

CONCLUSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In its resolution 59/160 of 20 December 2004, on the control of cultivation of and trafficking in cannabis, the General Assembly requested UNODC to perform a global “market survey” of cannabis. The present review has highlighted the limits of our knowledge of world cannabis markets today. While cannabis is the world’s most commonly consumed illicit drug, there are several factors that limit our understanding of the global cannabis market, many of which are subject to clarification through further research and the promotion of international standardization:

- The various cannabis products are ill-defined and this makes international comparisons based on existing records difficult. This is partly a consequence of the inherent variability of the plant and partly due to the rapidly changing nature of the world’s diverse consumption cultures. In developed countries in particular, however, there is a need for standardization of terminology, in particular with regard to distinguishing high-potency sinsemilla from less potent herbal cannabis. User surveys would benefit if they were to distinguish, at the very least, between consumption of cannabis herb and consumption of cannabis resin.
- The share of the market commanded by high-potency cannabis remains to be determined. This question could be clarified by both greater precision in household drug-use surveys and by proper randomization of cannabis samples submitted for national potency testing.
- Many countries of the world, including some of the most advanced, are incapable of estimating the scale of cultivation in their own territories. There is a need for standardized methodologies for making this assessment.
- The methods used for calculating the volumes of cannabis seized by law enforcement agencies need to be documented and standardized, in particular for the handful of countries responsible for the bulk of the seizure statistics.
- While the present article suggests some rough rules of thumb, there is a need for a better understanding of the productivity of the cannabis plant. Average yields resulting from the various cultivation styles should be determined and claims of multiple productive seasons in tropical areas further investigated.
- It is well known that cannabis users “clean” the seeds and stems from the cannabis they purchase on the lower end of the market. In order to

reconcile supply-side and demand-side estimates, it is necessary to know how much product weight is lost in that process.

- The rate at which both casual and cannabis-tolerant users consume the drug is in need of further documentation, as is the question of cannabis “dosage”.
- Further examination is required of the growing share of cannabis users in treatment populations and whether dysphoric episodes are becoming more common in countries where high-potency cannabis is becoming more common. Qualitative research could clarify the linkage between high-potency consumption and dysphoric episodes.
- The role of cannabinoids other than THC in the recreational cannabis experience should be further investigated and the social impact of the varying availability of distinct chemovars in different geographic locations explored.

Despite the widely held notion that cannabis has been exhaustively researched, large gaps in our understanding remain. Given that an estimated 4 per cent of the world’s population consumes the drug each year and that in several countries the majority of young people have tried it, cannabis remains a topic about which we cannot afford to be ignorant.