

Both the range of drugs and drugs markets are expanding and diversifying

The impact of high-potency Delta 9 THC and related products, such as Delta 8 a chemical variant of Delta-9 THC is a pressing concern as we witness an alarming surge in aggressive marketing practices targeting youth and young adults. Greater accessibility and a growing global market are driving a demand for higher-potency and novel products.

The advent of high-potency and Delta 8 cannabis products poses new risks, with concerns about heavy use exacerbating the mental health crisis in young adults. The lack of regulation on the concentration of THC in products is also a significant issue, as cannabis products today can have THC levels as high as 90%.

The aggressive marketing tactics employed by the industry aggravate the issue by targeting youth through enticing packaging, flavors, and social media campaigns. A 2022 study shows a 700% increase in global online searches for delta-8 THC. The data indicates that searches were ten times higher in the United States than other countries. The ease of accessibility, coupled with persuasive advertising, creates an environment where experimentation is becoming more likely, putting young people at greater risk.

The emergence of Delta 8, often marketed as a legal and milder alternative, adds another layer of complexity. Delta 8 has been associated with adverse effects like confusion, anxiety, and hallucinations. A publication by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine warns that Delta-8 products may raise the risk of developing or worsening mental health conditions, and that they can contain toxic by-products and heavy metals, which can have detrimental health effects.

The consequences on mental health are profound. Research studies have consistently shown a concerning link between the use of high-potency THC products during adolescence and adverse mental health outcomes. A systematic review and meta-analysis published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that regular use by adolescence is associated with a higher risk of developing depression and suicidal behavior later in life. The same review indicates a significant association between cannabis use and an increased risk of psychotic disorders, especially in vulnerable populations such as young adults. Several studies have indicated a link between cannabis use and suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts in young adults. A study from the US National Institutes of Health found that cannabis use was associated with increased risks of thoughts of suicide, suicide plans, and suicide attempts in young adults aged 18-35, regardless of whether they were also experiencing depression. Another study analyzing US trends in the association of suicide ideation with cannabis use among adolescents ages 12–17 found that cannabis use prior to age 17 was associated with an increased risk of suicidal ideation and behaviors in adulthood.

These findings underscore the urgency of addressing the implications of high-potency THC and related products on the mental well-being of our youth.

The increased global access and availability of high THC Delta 9 and novel Delta 8 products to adolescence and young adults is a growing concern as many underestimate the strength and potential danger, leading to accidental exposures and overuse.

To address this issue, we must advocate for comprehensive education and prevention strategies based on empirical evidence. Our youth need accurate information about the risks associated with high-potency Delta 9 THC and novel Delta 8 products. Additionally, in countries that allow for the sale of these products, we must urge for responsible advertising practices to mitigate the impact of marketing on youth initiation.

By fostering open conversations supported by research and data, we can work towards evidence-based policies that create a safer environment for our youth and young adults, free from the undue pressures of aggressive marketing and the potential pitfalls of high-potency Delta 9 THC and related products.