



Trends of Use and Perceptions of Delta-8 Products Among Pennsylvania State University Students

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Background

- ▶ Medical cannabis is legal in some capacity in 41 states and recreational cannabis is legal in 24 states (World Population Review, 2023)
- ▶ U.S. Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 eased restrictions on hemp production
 - Hemp must contain less than .3% delta-9 THC
 - Implicitly allowed for sale of delta-8 products
- ▶ Little research on
 - The dose-response relationship for delta-8 products (Johnson-Arbor & Smolinske, 2022)
 - Trends of delta-8 use on college campuses



Prior Literature

- ▶ Synthetic markets exist due to **legal loophole** (Harlow, Leventhal, & Barrington-Trimis, 2022)
- ▶ Dangers associated with **unregulated marketing and sale** of delta-8 products (Livne, et al., 2022)
- ▶ Increases in hospital visits, paranoia, psychosis, and emotion dysregulation (Babalonis, et al., 2021; Miller, Burk, Fargason, & Birur, 2023)
- ▶ Little regulations on age restrictions, no regulation surrounding synthesis procedures, contamination and inconsistency in products (LoParco, 2023)



Current Study

- ▶ Exploratory survey study of cannabis use, delta-8 purchasing, and perceptions of delta-8 among Pennsylvania State University students
- ▶ Motivated by unique cannabis policies in Pennsylvania
- ▶ Research Questions:
 - What percentage of Pennsylvania State University students who use cannabis purchase delta-8?
 - What percentage of Pennsylvania State University students who use cannabis purchase delta-8 as their **primary method of obtaining THC?**
 - Which reasons do students most frequently give for why they purchase delta-8?
 - Which reasons do students most frequently give for why they **do not** purchase delta-8?

Methodology

- ▶ Convenience sample of undergraduate students at Penn State
 - N = 626
- ▶ Questions about cannabis use, methods of obtaining cannabis, and reasons for decisions
- ▶ Descriptive statistics on prevalence of use of delta-8 products and most common methods of obtaining THC products
- ▶ Evaluation of perceptions of delta-8 products

Results

- ▶ 60.51% of respondents were aware that delta-8 products are sold in Pennsylvania prior to taking the survey
- ▶ Only 8.48% of respondents who had used cannabis in the past six months indicated purchasing delta-8, and only 4.95% indicated that this was the method they used most frequently
- ▶ Most common reason for **using delta-8** was not having another option
- ▶ Most common reason for **not using delta-8** was not liking available products

Negative Perceptions of Delta-8

- ▶ Written responses for why respondents chose not to buy delta-8 products despite using other forms of cannabis
 - "delta 8 is unregulated and has led to health problems and admissions to poison control centers."
 - "delta 8 although legal is far worse than purchasing regular cannabis , it's upcharged and less effective"
 - "I don't trust it"
 - "I like the real stuff"
 - "I have a medical card so no point"
 - "it seems like fake weed to me"

Discussion and Implications

- ▶ Clear **concern about the effects** of delta-8 among Penn State students
- ▶ This demographic is often not risk averse (O'Connell, Levy, & Harris, 2022)
- ▶ Research corroborates that this legal option is **not necessarily safer** than cannabis obtained from illicit markets (Babalonis, et al., 2021; Miller, Burk, Fargason, & Birur, 2023; LoParco, et al., 2023)
- ▶ Not FDA-approved and FDA explicitly advises against the use of delta-8 (FDA, 2022)
- ▶ Policy implications for regulating products and ensuring that using these products is safe



Future Directions

- ▶ Further investigation of delta-8 use and **perceptions** of these products
 - Other age groups
 - College students from other areas
- ▶ Investigation of demographic predictors (e.g., age, sex, race) of using or not using delta-8 products
- ▶ Further research on **why people choose to engage with illicit markets** instead of using legal options
 - Prescription medications

Conclusion

- ▶ Findings highlight that many people engage with illicit markets **despite having a legal option available**
- ▶ Unexpected developments in cannabis policy
- ▶ Crucial area of study in the field of criminology
- ▶ The **lack of regulation** and government oversight warrants further research
- ▶ Findings suggest **consumers should proceed with caution** when considering using delta-8 products



Thank you for listening!

Email **akn5535@psu.edu** for references
or if you have any questions!