

# CANNABIS USE TO MANAGE OTHER PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES CONSUMPTION: A MIXED-METHOD SURVEY IN FRANCE

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## Background:

Cannabis is still prohibited in France and its therapeutic benefits remain under debate. However, a non-negligible proportion of people who use cannabis report using it as an alternative to recreational or prescribed psychoactive substances. We aimed at providing data about characteristics and perceptions of people who use cannabis for such therapeutic purpose.

## Methods:

We conducted a mixed-method survey in collaboration with two French community-based associations. First, a web-based questionnaire among people who use cannabis described sociodemographic characteristics, cannabis use patterns and health behaviors. Subsequently, we conducted semi-structured interviews with cannabis users (n=12) and used thematic analysis to examine perceived benefits and harms from cannabis use, and experiences with other psychoactive substances.

## Results:

Participants (N=230) were mostly men (73.5%) and daily cannabis users (74%). Age ranged between 18 and 72 (mean=36). Many participants got their cannabis through relational networks (15.2%) or domestic cultivation (25.7%). They reported using cannabis to substitute one or more other legal, illegal and prescribed substances such as opiates (43.5%), alcohol (46.5%), stimulants (26.5%) and benzodiazepines (26.1%). The vast majority found that cannabis was effective to reduce the use of these substances and to manage craving. Consistently, our preliminary qualitative results suggest that participants consider cannabis as a safer substance than other recreational drugs or prescribed medications. Moreover, participants tend to present themselves as responsible users who manage their cannabis use to provide health benefits. Finally, most of them are involved in some community support networks.

## Conclusion:

Cannabis would be an effective harm reduction tool for some people who use psychoactive substances. Results suggest that substances users are able to make rational choices as regard to substance use and to manage their own health. In addition, they show the key role of community-based support in maintaining healthy patterns of substance use.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors declare they have no conflict of interest.