

SELF-REPORTED USE OF MARIJUANA FOR HEALTH PURPOSES: RESULTS FROM THE GENERAL POPULATION SURVEY

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BACKGROUND

In recent years in Slovenia there has been a major political and public debate over the legalization of cannabis part of which has also been extensive promotion of the use of cannabis for various medical purposes. In the legal and illegal market, many preparations based on cannabis have emerged and advertised its healing effects. We report results from the Slovene general population survey (GPS) in which questions about the use of marijuana for different health problems have been included.

METHODS

General population surveys on drug use aim to obtain comparable and reliable information on the extent and pattern of consumption of different drugs in the general population and to enhance cross-national comparability. In Slovenia, the first GPS on drug use have been carried out in 2011/2012 and the second in 2018. In 2018 survey, a set of questions on the use of cannabis for medical purposes was also included in the questionnaire. Questionnaire included questions about lifetime use of cannabis or cannabis preparation for medical purposes, how the person got the drug and the health problem they used it for. Descriptive statistics methods were used for the analysis of primary data.

RESULTS

The target population of the survey was the population of Slovenia aged 15 to 64 years. We used a mixed - mode survey method (internet and personal interviews). 9.161 questionnaires were completed, respond rate was 62,4%. According to our study 7.9% of Slovene adult population have ever used the cannabis for different health reasons and 14.4% of those who didn't used it yet are planning to use it in the future. The percentage of ever users is significantly higher among women than men ($\chi^2=17.158$, $p=0.000$) (Figure 1).

Only a minority of users (2%) got the medical cannabis by prescription at the pharmacy, while the majority bought it from a person they knew or in a specialized store or online.

There are many different health reasons why people use cannabis. According to our study the main health problems respondents used cannabis for were acute or chronic pain, sleeping problems and different skin diseases including psoriasis (Figure 2).

Figure 1 Prevalence of cannabis use for health purposes by gender and age group

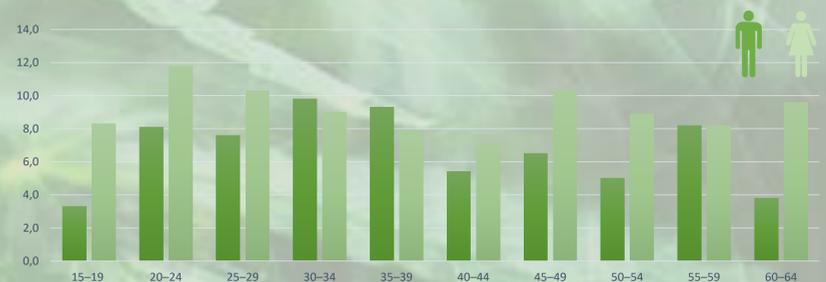


Figure 2 The most common diseases or symptoms that respondents use cannabis for



CONCLUSIONS

The questions on the use of cannabis for medical purposes were included in the GPS for the first time in order to gain at least some insight of the extent and characteristics of cannabis use for different health problems among adult Slovene population. Our study showed that 22% of Slovene adult population have already used or plan to use cannabis for different health problems. More in-depth research will be needed to gain a better understanding of cannabis use for medical purposes. But already the results of this research should be used for better and more effective policies and measures in this field and are beneficial for broader understanding of this actual issue.