Cannabis monitoring in Switzerland: the sentinel system

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Background

- In Switzerland cannabis consumption is very high since many years
- In the context of preparatory work for the revision of the Law on narcotics (Lstup), a monitoring of the cannabis consumption and related problems over 5 years (2004-2008) was set up
- To complete the existing surveillance system on drug use and abuse based on repeated surveys, a sentinel system in four regions (cantons) was initiated in 2004
Lifetime prevalence of cannabis consumption (%)  
(Sources: IUMSP 2002, ISPA/ISGF/2004)
Prevalence of cannabis consumption during the last month (%) (Sources: IUMSP 2002, ISPA/ISGF 2004)
Rate of police denunciation for cannabis consumption per thousand inhabitants (Source: OFP)
Objectives of the sentinel system

To implement a « barometer » of problems and solutions related to cannabis in various regions of Switzerland:

• What is the situation in relation to cannabis consumption and market and what is the evolution?
• What are the main problems encountered in the field?
• *What are the measures and interventions developed to solve those problems?*
Methodology of the sentinel system

Identification of 4 « sentinel » cantons:
- Criteria: language, type of illegal drug policy, rural/urban
  ➔ SG, TI, VD, ZH

Identification of observation settings:
- Criteria: where the problems will be visible
  ➔ 1. Health & social, 2. Education & training, 3. Justice & police

Constitution of 1 panel of specialists per domain and per canton (12 panels and 120 participants in total)
  ➔ Already met 3 times: en 2004, 2006 and 2007-08
Situation in 2006: summary
Justice and police: observations related to the illegal market in 2006

- Shared observations
  - Decreasing priority of police intervention: culture, selling, consumers
  - Disappearance of shops selling cannabis «officially»
  - Disappearance of large production sites
    ⇒ tendency towards small local production and smaller scale dealing
  - Illegal market of hard drugs and cannabis are well separated
  - Little/no importations
  - People living close to the Swiss borders tend to buy in Switzerland
  - Price stable and uniform: ~ 10 frs/gr, 6 Euro/gr
  - Mean THC level: ~ 15% (ICDP study 2005)
Justice and police: observations related to the illegal market in 2006

Cantonal particularities

- Zürich: problems unknown in the other cantons, i.e. violence of the milieu and « sophisticated », selling methods, some mafias seem to control the various shops (ZH)
  - Consequences: the work of the police has been intensified (zero tolerance)

Solutions

- Collaboration with the commerce police
- Collaboration with the services providing energy (electricity companies, etc.)
- Targeting landlords more than sellers in the various shops
Justice and police: observations pertaining to law problems and solutions

- Cantonal laws related to the production of hemp
  - Tessin: law in place since 1 February 2004
  - Vaud: “motion” Payot
  - Zürich: nothing
  - St-Gall: nothing

- Gap in the Lstup Art 19 culture is forbidden if the goal is to produce a narcotic

- Gap in cantonal CPP (codes of penal procedures)
  - Tessin: art. 163 CPP, since 15 April 2005 (destruction of the seized products)
  - Vaud: nothing, waiting for a national CPP
  - Zürich: in discussion
  - St-Gall: in discussion
Health, social services and schools: observations related to cannabis consumption in 2006 (1)

- Shared observations:
  - Consumption prevalence stable even slightly decreasing
  - Age at first consumption low, stable, even slightly decreasing
  - Consumption less visible around schools, increase in visibility in public space (SG, TI)
  - A lot of multi-consumption, mainly alcohol-cannabis
Health, social services and schools: observations related to cannabis consumption in 2006 (2)

- Cantonal differences:
  - Stable access excepted in TI (decrease)
  - Alcohol as a problem is more important than cannabis (in particular binge drinking): VD does not mention it and ZH mention a shift from cannabis to alcohol
  - The “Latin” Switzerland insist on the “banalisation” of consumption for the young compared to the “German” Switzerland that insist on the high social acceptability of consumption
Health and social services: observations related to problems in 2006 (1)

- Shared observations
  - The problematic consumption of cannabis among the young is associated to already difficult situations (catalyser, revealing effect)
  - Increase in use of services or advices to stop the consumption of cannabis (except in TI)
  - More and more cases of addiction to cannabis
Health and social services: observations related to problems in 2006 (2)

- Cantonal differences:
  - Increase in the perception of the problems related to cannabis consumption (among the young and the professionals) in VD; increase in the demand of training
  - Decrease in emergency admissions due to psychosis related to cannabis in TI
  - SG and ZH: cannabis is present in group violence
  - Increase in detected cases of driving under the influence of cannabis, LCR (SG and police)
Schools and apprenticeship: observations related to problems in 2006 (1)

- **Shared observations:**
  - In general, cannabis does not disturb school functioning.
  - Decrease in demand for interventions in schools/parents (except VD).
  - Limited school problems specifically related to cannabis consumption (lower motivation, late arrivals, etc.).
  - Few cases of apprenticeship drop-out.
  - A problematic cannabis consumption is in most cases related to a larger array of problems.
Schools and apprenticeship: observations related to problems in 2006 (2)

- Cantonal differences:
  - Lack of coherence in tackling the issue of cannabis among adults (professionals and non-professionals), VD
Conclusions (1)

- **General climate:**
  - Globally the cannabis problematic is decreasing excepted in VD: calmer general climate
  - In most cantons the professionals mention an increase in their knowledge and the availability of information: more realistic and pragmatic approach
  - Except in VD which have already had a stricter politic in the context of Switzerland of “zero tolerance” to cannabis, the other cantons are becoming stricter (but without an increase in denunciations for consumption)

- **Market:**
  - End of the large cultures and closing down of the shops (the police has put a focus on these 2 axes)
  - Cannabis trafficking at a smaller scale
Conclusions (2)

- **Consumption**
  - Stabilisation or even decline in consumption
  - Increase in the demands of care to stop consumption

- **Problems**
  - Decrease in perceived problems, decrease of interventions in schools
  - Except for VD, the cantons agree that today alcohol consumption is the most important problem (cannabis at the second place)