



MEDIA RELEASE

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New South African Studies done on cannabis/dagga since the legalisation for private use by the Constitutional Courts ruling in 2018

A recent study published in the South African Medical Journal found Cannabis use during adolescence affects the endocannabinoid system, which is particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of cannabis as it undergoes profound developmental changes.

The study states that adolescent cannabis use causes structural, functional, and histological alterations in the frontoparietal, cerebellar and other regions of the brain with some evidence suggesting that cannabis related neurocognitive impairments persist into adulthood, even after prolonged abstinence. Adolescent cannabis use should be actively discouraged, and pregnant women should be advised to avoid cannabis use.

Thirdly According to another study published in the South African Journal of Psychiatry, ADHD is common amongst cannabis users seeking substance abuse treatment and advises that cannabis prevention activities be strengthened.

Also, an observational study by the University of Witwatersrand on cannabis exposures reported to the Poisons Information Helpline of the Western Cape (PIHWC) noted there was a threefold increase in cases reported during the period June 2018 to June 2019 compared to the period June 2015 to June 2016. This coincides with the South Africa Constitutional Court ruling in favour of decriminalising cannabis for private cultivation and consumption.

Accidental ingestion of edible cannabis products was a common occurrence in patients aged 12 years and younger.

The introduction of the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill in 2020 further clarified how consumers can legally use cannabis.

The expectation of many is that changing legislation will lead to the increased use of cannabis products.

In general, there has been an increase in reports made to health care facilities of acute cannabis intoxication and other adverse effects in countries when cannabis was legalised.

The same study warned that Cannabis use is not without consequences, and it is important for all health care practitioners involved in acute patient care to be aware of the various adverse effects associated with its use.

Prolonged cannabis use during adolescence also disrupts the neuromaturation processes of the brain that occur during this period, with synaptic pruning and white matter development particularly affected. Adolescent cannabis use is also associated with cognitive deficits and interference in logical thinking processes.

Cannabis use during pregnancy increases the risk of adverse outcomes for women and their neonates, to the extent that the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists advised physicians to discourage use of cannabis during preconception, pregnancy, and lactation.

Cannabis use during pregnancy and breastfeeding alters the development of multiple brain regions and may result in lasting functional consequences, including impaired higher-order executive functioning (i.e., impulse control, visual memory, and attention). As a result, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) during childhood affects academic performance and social adjustment.

Prenatal cannabis exposure is associated with an increased risk of foetal growth retardation and childhood behavioural disturbances. Infants exposed to cannabis in utero tend to have lower birthweights and are more likely to need placement in the neonatal intensive care unit compared with infants without exposure. Cannabis may be toxic to human chromosomes, with chromosomal changes caused by in utero cannabis exposure contributing to the lower fertility and higher miscarriage rates known to occur among women who use cannabis.

Doctors For Life International would like to caution the South African government on whether they want to continue to experiment with the approximately 60 million people of South Africa as it moves towards ratifying the Cannabis for Private Purposes Bill introduced to Parliament in October 2020.