

Prevalence and reasons of medicinal cannabis use – findings from The International Cannabis Policy Study 2018

JANNI LEUNG^{1,2}, GARY CHAN¹, DANIEL STJEPANOVIĆ¹, JACK YIU CHAK CHUNG^{1,2}, WAYNE HALL¹, DAVID HAMMOND³

¹National Centre for Youth Substance Use Research, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, ²School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, ³School of Public Health and Health Systems, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada

Presenter's email: j.leung1@uq.edu.au

Introduction and Aims: There has been increasing attention on cannabis use for medicinal purposes, but there is currently a lack of data on its epidemiology. This study examines the epidemiology of medicinal cannabis use by estimating its prevalence, comparing gender and age differences; and investigating what reasons they were used to manage.

Design and Methods: Participants included 27,169 respondents (aged 16-65) who completed Wave 1 of The International Cannabis Policy Study (ICPS) conducted across Canada and the United States in 2018 via online surveys. Cannabis policy conditions were: "US legal-recreational" (legal for both recreational and medical use), "US legal-medical only", "US-illegal", and "Canada-medical only".

Results: The overall prevalence of self-reported ever medicinal cannabis use was 27%, with similar rates by sex and highest prevalence in young adults. Prevalence was higher in US legal-recreational states (34%) than US illegal states (23%), US legal-medical only states (25%), and Canada (25%). The most common physical reasons include use to manage pain (53%), sleep (46%), headaches/migraines (35%), appetite (22%), and nausea/vomiting (21%). For mental health reasons, the most common were for anxiety (52%), depression (40%), and PTSD/trauma (17%). There were 11% who reported using cannabis for managing other drug or alcohol use and 4% for psychosis.

Discussions and Conclusions: A substantial proportion of the North American population reported ever use of cannabis for a variety of medicinal reasons, including those living in jurisdictions without legal markets. Further research is needed to understand the safety and efficacy of these forms of medicinal cannabis use.

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