AN EVALUATION OF CANNABIS HEALTH WARNING LABELS FOR LEGAL CANNABIS PRODUCTS

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Introduction / Issues: Cannabis markets are evolving rapidly, and several countries have seen regulated and highly commercialised markets develop. To date only Canada has incorporated mandatory health warnings for cannabis products. To date there is little understanding of how these messages may be received and how they might influence behaviour.

Method: The Global Drug Survey (GDS) is a large anonymous cross-sectional web survey. In GDS 2019, respondents who used cannabis in the last 12 months were presented with six health warning labels and asked if they believed the information, if it was new to them, and if it would make them think about using less cannabis. Four labels were based on those used in Canada (related to dependence, driving stoned, harms of smoking, harms to developing brain) and two were based on side effects that people reported would motivate them to quit in GDS2018 (lack of motivation, effects on memory). This paper included data from 55687 people from 27 countries (70% male; M age 27.5).

Key Findings: Overall, nearly 60% of people were supportive of the use of health warning messages being displayed on products. Levels of awareness of health harms was generally high. The message about cannabis dependence had the lowest level of awareness and believability and was the least likely to change behaviour. Almost 50% indicated that the message about driving stoned was the most likely to change behaviour, followed by motivation and effects on memory.

Discussions and Conclusions: Labels on cannabis products could be an effective way to educate people and potentially change their behaviour.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Any country legalising cannabis should mandate health warnings as part of optimal public health apaches to drug law reform.

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