

Baseline Survey on Awareness, Knowledge and Behaviour Associated with Recreational Use of Marijuana - Executive Summary

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This certification is to be submitted with the final report submitted to the Project Authority.

I hereby certify as Senior Office of EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.

Signed:



Susan Galley, Senior Vice President

EKOS Research Associates Inc.

Executive Summary

Research Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the research was to learn more about public awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours related to marijuana, both in terms of the impacts that marijuana use has on health and the risks to public safety that use poses, such as driving while impaired. Respondents in the survey were told that the focus of the survey was on marijuana used for “recreational” rather than for medicinal purposes. The research was also designed to establish a baseline for the general population aged 13+ with regard to their current state of awareness, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours with respect to the risks and harms of marijuana use.

Methodology

A national online/telephone survey was conducted with 2,201 Canadians 13 years of age or older. The sample included three targeted segments: youth aged 13-18 (n=287), young adults aged 19-24 (n=372), and parents of youth aged 13-18 (n=532). The survey was conducted in late May and early June with a participation rate of 20 per cent (which is a typical response rate for this kind of survey). An oversample was collected in each of these three segments to ensure sufficient cases in the analysis of results for each individual group. Weighting was applied to the sample to ensure that the total sample of 2,201 reflects the characteristics of the general public by region, age, gender and parental status.

Knowledge Regarding Marijuana

Most Canadians understand how marijuana can be consumed, citing at least one or several methods of consumption. Smoking marijuana in a joint (33 per cent), general mention of smoking it (52 per cent), or eating it (69 per cent) are reported most often. Results are similar for the three target groups, although youth (i.e., those between 13 and 18) are less familiar with eating as a method of consumption. In terms of understanding of risk, two in three Canadians (65 per cent) are aware that some methods of using marijuana are more harmful to health than other ways. This understanding is higher among parents of youth (70 per cent), but lower among youth (52 per cent).

In terms of overall awareness, the large majority of Canadians are also aware that the drug is not currently legal (86 per cent), and results are similar across the target groups. In terms of risk assessment, the same proportion understands that it impairs one’s ability to drive, although young adults (i.e., those between the ages of 19 and 24) are less apt to agree with this risk assessment (77 per cent). In terms of specifics, when asked when is it safe for someone to drive a vehicle after using marijuana, more than one in three young adults cited “a couple of hours or less” (24 per cent), or “whenever the person feels the effect is gone” (15 per cent).

Perceived Acceptability and Risk

Just under half (48 per cent) agreed that marijuana use is socially acceptable, although 32 per cent disagreed. Acceptance is greatest among young adults (53 per cent) and lowest among teens under 16 (19 per cent). Seven in ten (69 per cent) also agree that it is something that youth and young adults will try, although youth themselves, particularly those under 16 are much less likely to agree (30 per cent).

While 41 per cent of Canadians see marijuana as a high health risk, 49 per cent see alcohol and 92 per cent see cigarette smoking as a high health risk. Young adults are even less likely to see marijuana as a health risk (27 per cent). In fact, 40 per cent of young adults consider the risk to be low, while only 14 per cent consider alcohol to be low risk, and only six per cent consider smoking cigarettes to be low risk. More than one in three youth (35 per cent) also rated the risk of marijuana as low (24 per cent among those under 16, and 38 per cent among those 16 to 18).

Those who have tried marijuana, and even more so, those who have used it in the last 12 months, are more likely to see the drug as socially acceptable (and that young people will try it), and less likely to see the risks. Since use of marijuana is strongly correlated with age and the greatest prevalence of use is between 19 and 45, there are strong patterns of responses associated with age.

Regarding the variation in risk to different age groups, there is largely universal agreement that it is harmful to teens (89 per cent), however, only 63 per cent see it as harmful to young adults (19 to 24), and this is lower among respondents in this age cohort (53 per cent). Just under half (48 per cent) see it as harmful to adults. The impact of marijuana on a range of skills is seen as harmful among 43 to 60 per cent of Canadians, but sizable proportions see it as having no impact, or even a positive influence. Marijuana is least apt to be judged as harmful to relationships with family and friends (43 per cent), mental health and physical health (47 per cent in each case). The drug is somewhat more apt to be seen as a threat to performance at school and attention and memory (according to approximately 60 per cent of Canadians). In each case, parents of youth, and youth themselves are more apt to see the drug as harmful. Younger teens under 16 are particularly likely to see marijuana as harmful, and there is a 10+ point gap between those under and over 16. The impact on addiction is seen as fairly likely with frequent (i.e., daily or almost daily) use according to 58 per cent of Canadians, but only 20 per cent see occasional use (less than weekly) as a threat. Youth, particularly those under 16, and their parents are more likely to see marijuana use leading to addiction (49 per cent of younger teens see even occasional use as likely to lead to addiction, and 80 per cent of younger teens and 73 per cent of parents of younger teens see frequent use as likely to lead to addiction).

Reported Use of Marijuana

Just over half (58 per cent) of the survey sample reported having used marijuana at some point in the past. The range is similar for young adults and parents of youth (54 to 59 per cent). Across the survey sample, the prevalence of trying the drug rises to 69 per cent among those 25 to 44 and declines sharply at 65. The prevalence is also somewhat higher among men (62 per cent) and residents of British Columbia (63 per cent). Those who have used marijuana overwhelmingly say that it is used in their social circle of friends and family (99 per cent), while those who have not tried it are less apt to report use among others they associate with (66 per cent).

Among the 58 per cent who have tried marijuana, just over a third (38 per cent) have used it in the last 12 months. That is, 22 per cent of the full survey sample indicated recent use (in the last 12 months). This is highest among young adults and those between 25 and 34 (36 per cent in each cohort). It is also 31 per cent among older teens (16+). Six per cent of younger teens have used it in the last 12 months. Most of those who have ever tried it first did so between 13 and 18 years of age (59 per cent) or when they were between 19 and 24 (23 per cent).

There is a range of frequency of use reported, with just over one in five (22 per cent) reporting daily use, and just under one in five reporting weekly use (17 per cent) or monthly use (18 per cent). Four in ten (42 per cent) use it a few times a year or less. Reasons for use largely relate to pleasure/recreation (36 per cent), relaxation (22 per cent) or curiosity (25 per cent). One in ten pointed to a desire to feel included. Most described smoking marijuana as their typical method of consumption (42 per cent indicating general mention of smoking it, 27 specifically saying they smoke it in a cigarette and 11 per cent describing use of a water pipe or bong). Relatively few (9 per cent) said they typically eat it in food, and fewer still described other methods of consumption. Most marijuana users typically obtain it from a friend according to survey results (78 per cent), although this is less likely among recent users (68 per cent). Obtaining the drug from someone who sells was reported in a much smaller proportion of cases (19 per cent).

Most of those who have never tried it or tried it but not in the last 12 months said that, even when marijuana becomes legal, they are unlikely to use it (85 per cent).

With regard to driving, 27 per cent of Canadians indicated that they have driven a vehicle while under the influence of marijuana at some point in the past. This is higher (42 per cent) among recent marijuana users. Over one in three Canadians (35 per cent) also reported that they have been a passenger in a vehicle driven by

someone under the influence of marijuana. This figure rises to 42 per cent among young adults, and 70 per cent of recent marijuana users said that they have been in this position. Few Canadians said that they would be likely to accept a ride from someone under the influence of marijuana in the future (11 per cent with another 10 per cent saying moderately likely). This rises marginally to 13 per cent likely and 14 per cent moderately likely among young adults. Given that marijuana is seen as socially acceptable, it is less likely that the reported incidence of marijuana use in the survey is a result of participants wishing to respond in a socially acceptable manner (i.e. claiming not to have used marijuana, even when they have, to align with social norms). The fact that 86 per cent agree, however, that marijuana can impair driving ability suggests that the reported incidence of driving while under the influence or accepting a ride from someone under the influence of marijuana is more likely to suffer from under reporting due to the pressure to be portrayed in a socially acceptable light.

Information on Marijuana

Half of Canadians indicated that they have looked for information on marijuana with this figure rising to 64 per cent among young adults, and to 75 per cent among recent marijuana users. Two in three Canadians agree that they have access to enough trustworthy information about the health risks of the drug; this is highest among parents of youth (74 per cent) and recent users (85 per cent). The most likely source to be consulted for information about health and safety risks are health care professionals (53 per cent). This is followed at a distance by the Internet (15 per cent although somewhat more popular among young adults and parents of youth; 23 per cent in each case). Law enforcement as well as health professionals are the most likely sources for information about impaired driving (according to 30 and 25 per cent, respectively). In the case of both health risks and impaired driving, youth also consider parents and teachers to be key sources of information.

Topics of interest regarding the risks and effects of marijuana include health risks (60 per cent are interested), effects on driving (57 per cent are interested), effects of combining it with alcohol or other drugs (54 per cent are interested), and other risks for youth and young adults (54 per cent are interested). Variation in risk associated with different methods of consumption and different products, risk of addiction, laws and penalties and the physical and psychological effects of the drug are also of interest to 46 to 50 per cent of Canadians. Parents of youth are also interested in how to talk with teens about marijuana (51 per cent).

There is considerable variation reported between parents of youth and youth themselves about the incidence of having a conversation about marijuana; while this was reported to have taken place among 86 per cent of parents, only 58 per cent of youth themselves said the same. The kinds of topics discussed are varied, with health and safety, as well as social risk at the top of the list.

The total expenditure for the POR project is \$81,416.50 (including HST).

Supplier Name: EKOS Research Associates

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To obtain more information on this study, please e-mail information@hc-sc.gc.ca