

Cannabis and driving: results from a general population survey

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AIMS: To assess patterns of *cannabis* consumption and driving in a representative sample of the Spanish population. Specifically, the objectives were: To determine the prevalence of driving under the influence of *cannabis* in the previous 12 months; of being a passenger in a vehicle driven by a person under the influence of *cannabis*; and of having a road traffic accident while being under the influence of *cannabis*.

METHODS: A total of 2,500 people, aged between 14-70 and living in Castille and Leon (Spain), were surveyed in 2004 with regard to their consumption of alcohol and illicit drugs. The assessment included lifetime, previous year and previous month's consumption of *cannabis*, opiates, cocaine, synthetic drugs, inhalants and amphetamines. Among those who reported *cannabis* use in the previous month, further assessment was carried out concerning driving under the influence of *cannabis* and the number of days this was done, being a passenger in a vehicle driven by someone under the influence of *cannabis*, and having a road traffic accident related to being under the influence of *cannabis*.

RESULTS: 15.7% of those surveyed reported *cannabis* consumption in the previous 12 months. Of those surveyed that reported *cannabis* consumption in the previous year, 9.7% reported driving a vehicle under the influence of *cannabis* during this period, on average 8 times. 1 out of 5 (19.8%) reported being a passenger in a vehicle driven by a person under the influence of *cannabis*, on average 5 times in the previous 12 months. Having a road traffic accident while being under the influence of *cannabis* was reported by 4.8%.

CONCLUSIONS: The present data shows that *cannabis* consumption and driving is a relevant issue that needs much more attention. An in depth analysis showed that demographic aspects (age) and alcohol consumption are also related to this behaviour. Earlier studies on drivers killed in road traffic accidents in Spain showed that *cannabis* was frequently found in such cases, ranging from 0.8% in 1991 to 3.9% in 2002.

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