

Consumption and purchase of cannabis by 16- and 17-year-olds

Summary

In response to a pledge made by the Minister of Justice during the National Juvenile Debate 2001, the Research and Documentation Centre (*WODC*) carried out a short study of literature on the consumption and purchase of cannabis by 16- and 17-year-olds. The most important findings are given below.

Cannabis is by far the drug that is taken most by 16- and 17-year-olds. The use of hard drugs is much less widespread. A minority of young people have taken other drugs apart from cannabis at one time or another. The use of cannabis by young people, including 16- and 17-year-olds, stabilised during recent years. The same applies to other drugs.

Sixteen- and 17-year-olds purchase cannabis in the 'coffee-shops'(1) or through their social network. Since 1996 the role of the coffee-shop in this age group's purchase of cannabis has clearly been reduced. The role of the social network in purchasing cannabis has increased in the meantime. Nevertheless, no important swing seems to have taken place in local cannabis markets. This is said to be because the social network often gets the cannabis for 16- and 17-year-olds from the coffee-shop, and some of the young people still purchase it there themselves.

On the grounds of the information available, it is not possible to state with any certainty whether 16- and 17-year-olds are more likely to come into contact with hard drugs and criminal situations or dangerous situations by purchasing cannabis via their social network. Neither do we know how young people feel about purchasing more through their social network and less from the coffee-shop. Finally, it is not certain whether any relationship exists between the increased demand for help in the care and treatment of drug addicts and raising the minimum age. Further research is necessary in order to obtain clarity on these questions.

All in all, the available information creates the impression that up till now raising the age limit for entering coffee-shops has not had any detrimental side effects for 16- and 17-year-olds: neither the consumption statistics, nor the data on purchasing behaviour show any alarming trends.

(1) A shop where the sale of softdrugs is tolerated

Gebruik en aanschaf van cannabis door 16- en 17-jarigen

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The Hague, WODC, 2002
Onderzoeksnotities, no. 2002/7