



Teheran University of Medical Sciences

School of Medicine

Title:

Clarification of psychiatrists' opinions about non-medicalization of cannabis use disorder: a qualitative study

A dissertation submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
M.S. Degree in Medical Ethics

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Year: 2025
Register number: ۴

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD) is a significant challenge in public health and treatment policy. While medicalization has increased patient access to treatment services, it has also led to dependency on pharmacological treatments and unnecessary healthcare costs in some cases. Therefore, this study aimed to explore psychiatrists' perspectives on the demedicalization of CUD.

Methods: This qualitative study was conducted with 16 experienced psychiatrists specializing in addiction, selected using purposive sampling with maximum variation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which continued until data saturation was reached. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis based on the Graneheim and Lundman approach.

Results: Analysis of the psychiatrists' perspectives led to the identification of 4 main themes: Advantages of demedicalization, Disadvantages of demedicalization, Social and cultural impacts, and Policy recommendations and interventions. These themes encompassed 11 categories and 21 subcategories. The most significant advantages of demedicalization included reducing social stigma, increasing social acceptance of cannabis users, enhancing individual responsibility, reducing dependency on pharmacological treatments, and addressing the socio-economic roots of cannabis use. The main disadvantages involved neglecting medical needs, the use of non-professional and inappropriate treatments, increased substance use, and heightened risky and secretive behaviors. Regarding policy recommendations, psychiatrists emphasized shifting from criminalization to supportive treatment models, expanding psychological services, providing social support services, and preventing the dangerous normalization of cannabis use.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that demedicalization of CUD can have significant benefits, including reducing social stigma and improving social acceptance of patients. However, it may also present challenges such as neglecting medical needs and increasing substance use. Therefore, a comprehensive approach integrating medical, psychological, and social interventions is essential to minimize potential negative consequences.

Keywords: Demedicalization, Cannabis Use Disorder, Qualitative Study, Psychiatrists