2017
Conclusions

• Increase in the overall treatment demand for cannabis-related problems in Europe

• In some countries decrease – they may have reached the peak earlier

• Need for further investigation on:
  • reasons for cannabis users to enter treatment
  • different national trends
  • severity of cannabis use
  • treatment provision

Montanari et. al., European Addiction Research, 2017
Thank you!

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