Sandwijk, J.P., P.D.A. Cohen, S. Musterd, & M.P.S. Langemeijer (1995), *Licit and illicit drug use in Amsterdam II. Report of a household survey in 1994 on the prevalence of drug use among the population of 12 years and over.* Amsterdam, Instituut voor Sociale Geografie, Universiteit van Amsterdam. pp. 48-56.

URL of this document:
http://www.cedro-uva.org/lib/sandwijk.prvasd94.06.pdf

CEDRO
centrum voor drugsonderzoek

UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

LICIT AND ILLICIT DRUG USE IN AMSTERDAM II

Report of a household survey in 1994 on the prevalence of drug use among the population of 12 years and over

J.P. SANDWIJK, P.D.A. COHEN, S. MUSTERD, & M.P.S. LANGEMEIJER

6

Cannabis

6.1 Introduction

Looking at prevalence figures for cannabis, it may be hard to believe that we are in fact dealing with an illicit drug. In practice, however, the extent to which cannabis should be considered illicit is open to question. The easy availability of cannabis in the Netherlands is the result of a distinction in the opium law, introduced in the 1976, between drugs with 'acceptable risks' and drugs with 'unacceptable risks'. As a result, discouraging use of the latter became the priority. Legal action against soft drugs is to be taken only when large quantities are involved. The lenient attitude towards soft drugs invoked a ready supply for those who wanted to use them. Even today, users of cannabis rarely encounter legal barriers which might prevent or stop them from using.

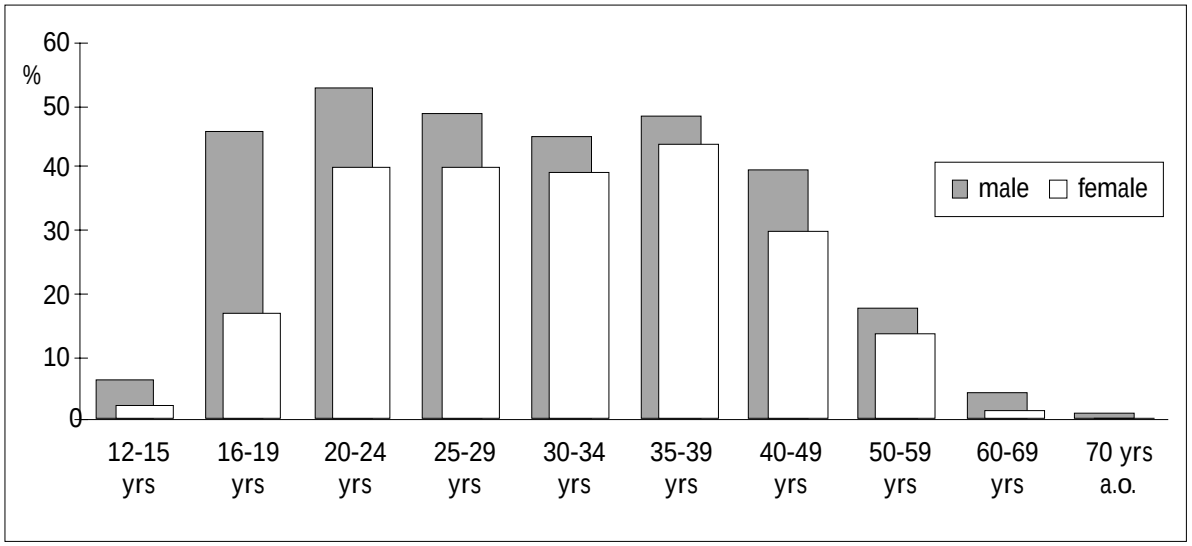
6.2 Prevalence

The lifetime prevalence of cannabis measured at 29.2 percent. Last year and last month prevalence were 10.6 and 6.8 percent respectively. So while there was a sizeable group that had used cannabis at some time, recent use was modest.

The continuation rate for cannabis lead us to the conclusion that many people try cannabis at least once, but many never become very regular users. Of all the cannabis users, 36 percent had used it in the year preceding the interview, and 23 percent in the preceding month. These are low figures compared to legal drugs such as alcohol or tobacco (80.5 and 61.4 percent respectively), but high compared to other illegal drugs, as we will see later.

Many users never become 'experienced' according to our definition (i.e. used 25 times or more). In 1994, 42.6 percent did not meet this criterion.
In Chapter 2, we found a bipolarity in cannabis use as regarding frequency of use, a finding fairly common for drug use in general. The majority of all regular cannabis users engaged in use at a low frequency (51.5 percent one to four times a month), but a relatively large share used the drug with a high frequency (25 percent more than 15 times a month).

Figure 6.1 Lifetime prevalence of cannabis use by age group



6.3 Social-demographic aspects of cannabis use

There are exceptional cases starting at the age of 10 or 71, but the majority (77%) experiences first use of cannabis between 15 and 25 years of age. For both men and women, the average age of first use is 20.
Lifetime prevalence is distributed almost equally among both sexes: 53 percent is male, 47 female. Of all last month users however, 70 percent is male. So even though men and women start using at, on average, the same age and in more or less the same numbers, women are much less likely to continue using. In exact figures: of all men that ever used cannabis, 30 percent used in the month prior to interview; for women this is 15 percent. Furthermore, men use on a greater number of occasions than women.
Returning to the aspect of age in relation to cannabis use, a generation effect as well as an age effect are visible. The age effect exists in that use of cannabis is something that young people do. When reaching a certain age, use is cut back or ceased completely. The generation effect is working against the age effect. It means that use is getting through to age groups where it was unheard of before. This is a consequence of the fact that cannabis hasn't been on the market forever. Part of the group that started using at the introduction in the sixties has continued using, and by doing so 'introduced' cannabis prevalence in higher age groups. For example: someone who started using in 1965 at the age of 25 now accounts for a score on lifetime prevalence (and maybe even last year and last month prevalence) in the category 50-59 years.

As was the case in previous chapters, ethnicity is a very important determinant of use. There is a clear dichotomy between people of native Dutch parentage, other Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and those of Surinamese, Antillean, Moroccan and Turkish origin on the other. Of the first group, 32 percent had used

cannabis at some time; the corresponding figure for the latter group was only 14 percent, comprised predominantly of Surinamese or Antillean origin.

In households with children, cannabis use (by the parents) is generally low. Lifetime prevalence was lower for people with children, and of those who did use cannabis, a greater proportion had not used it recently. The children themselves (the category 'living at home') had a relatively high score on recent use. Other categories with high scores were singles and 'other'.

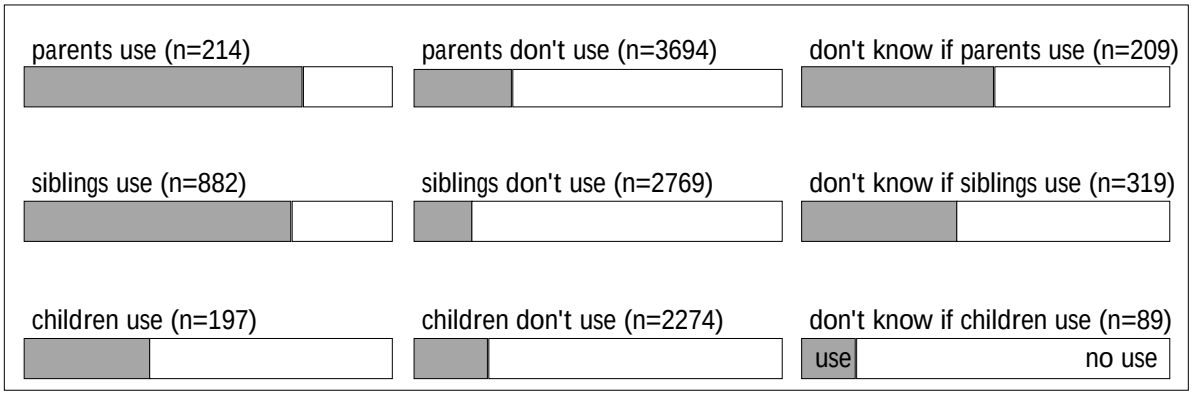
In the third version of the prevalence survey, some new questions on cannabis use by other members of the family were included. Figure 6.2 shows the results. The respondents without parents, siblings and/or children were not included in the graph.

The figure represents lifetime prevalence of respondents (on the horizontal axis) by use by several groups of relatives. The first three bars show the relation between cannabis use by the respondent and cannabis use by the respondents' parents. It is clear that if parents use (or have used in the past), the respondent is very likely to use cannabis as well. In exact figures: 76 percent of the respondents with 'using parents' had used cannabis themselves at some time. In the group with non-using parents, the lifetime prevalence of the respondents was 27 percent. The group that was unable to indicate whether or not their parents used cannabis fell in a median position: 52 percent had used cannabis at some time. This lead us to the conclusion that use of cannabis by parents contributes to a higher level of prevalence for children.

In the case of siblings, there was also a clear positive relation between use by the sibling and use by the respondent. If the respondent's children used cannabis, the relation weakens considerably. Levels of prevalence were slightly higher for those whose children used cannabis, but differences were minor.

Two comments must be made here. First, it is important to keep in mind the extent of use by different members of the family. On first sight, use by the parents and

Figure 6.2 Lifetime prevalence of cannabis use, by use by parents, siblings and children



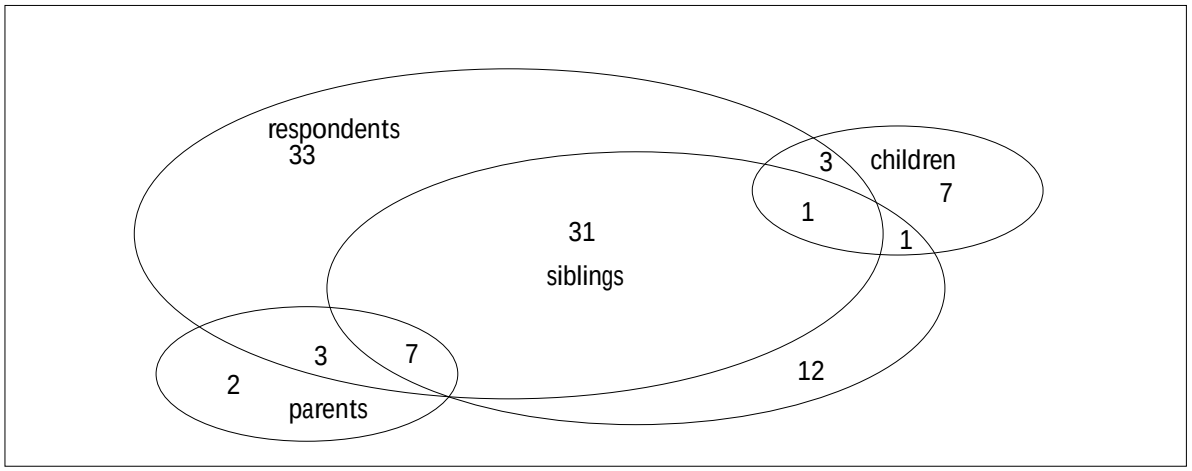
by the siblings seemed to have the same relation to use by the respondent: in both cases, almost three quarters of the respondents also used cannabis. However, the number of respondents with a parent that used cannabis was small: only 5 percent of the population. For the adults in the response group, this was caused by the generation effect: their parents were from non-using generations. The bottom line is that we are talking about three quarters of only five percent of the population, in other words, not a very large group.

The number of respondents with using siblings was substantially larger: 20 percent. Of course this too was a result of the generation effect: since siblings are of the same generation as the respondents, prevalence figures should resemble those in the response group. In this case, the number of cases in which use by the respondent coincided with use by a sibling measured at 15 percent of the whole population and 50 percent of the cannabis users: a sizeable share.

Second, it is important to stress that the actual variable at work here was knowledge of use instead of actual use by other relatives. There are reasons to believe that these two figures differ considerably. In the age group of 12 to 15 year-olds, 9.4 percent of all the respondents indicated cannabis use by the parents. Given that the parents of this particular group of respondents were roughly between 35 and 45 years old, there is reason to suspect that many children were not aware that their parents used cannabis. It may be slightly speculative, but the de facto lifetime prevalence of cannabis in the age group to which most parents of 12 to 15 year olds belong was probably higher than 9.4 percent.

It is not very clear how (knowledge of) use by the parents and use by the child are related. It is possible that use by the parents in itself stimulates use by the children. On the other hand, levels of use by the children may be higher because of a certain cultural environment in the household that is not prohibitive towards cannabis use. The only conclusion we are able to draw here is that if a child indicates cannabis use by the parents, it often coincides with use by the child itself.

Figure 6.3 Use of cannabis by position on the labour market



However, the exact causal connection between the two variables remains obscure.
The same phenomenon was found with use by siblings and, to a lesser extent, children. Here too, alleged use by the relative often coincides with use by the respondent.
Figure 6.3 shows the extent to which several members of one family used cannabis[1].

The two largest groups were the respondents who used cannabis but had no using family members (33%) and those whose siblings also used cannabis (31%). A third group with a substantial size was made up of non-using respondents who had using siblings (12%). Families whose members all use cannabis use are virtually unheard of.

6.4 Socio-economic aspects of cannabis use

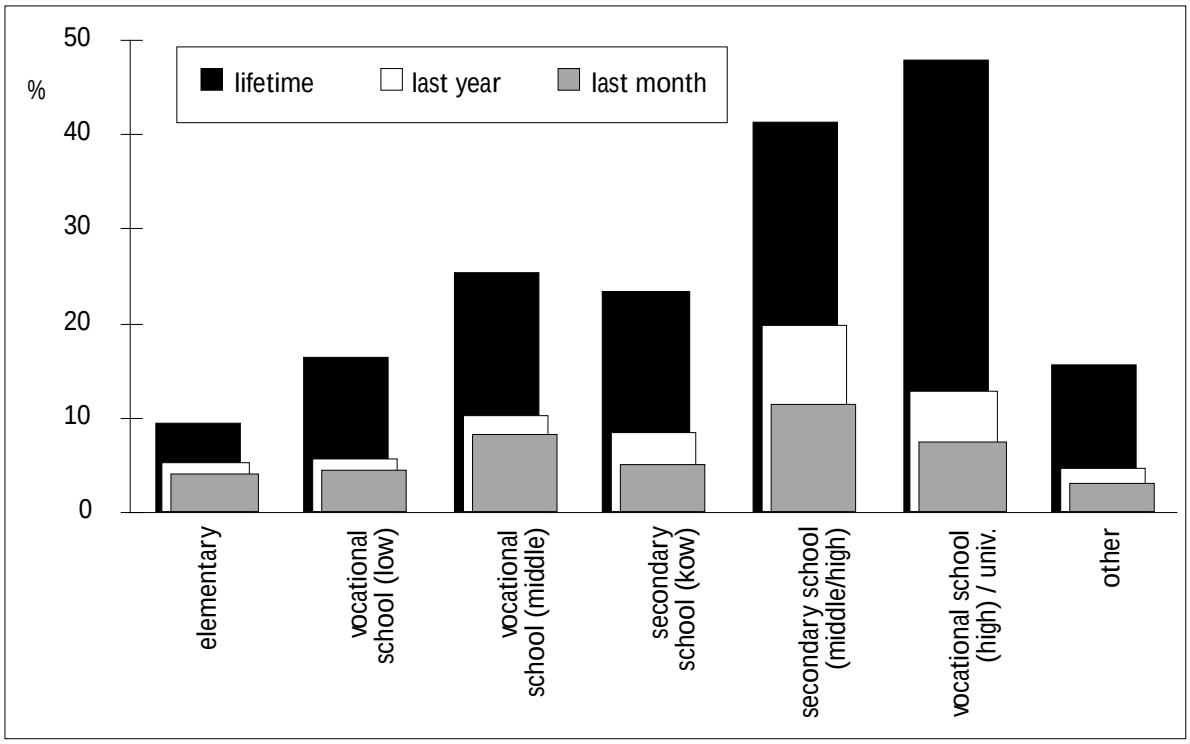
Once more, the level of education is a very interesting variable. Figure 6.4 clearly shows that cannabis use is greatly influenced by educational background. The higher we go up the educational scale, the greater the number of cannabis users on a lifetime basis. It is important to realize that the age composition of the different groups is an important factor here. The two groups with a clearly higher lifetime prevalence are, on average, younger and thus contain more cannabis users.

It is interesting to examine the extent to which cannabis use decreases over time in the different educational groups. Of all of the one-time cannabis users in the highest educational class, only 15 percent had used the drug in the month prior to the interview. For people in the lowest group, this was 43 percent. In other words, if picked up, the habit of using cannabis is more persistent in lower educational groups. However, the absolute number of people using cannabis in these groups is low.

Occupational groups who showed a high lifetime prevalence were working people, the short-term unemployed and students. Recent use was prevalent among the unemployed (long-term and short-term) and students. Working people could not be categorized in the group of regular cannabis users on the basis of the last month prevalence figures.

The same phenomenon is reflected in income levels. Lifetime prevalence was relatively high for higher incomes, but last year and last month prevalence does not deviate very much from other income groups. The lower income groups, on the contrary, had higher prevalence values on the last year and last month items. There are four possible reasons for this. The first is the strong representation of young people in lower income groups; the second is related to the lifestyle

Figure 6.4 Lifetime prevalence of cannabis use by level of education



associated with a 'living on the dole'. Most unemployed people have an income in the one of the lower categories. Thirdly, many people in higher income groups probably used cannabis as students, but ceased after they found a job (which placed them in the higher income category). Finally, use of cannabis can no longer be associated with certain subcultures. Use of cannabis is present in all income categories, including the lowest. Viewed from this angle, this is a result of and 'normalization effect', which causes the diffusion of use throughout society.

6.5 Summary

Lifetime prevalence of cannabis is 29 percent. According to our findings on the last year item 11 percent of the population used a cannabis product. The corresponding figure for the last month item was 7 percent.

Almost half of the group that had ever used cannabis (43%) had done so less than 25 times. Men and women have more or less the same lifetime prevalence, but last month users are more likely to be male.

Both an age effect and a generation effect are visible in cannabis use. The age effect exists in that most users are young. The generation effect indicates that use is penetrating into higher age groups, as the generation that first started using cannabis in the sixties grows older. A possible relation seems to exist between use

by relatives and use by the respondent him/herself. Use by the respondent often coincides with (knowledge of) use by a relative. The exact nature of the causal connection of this is not clear.

The socio-economic status provided some very interesting facts in relation to cannabis use. The conclusion is that people with a higher status have higher prevalence figures, but do not differ from other groups on more recent prevalence figures. In lower status groups, there are fewer users, but a greater proportion continues using if use has been established.

1 The base for percentages here was the total number of people that either used cannabis themselves (542), or that had family members who used it (383), or both (730). The total figure is 1,655. Combinations that applied to less than 1 percent are left out of the graph. These are: use by respondents, parents, siblings and children, and use by respondents, parents and children.

6.6 Tables regarding the use of cannabis

Table 6.1 Use of cannabis by age group and gender

	lifetime			last year			last month			N		
age group	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total	male	female	total
12-15 yrs	6.7	2.3	4.7	6.7	2.3	4.7	4.8	1.1	3.1	105	87	192
16-19 yrs	45.8	17.2	30.2	34.9	9.1	20.9	21.7	6.1	13.2	83	99	182
20-24 yrs	52.9	40.4	45.5	33.5	19.1	25.0	21.3	9.3	14.2	155	225	380
25-29 yrs	48.8	40.5	44.5	25.6	11.0	18.2	17.2	7.0	12.0	285	299	584
30-34 yrs	45.2	39.4	42.3	20.4	7.8	14.1	14.4	5.2	9.8	270	269	539
35-39 yrs	48.4	44.0	46.1	20.5	9.5	14.7	11.9	6.6	9.1	219	243	462
40-49 yrs	39.8	30.1	34.9	11.7	4.3	7.9	8.4	2.2	5.2	359	372	731
50-59 yrs	17.9	13.8	15.7	2.1	1.8	2.0	1.6	0.9	1.2	190	217	407
60-69 yrs	4.3	1.5	2.8	0.5	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.0	0.3	185	201	386
	1.1	0.6	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	177	324	501
total	33.6	25.3	29.1	15.2	6.5	10.5	10.1	3.8	6.7	2 028	2 336	4 364
sign. T-test	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05	p<.05			

Table 6.2 Use of cannabis by ethnicity and gender

	lifetime		last year		last month		
ethnicity	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	N
Dutch	1 130	31.9	404	11.4	250	7.1	3 543
Sur./Ant.	71	20.3	26	7.4	20	5.7	349
Moroccan	10	6.6	5	3.3	4	2.6	152
Turkish	4	3.9	3	2.9	3	2.9	102
Europ./USA	40	36.4	13	11.8	11	10.0	110
other	17	16.3	8	7.4	5	4.6	108
total	1 272	29.1	459	10.5	293	6.7	4 364
signif. Chi-square	p<.05		p<.05		n.s.		

Table 6.3 Use of cannabis by type of household

	lifetime		last year		last month		
type of household	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%	N
single	497	36.7	211	15.6	135	10.0	1 355
single parent	89	35.9	19	7.7	14	5.6	248
couple	200	20.9	54	5.6	38	4.0	957
couple with children	213	24.7	37	4.3	27	3.1	861
living at home	103	21.2	65	13.4	40	8.2	485
other	170	37.1	73	15.9	39	8.5	458
total	1 272	29.1	459	10.5	293	6.7	4 364
signif. Chi-square	p<.05		p<.05		p<.05		

Table 6.4 Use of cannabis by level of education

level of education		lifetime abs.	lifetime %	last year abs.	last year %	last month abs.	last month %	N
elementary	LO	58	9.5	33	5.4	25	4.1	609
vocational (low)	LBO	94	16.6	32	5.7	26	4.6	566
secondary (low)	MAVO	141	23.4	51	8.5	31	5.1	412
vocational (middle)	MBO	105	25.5	43	10.4	34	8.3	602
second. (middle/high)	HAVO/VWO	274	41.4	132	19.9	77	11.6	662
voc. (high)/University	HBO/WO	567	48.0	152	12.9	88	7.5	1 181
other		33	9.9	16	4.8	12	3.6	332
total		1 272	29.1	459	10.5	293	6.7	4 364
signif. Chi-square		p<.05		p<.05		p<.05		

Table 6.5 Use of cannabis by position on the labour market

position at labour market	lifetime abs.	lifetime %	last year abs.	last year %	last month abs.	last month %	N
employed full time	556	40.8	175	12.8	111	8.1	1 363
employed part time	223	40.5	55	10.0	33	6.0	551
unemployed < 2 years	74	46.8	37	23.4	19	12.0	158
unemployed > 2 years	44	38.9	23	20.4	18	15.9	113
retired	10	1.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	549
work disability	48	23.9	20	10.0	16	8.0	201
student	88	46.8	53	28.2	30	16.0	188
other	229	18.5	96	7.7	66	5.3	1 241
total	1 272	29.1	459	10.5	293	6.7	4 364
significance	p<.05		p<.05		p<.05		

Table 6.6 Use of cannabis by household income

income (Dutch guilders)	lifetime abs.	lifetime %	last year abs.	last year %	last month abs.	last month %	N
< 750	28	33.3	20	23.8	15	17.9	84
750-1250	111	36.2	59	19.2	38	12.4	307
1250-1500	75	26.9	29	10.4	17	6.1	279
1500-2000	133	24.3	56	10.2	37	6.8	548
2000-2500	141	30.9	64	14.0	43	9.4	456
2500-3000	114	28.1	27	6.7	14	3.5	405
3000-4000	154	32.1	45	9.4	35	7.3	480
4000-5000	136	35.4	38	9.9	20	5.2	384
>5000	180	40.5	36	8.1	23	5.2	444
unknown	200	20.5	85	8.7	51	5.2	977
total	1 272	29.1	459	10.5	293	6.7	4 364
significance	p<.05		p<.05		p<.05		