

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Risks of Legalising Cannabis Drugs

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Abstract

For many years, the Czech media have been publishing materials pointing to the many advantages of cannabis drugs and calling for their legalisation. The phrase “recreational use” is used in this context. This is misleading; a person intoxicated by a drug is not “recreated” during the intoxication or after its effects have subsided. Memory, concentration and performance are, on the contrary, weakened at that time. Legalization of cannabis drugs would lead to increased consumption and decrease in the price of cannabis drugs on the black market. This would bring a number of complications including mental disorders, fetal harm, traffic accidents and economic damage.

Keywords

Risks; Legalising; Cannabis Drugs; Addiction; Harmful use

1. Introduction

For many years, the Czech media have been publishing materials pointing to the many advantages of cannabis drugs and calling for their legalisation. The phrase “recreational use” is used in this context. This is misleading; a person intoxicated by a drug is not “recreated” during the intoxication or after its effects have subsided. Memory, concentration and performance are, on the contrary, weakened at that time. As a point of interest, in 2019, \$5.76 million was spent on lobbying in favour of cannabis drugs in the US, which was double the amount spent in 2018. Companies that sell cannabis products also subsidize research, which can bias results in favour of sponsors (Grundy et al., 2023). Something similar is likely to occur in many other countries, including the Czech Republic. It is very naïve to think that liberalisation of the cannabis drug market will eliminate the black market. Fischer et al. (2020) points out that legalisation has led to a substantial reduction in the price of these drugs on the black market. This has also contributed to higher consumption of this class of substances after legalization in Canada (Imtiaz et al., 2023). In this context, it should be noted that already today Czech facilities for the medium-term treatment of addictive diseases are already overloaded and do not admit directly, but through waiting list.

The legalisation of cannabis drugs is euphemistically called “market regulation”. It is argued that the abuse of cannabis drugs is widespread. Chomynová et al. (2022) report that 6-10% of people over 15 years of age have used cannabis substances in the last 12 months. A far greater number of people have certainly crossed the road on a red light at some point. Are traffic lights to be abolished for this reason?

2. Addiction and harmful use of cannabis drugs

Market liberalisation has led to an increase in younger adults who use cannabis drugs harmfully and are dependent on them (Fischer et al., 2020, O’Grady et al., 2022). This has economic implications. There are individuals who should be economically active and returning to society the resources spent on their education and upbringing. An increase in the number of adults abusing this group of drugs as a result of market liberalisation has not been

demonstrated but cannot be ruled out (Gunadi et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2022) mention increased complications due to cannabis drug use among those aged 25 to 64 years, particularly in older women, as a consequence of legalization. At older ages, cannabis drugs have numerous risks, including memory impairment, falls, accidents, and failure to carry out normal duties.

3. Psychiatric complications

- The increase in cannabis drug abuse, either alone or in combination with tobacco or alcohol, has led to an increase in psychiatric, neurological, cardiac and gastrointestinal events in France (Bouquet, 2021).
- Psychotic conditions resulting from cannabis drug abuse often require hospitalization and some of them precede the development of schizophrenia. The association between cannabis drug abuse and the occurrence of schizophrenia is causal, according to Vaucher et al. (2018). Structural changes in brain have been demonstrated in cannabis drug-induced psychotic states, and even more so in cannabis-induced schizophrenia (Shah et al., 2022).
- There is also a connection between recent cannabis drug use and suicidal ideation (Diep et al., 2022), suicide and injuries (Kimbrel et al., 2018).
- Cannabis drug abuse is a risk factor for bipolar disorder (Lalli et al., 2021). Hengartner et al. (2020) found in 30-year longitudinal study that cannabis drug abuse was associated with higher risk of depression and suicidal behaviour in later life. However, this study involved adolescents, so its findings may or may not apply to young adults.
- For people under 30, cannabis drug use is a risk factor for violent behaviour (Dellazizzo et al., 2020).
- Cannabis drugs also negatively affect memory, concentration and decision-making, particularly in older people (for a review, see Nešpor, 2022). This can impair their self-sufficiency and increase their risk of accidents.



- Clinical experience suggests that cannabis drug abuse and associated decompensation is a common, although not always diagnosed, problem in people with schizophrenia or other severe disorders. Crocker et al. (2021) state that cannabis drug abuse is associated with the onset or exacerbation of mental disorders, particularly in adolescents and young adults.

Cannabis drug abuse in pregnancy

According to Gesterling et al. (2022) and Wilson et al. (2022), there has been an increase in the abuse of cannabis drugs in pregnancy following the legalisation of “recreational” use. Cannabis drugs in pregnancy are associated with a higher risk of complications for both mother and fetus. The risk increases even more when smoking cannabis cigarettes. Children whose mothers abused cannabis drugs during pregnancy were more likely to be born prematurely or with birth defects. They also had behavioural and learning problems (Luke et al., 2022). It is not entirely clear what frequency and amount of cannabis drug use is critical for maternal and fetal health. It is also not known how the interaction of cannabis drugs and other substances or medication affects the fetus. This makes it all the more appropriate to warn pregnant women against cannabis drugs.

Traffic accidents

Chronic “recreational” use of cannabis drugs impairs the ability to drive, and this impairment persists even after the intoxication has subsided (Dahlgren et al., 2020).

Other potential risks

- Acute intoxication with cannabis drugs can cause bouts of severe vomiting.
- When cannabis products are used per os, there is a risk of overdose in adults and especially in children (Matheson et al., 2020). The legalisation of cannabis products for per os consumption has led to a pervasive increase in unintentional poisonings in children in Canada. This occurred when children found cannabis candy in their parents’ homes (Myran et al., 2023).
- Goyal et al. (2017) draw attention to the cardiovascular risks of cannabis drugs including increased blood pressure, orthostatic hypotension and stroke. There is also an increased risk of atrial fibrillation (Lin et al., 2022).

3. Summary and conclusion

Legalization of cannabis drugs would lead to increased consumption and decrease in the price of cannabis drugs on the black market. This would bring a number of complications including mental disorders, fetal harm, traffic accidents and economic damage.

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