

PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL CONTROL OF MARIJUANA AMONG ZAGREB STUDENTS – FINDINGS ON GENDER DIMENSION

Fran Miškić^{1, *}, Erik Brezovec² and Nikša Dubreta¹

¹University of Zagreb, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture
Zagreb, Croatia

²University of Zagreb, Faculty of Croatian Studies
Zagreb, Croatia

DOI: 10.7906/indecs.21.6.5
Regular article

Received: 6 October 2023.
Accepted: 22 December 2023.

ABSTRACT

The article presents the results regarding differences between attitudes of male and female students towards, as well as patterns of marijuana use among undergraduate and graduate students in Zagreb. Attitudes towards marijuana were examined within the framework of re-evaluating the analytical utility of Becker's mechanisms of social control – availability, secrecy, and morality. Through a survey conducted among Zagreb students, it was revealed that the differences in usage patterns between male and female students are negligible and align with findings from other studies indicating that the disappearance of gender differences is most pronounced among young adults. On the other hand, the perception of Becker's mechanisms of availability and morality between male and female students is expressed in terms of statistical significance, but with a limited impact – female students consider marijuana somewhat more available, but they are also slightly more committed to official, morality-based definitions of marijuana harm. Regarding the mechanism of secrecy, differences between male and female students were not identified, and students continue to perceive concealing marijuana use and its effects as important. As confirmed in other research, Becker's mechanism of availability proves to be poorly functional in the context of social control of marijuana, while the mechanism of secrecy remains analytically useful in conditions of marijuana illegality, regardless of its decriminalization in Croatia. The somewhat stronger expression of the morality mechanism in female students leaves room for exploring gender-biased aspects of social control.

KEY WORDS

marijuana use, students, gender differences, social control

CLASSIFICATION

APA: 2900

JEL: O17

*Corresponding author, *η*: fran.miskic@fsb.hr; +385 91 9558000;
Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, I. Lučića 1, HR – 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia

INTRODUCTION

Social control over marijuana use in Croatia is currently integrated within the framework of its decriminalization policy. The cultivation, processing, possession, and trade of marijuana are illegal, while the sanctioning for possession of small quantities for personal use must be handed to misdemeanor proceedings [1, 2]. As a part of misdemeanor procedures, possession of marijuana for personal use is penalized with fines, typically around the legally prescribed minimum [3], occasional urine testing, and some forms of informal social control in cases involving minors. The use of marijuana for medical purposes is not prohibited but is only recognized in the treatment of the most severe illnesses [4, 5], and it entails the use of approved marijuana-based medications under medical supervision.

Despite the decriminalization of personal use, marijuana remains illegal in Croatia, and it is often portrayed as harmful and undesirable in public discourse. This is frequently emphasized with remarks about the increasing percentage of active ingredients in newer strains, marijuana dependence, dangers to mental health, and the widespread recreational use of the substance [6].

Sex and gender differences and their social implications regarding marijuana use in Croatia can be discerned from multiple studies and official drug reports. Most of these studies indicate that sex differences decrease among young adults (18-25 years old) who have tried, or those who occasionally or regularly use marijuana [7-9]. However, the differences remain relatively stable in the general population of Croatia [10-12]. Some studies have also explored and interpreted sex and gender differences in motivational aspects of marijuana (and other drug) use [13], family background, and through the application of other theoretical concepts [11]. Reduction in differences can be partially observed in terms of the broader normalization of marijuana use [6] – use prevalence in Croatia is slightly higher than the European average [14], it is visible in public spaces, and its social representation suggests a tolerable offense [6].

Essentially, these findings align with results from studies in some other countries. It appears that the gender gap is no longer as pronounced as it used to be, and its diminishing is increasingly evident in the rising lifetime prevalence of marijuana use among women. However, research findings suggest that men still lead not only in lifetime prevalence but also in frequency and quantity of substance use [15-18]. Men are more likely to consume marijuana in various ways and prefer more potent strains [19]. On the other hand, the reduction in the gap was indicated with the elaboration of the normalization thesis in the 1990s, according to which, for the context of drug use, gender is no longer a valid predictor with a tendency to further decline in importance for understanding drug use in the 21st century [20]. This has been repeatedly confirmed in subsequent studies [21-25] and studies highlighting the need for gender dimensions of marijuana and other drug use to move beyond examining differences between men and women in prevalence, attitudes, and opinions and to address questions emerging from gender studies themselves [18-19, 21, 26, 27].

Given that marijuana in Croatia is somewhat normalized but still illegal, existing studies have investigated the extent to which common mechanisms of social control of marijuana are functional in such circumstances. As part of research conducted among undergraduate and graduate students in Zagreb [6], we examined the obtained results regarding the gender dimension to determine if there are differences in the perception of mechanisms of social control of marijuana between male and female students. In addition to the perception of social control mechanisms, in order to enable a more precise elaboration on gender differences, results on the age of first consumption, frequency of use, reasons for use, user self-image, and preferred use environment were obtained.

In developing social control mechanisms, we relied on Becker's sequential model of deviance [28], which was developed precisely on marijuana users and whose analytical utility

has been questioned in recent studies and in times of global marijuana use normalization. Considering the stages through which a person develops into a marijuana user for pleasure, Becker indicated the importance of neutralizing mechanisms of social control, which manifest in hindering marijuana availability, suppressing its visibility in wider society, and morally discrediting both the use itself and its users. According to Becker, changes suggesting the success of neutralization occur simultaneously across all three mentioned mechanisms but vary in stages in the marijuana user's career, depending on whether they are beginners, occasional or regular users [28].

The hindrance of marijuana availability occurs through its prohibition and relegation to the realm of illegality, making supply more unstable and insecure. As with availability decrease, use becomes less stable and constant, this also involves the precaution of avoiding sanctions. Beginners and occasional users will rely significantly more on chance or acquaintances with other users, while regular users will focus on establishing a more stable connection with and will purchase marijuana from dealers as in any other commodity-cash transaction. On the other hand, concealing marijuana use allows users to avoid formal and informal sanctions, i.e., condemnation of such behavior by non-users. In cases of frequent use, this includes avoiding non-users themselves and directing daily activities toward the user group or subculture. Finally, neutralizing the mechanism of moral discredit of marijuana use involves rejecting the notion of use as an immoral and health-harming practice. Discarding prevailing stereotypes in drug use and rationalizing one's own activities are prerequisites for future use. The success of neutralization is reflected in the ability to interpret conventional notions about marijuana in terms of uninformed outsider views that are not resonant with user perceptions based on their own and wider user experience [28].

Through developments in the decades following Becker's original study, marijuana use has expanded both in terms of lifetime prevalence and the fragmentation of the user population. What is more, changes in the social context of marijuana use are evident in the rise of more tolerant social policies that vary from decriminalization to legalization in many countries in the 21st century. Recent studies often interpret the weakening influence of Becker's mechanisms of social control over marijuana use from the perspective of normalization theory [29-31] and place it in the realm of tolerable offenses [32]. For example, a study on marijuana use among Canadian students conducted shortly prior to its legalization by Hathaway shows that the question of availability and supply is mediated by informal friend networks, where reciprocity and sharing facilitate the use as a normalized and shared practice. However, some authors [33] point out that Becker's mechanisms at the beginning of the 21st century are more persistent than is commonly thought and express the persistence of the prohibitionist paradigm in drug policy [34].

In a study conducted among Zagreb students, the question of the perception of Becker's mechanisms of social control of marijuana use was at the forefront. In this paper, we examined these results through questioning prevailing findings in available studies on the gender dimension of marijuana and other drug use in Croatia [7-14] – in terms of frequency, different forms of prevalence, and motives for use. Two additional questions about the perception of one's own user status and the preferred use environment were included to provide some basic information about patterns of use.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

As part of the research on patterns of marijuana consumption and the perception of social control among Zagreb students, determining gender differences is one of the focal points of

this study. Therefore, it was necessary to establish the frequency and motives of use, as well as the elements of marijuana use patterns mentioned in the introduction, with respect to gender. Subsequently, we tried to determine whether the obtained findings suggest statistically significant differences between male and female students. Finally, we wanted to explore to what extent theoretically formulated Becker's mechanisms of social control of marijuana use are applicable concerning any gender differences in their perception. The research questions can be summarized as follows:

RQ1: Do the obtained findings on forms of frequency, motives, and selected patterns of marijuana use among Zagreb students show differences with respect to gender?

RQ2: Are there differences in the perception of Becker's mechanisms of social control among male and female Zagreb students?

Regarding the first research question, a descriptive analysis was accompanied by an independent samples t-test. Concerning the second research question, the reliability of the constructed scales measuring the perception of availability, secrecy, morality/beliefs was first determined with the Cronbach alpha coefficient, followed by an independent samples t-test.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire constructed for the research had three parts. The first part consisted of questions about the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics: gender, place of residence, field of study, number of household members at the place of residence, employment status, monthly budget, and parental education status. In the second part, for respondents who used marijuana at least once in their lives, elements of marijuana use were examined, with findings from previous Croatian studies - frequency and motives of use - supplemented by the perception of personal user status. Additionally, among students who have never used marijuana, the frequency of encounters with marijuana and potential motives for trying it were investigated. The third, final part of the questionnaire used for the analysis in this study focused on the perception of social control mechanisms directly aimed at preventing and discrediting marijuana use, according to Becker. These mechanisms include availability, secrecy, and morality, as elaborated in the introductory part of this article.

The scales measuring the perception of availability, secrecy, and morality contained statements about the relevant aspects of marijuana consumption (Table 1) and the procedure of their validation is already described in detail in another article [6]. Agreement and disagreement with the offered statements were expressed on a five-point scale – from “1 – strongly disagree” to “5 – strongly agree”.

SAMPLE AND RESEARCH CONDUCT

The population covered by this research consists of Zagreb students – from the University of Zagreb, the Croatian Catholic University, private universities, and colleges. The research used a quota sample comprising 645 Zagreb undergraduate and graduate students. Quotas were determined based on gender and the field of study. Sample construction (and quota determination) was based on available data on the characteristics of the population of Zagreb students, participants in higher education programs in the city of Zagreb. As shown in Table 2, the sample consisted of 58,9 % female students and 38,3 % male students, with 2,8 % of students not identifying within the classical dichotomous division into men and women. Therefore, since this research sought to determine the possible existence of differences between genders, the mentioned 2,8 % ($N = 18$) of participants were excluded from the sample, resulting in a final sample of 627 Zagreb students.

In addition to gender, the quota sample also included the field of study. The distribution of students in the sample across various fields of study was as follows: 39,1 % in social sciences,

Table 1. Becker's mechanisms of social control.

	Statements	N	\bar{x}	SD
Availability (Cronbach $\alpha = 0,790$)	Marijuana is relatively easy to obtain today.	645	4,21	0,961
	Usage of marijuana is not uncommon at social gatherings (parties, concerts, outings, weddings, etc.).	645	3,93	1,079
	It is not easy to obtain marijuana because it is illegal.	645	1,83	0,939
	Police actions make obtaining marijuana more difficult.	645	2,45	1,083
Secrecy (Cronbach $\alpha = 0,850$)	If someone uses marijuana, it is better not to talk about it with colleagues at work.	645	3,55	1,127
	Marijuana consumers are wise not to let their broader environment find out.	645	3,42	1,086
	In certain situations, marijuana consumers must be careful not to be noticed.	645	3,83	1,039
	Marijuana consumers need to be careful not to let their parents find out.	645	3,29	1,049
Morality (Cronbach $\alpha = 0,808$)	The current marijuana prohibition is morally justified.	645	2,90	1,271
	Statements about the harmful consequences of marijuana consumption are exaggerated.	645	2,94	1,184
	I trust psychiatrists and other experts when they talk about the harmfulness of marijuana.	645	3,39	1,157
	Consuming marijuana is an appropriate way to relax from stress.	645	2,90	1,152
	I consider most negative information about marijuana consumption that I heard in school to be accurate.	645	3,06	1,165
	Frequent marijuana consumption is an escape from reality.	645	3,73	1,157
	Ultimately, the law prohibits marijuana because its use can be harmful.	645	3,44	1,192
	It's not worth it for me to violate social norms.	645	3,07	1,119
	Occasional marijuana consumption is not harmful.	645	3,45	1,124

*The nuanced statements are not included in the final version of the questionnaire for greater internal consistency of the scales.

Table 2. The sample structure according to gender.

	F	%
Men	247	38,3
Women	380	58,9
Other	18	2,8
Total	645	100,0

29,9 % in technical sciences, 12,4 % in biotechnical and biomedical sciences, 9,3 % in humanities, and 9,3 % in natural sciences (the quotas for students from interdisciplinary and artistic fields were not defined due to their negligible numbers). Despite these quotas, the sample is non-probabilistic, i.e., convenient.

Moreover, the specificity of the sample, consisting exclusively of the student population, inevitably limits the generalizability of findings to a broader population, such as young adults in general. The student population is characterized by frequent redefinition of categories such as “desirable” and “undesirable”, stemming from fundamental aspects of the student lifestyle.

Some authors [35-37] suggest that impending employment demands, dynamic changes in group environments, and greater susceptibility to external influences contribute to the non-crystallization of attitudes among students.

However, despite these acknowledged limitations, the sample composed of a student population can still be employed to test and identify the boundary conditions of the theory [37]. Considering the importance of changes in the group environment for dimensions such as availability, secrecy, and morality, along with the flexibility of attitudes and the need for frequent reassessment of conventional beliefs, specificities of the chosen sample are presumed to be plausible.

Finally, similar studies have established that the university serves as a social space conducive to researching the gender and drug use dimensions in an environment primarily adapted to young adults, some of whom do not use drugs [27, 30].

The data were collected using a combination of two survey completion techniques: Mobile Assisted Personal Interview (MAPI) and paper/pencil (PAPI). MAPI was the primary technique, with students accessing the survey on their smartphones or personal devices via a link or QR code in Google Forms format. In cases of technical difficulties during the MAPI technique, the PAPI method was employed, and researchers manually entered the data into the database. Surveys were distributed and completed at the beginning of lectures in collaboration with various professors at Zagreb faculties. The average duration for survey completion was 15 minutes, and students were informed about the purpose and objectives of the research before participating. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and students could discontinue survey completion at any time. The data collected through the survey questionnaire were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical software.

RESULTS

Addressing the first research question involved a descriptive analysis of specific marijuana use patterns among male and female Zagreb students. Regarding the prevalence of marijuana consumption, the data in Table 3 show that slightly more than half of male (54,7 %) and female (56,3 %) students reported having consumed marijuana at least once in their lives. A small percentage chose not to answer (1,6 %), and 43,7 % of males and 42,1 % of females stated they have never used marijuana. Consequently, 135 male students and 214 female students provided responses to further questions directly related to marijuana use, while other male ($N = 108$) and female ($N = 160$) students were asked about their future prospects of trying marijuana.

Table 3. Have you ever consumed marijuana in your life?

Answer	Men		Women		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Yes	135	54,7	214	56,3	349	55,7
No	108	43,7	160	42,1	268	42,7
I don't want to answer	4	1,6	6	1,6	10	1,6
Total	247	100	380	100	627	100

With regard to students who have consumed marijuana at least once, more than half of male students (51,1 %; $f = 69$) and female students (55,1 %; $f = 118$) identified socializing and recreation as the primary motivation for marijuana consumption. Meanwhile, 26,7 % of male students ($f = 36$) and 29,0 % of female students ($f = 62$) cited relaxation and stress relief as the main drivers for marijuana use.

Concerning the preferred social setting for marijuana consumption, a majority of both male (89,7 %; $f = 121$) and female students (90,6 %; $f = 194$) indicated a preference for consuming marijuana “with 1-2 friends” or “with a group of friends/acquaintances”.

Among students who have never consumed marijuana in their lives, the prevailing reason is a lack of interest in trying it. Specifically, 82,4 % of male students ($f = 89$) and 76,3 % of female students ($f = 122$) expressed no desire to try marijuana. This indicates that a total of 78,7 % of surveyed male and female students who have never used marijuana have no interest in trying or consuming it. Moreover, the proportion of individuals expressing a desire to try marijuana (10,4 %) is slightly lower than of those who are uncertain about it (10,8 %).

Additionally, among male and female students who have never consumed marijuana in their lives, nearly one-fourth of the surveyed students (25,7 %) have never been in a situation where marijuana was consumed. This includes 27,8 % of male students and 24,4 % of female students. Combining this group with those who have been in such a situation only once, more than a third of surveyed male (38,9 %) and female (38,8 %) students have either never or only once found themselves in a situation involving marijuana consumption.

Regarding self-perception of user status among students who have tried marijuana once or occasionally and those who use it frequently (Table 4), almost half of male students (49,6 %) see themselves as non-users, while 45,3 % of female students share the same self-perception. Notably, 7,3 % of female students perceive themselves as frequent users, and a similar percentage applies to almost every tenth male student (9,6 %).

Table 4. How do you perceive your marijuana consumption?

Answer	Men		Women		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Regular user	13	9,6	16	7,5	29	8,3
Occasional user	55	40,7	101	47,2	156	44,7
Non-user	67	49,6	97	45,3	164	47,0
Total	135	100	214	100	349	100

Through a descriptive analysis, the frequency of marijuana consumption in various forms of prevalence was determined. Table 5 reveals that, in the last month, more than a third of respondents (35,8 %), including both female (35,1 %) and male (37,8 %) students, have consumed marijuana. In addition, at the time of the survey, every fifth participant (20,3 %) had used marijuana in the last week – 23,0 % of male and 18,7 % of female students. Nevertheless, it is notable that the proportion of male and female students who last consumed marijuana more than a year ago (compared to consumption in the last month) is almost equal.

Table 5. When was the last time you consumed marijuana?

Answer	Men		Women		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
In the last week	31	23,0	40	18,7	71	20,3
In the last month	20	14,8	35	16,4	55	15,8
In the last year	28	20,7	55	25,7	83	23,8
Over a year ago	52	38,5	82	38,3	134	38,4
Not sure	4	3,0	2	0,9	6	1,7
Total	135	100	214	100	349	100

In order to determine whether the observed gender differences between male and female students are statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results indicated that, in none of the examined dimensions of use – consumption, perception of user

status, frequency, motives, and tendencies regarding consumption – there is not a statistically significant difference between male and female students in Zagreb.

To explore whether there are differences in the perception of Becker's social control mechanisms among male and female students in Zagreb, the internal consistency of the scales measuring the mentioned control mechanisms – availability, secrecy, and morality – was checked. For this purpose, the reliability analysis was performed for each of the scales based on the results obtained from the overall sample ($N = 645$). Through this procedure, certain items were excluded from the final version of the questionnaire (see Table 1), and the Cronbach's α coefficient for each of the final scales is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Analysis of scale reliability.

	Cronbach α
Availability	0,790
Secrecy	0,850
Morality	0,808

In general, the descriptive analysis of the perception of marijuana availability (see Table 7) shows that 77,0 % of males ($f = 190$) and 87,9 % of females ($f = 334$) agree with the statement that obtaining marijuana is relatively easy nowadays. Therefore, approximately 4 out of 5 surveyed students (83,5 %; $f = 524$) believe that marijuana is very accessible today, meaning it is easily obtainable.

Table 7. Marijuana is relatively easy to obtain today.

Answer	Men		Women		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Strongly disagree	11	4,5	8	2,1	19	3,0
Disagree	10	4,0	1	0,3	11	1,8
Neither agree nor disagree	36	14,6	37	9,7	73	11,6
Agree	76	30,8	153	40,3	229	36,5
Strongly agree	114	46,2	181	47,6	295	47,0

Through a descriptive analysis of the perception of the moral justification of the current marijuana prohibition (see Table 8), a nearly even distribution was observed among female students regarding agreement or disagreement with the statement. That is, one-third of the surveyed female students agree ($f = 128$), another third disagree ($f = 126$), and the final third neither agree nor disagree ($f = 126$) that the current marijuana prohibition is morally justified. Concerning male students, the distribution is similar but with a higher proportion (39,7 %) expressing disagreement with the statement ($f = 98$). Therefore, the largest proportion (36,1 %) of all surveyed students believes that the current marijuana prohibition is not morally justified ($f = 226$). However, almost a third of their peers either think otherwise (31,9 %) or cannot align with either of these two positions (32,1 %).

Table 8. The current marijuana prohibition is morally justified.

Answer	Men		Women		Total	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Strongly disagree	54	21,9	55	14,5	109	17,4
Disagree	44	17,8	73	19,2	117	18,7
Neither agree nor disagree	75	30,4	126	33,2	201	32,1
Agree	38	15,4	78	20,5	116	18,5
Strongly agree	36	14,6	48	12,6	84	13,4

In case of availability, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency is 0,790, and the final version of the scale consists of two items, with a possible result range from 2 to 10 –

a higher score implies a higher perception of availability. An independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference ($t(625) = -2,763$; $p = 0,006$) in the perception of marijuana availability among Zagreb students, between men ($M = 7,91$; $SD = 2,077$) and women ($M = 8,34$; $SD = 1,602$), Table 9. Among women, availability as a social control mechanism is perceived as far less effective. In other words, compared to male students, female students consider marijuana to be more easily accessible. However, the difference in mean values equals $-0,430$ (95 % CI: $-0,736$ to $-0,124$) and is considered small (eta squared = $0,012$).

Table 9. Comparison of availability perception

	Men ($f = 247$)		Women ($f = 380$)		t-test	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Availability	7,91	2,077	8,34	1,602	-2,763	0,006*

*significant at the level $p < 0,01$

With regard to the morality mechanism (see Table 10), a high Cronbach alpha coefficient of internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = 0,808$). In this regard, the final version of the scale consists of 5 items, allowing a range from 5 to 25. A higher score indicates greater inclination toward conventional beliefs and attitudes regarding marijuana use. Once again, a statistically significant difference was found between male and female students in Zagreb ($t(625) = -3,351$; $p = 0,001$), with a small effect size (difference equals $-1,191$ with 95 % CI: $-1,889$ to $0,493$; eta squared = $0,017$). Concerning statements reflecting conventional, institutionally grounded attitudes toward marijuana, women ($M = 16,93$; $SD = 4,265$) expressed a higher level of agreement than men ($M = 15,24$; $SD = 4,477$).

Table 10. Comparison of morality perception.

	Men ($f = 247$)		Women ($f = 380$)		t-test	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Morality	15,24	4,477	16,93	4,265	-3,351	0,001*

*significant at the level $p < 0,01$

In the scale measuring the perception of secrecy, the highest Cronbach's alpha coefficient of internal consistency was identified ($\alpha = 0,850$). However, there was no statistically significant difference between female and male students in Zagreb (see Table 11).

Table 11. Comparison of secrecy perception

	Men ($f = 247$)		Women ($f = 380$)		t-test	P
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Secrecy	13,96	3,662	14,23	3,179	-0,952	0,341

DISCUSSION

The presented results suggest a decrease in gender differences in marijuana use and its social control perception among undergraduate and graduate students in Zagreb. In the findings, there is little evidence of disparities, and where statistically significant, the impact size is small.

The findings on marijuana use align with results from research conducted in other countries, suggesting a reduction in gender disparities in the lifetime prevalence of use among young adults [20-25]. The findings on weekly, monthly, and yearly prevalence also indicate a lack of gender differences – where differences are identified, they are extremely small, unstable, and inconsistent. This holds true for students who have never consumed marijuana; gender differences are mild in terms of the desire to experiment and almost negligible when it comes to the absence of encounters in situations where marijuana is being consumed. Finally, gender differences are weakly expressed in terms of self-perception among users – in the case of regular users, men slightly outnumber women, and for occasional users, the difference is minimal.

The findings on the perception of Becker's mechanisms of social control suggest the existence of gender differences in the assessment of the mechanisms of availability and morality, with an absence of differences in the perception of the mechanism of secrecy. In questions related to the perception of the latter, it was revealed that students, in general, view concealing marijuana use as an important factor in neutralizing social control. In other words, concealing use from parents, colleagues, the broader social environment, etc., is considered important by more than two-thirds of the surveyed students, regardless of gender and user status. In this regard, Becker's mechanism of secrecy has proven to be a persistent and still relevant aspect of marijuana use.

On the other hand, female students perceive marijuana as more accessible and prevalent in group settings compared to their male counterparts. Conversely, male students tend to neutralize conventional, predominantly negative, and harmful stereotypes about marijuana more than female students. However, despite statistical significance, the impact size in both cases is small, suggesting caution in interpreting these differences.

The obtained findings partially stem from sample specificity, given that Croatian students represent a subset of young adults with prevailing liberal attitudes toward drug use [38]. While sharing liberal values and higher social awareness with their non-student peers, students are generally of higher social standing, residing in better conditions in larger urban centers. For an extended period, Croatian students have led in liberal drug attitudes, which resulted in their being a distinct subset with higher psychoactive substance consumption, particularly marijuana [38].

Perhaps the most significant finding in the conducted research indicates that user status is a more critical predictor for assessing the mechanism of morality than gender affiliation [6]. This suggests a substantial extent of statistical difference, showing that non-users are more inclined towards official (school and psychiatric) definitions regarding the harmfulness of marijuana and the moral justifiability of its prohibition. Finally, the obtained results align with findings from other studies that indicate a reduction in gender differences in marijuana consumption among young adults [7, 21-25]. This is confirmed here, specifically in the gender dimension, regarding the assessment of the effectiveness of Becker's mechanisms of social control.

However, the presented results and derived conclusions should be viewed in light of their limitations. The dimensions of gender and sex in marijuana use and social control perception require more careful consideration and detailed exploration. The obtained results offer initial insights that need further supplementation with research grounded in a gender perspective. This applies to patterns of use, which should be complemented with knowledge about differences in preferences in how marijuana is mainly consumed, expected effects of use, preferences for specific usage environments, incorporation of use into personal identities, and more. In short, it is necessary to investigate to what extent these and other potential questions about usage patterns are gender-generated and whether they manifest through the acceptance or rejection of patriarchal values still prevalent in Croatian society [39]. Similarly, the obtained results on gender differences in the perception of Becker's social control mechanisms need close critical observation. For instance, the fact that, in the presented results, women perceive marijuana as more accessible than men does not provide information on whether they acquire it themselves or how easy it is for them to do so. Therefore, it remains to be determined how the more pronounced perception of accessibility observed here manifests in concrete ways, as other research indicates significant differences in how men and women obtain marijuana and how they perceive such situations [18, 19, 26, 27]. The same applies to the neutralization of the secrecy mechanism (experiences of concealing use from gender-biased aspects of social control of deviance) and morality (again, gender-biased judgments on the morality and harmfulness of marijuana use).

Finally, limitations extend to the sample, preventing generalizations to other young women and men, although results from other studies suggest trends of significant reduction in the lifetime

prevalence of marijuana use primarily among young adults but not among other adult men and women. Moreover, the study's participant population consists of undergraduate and graduate students in Zagreb, excluding students in other cities and universities. This leaves room to assume that local social, economic, and cultural specificities may manifest in different characteristics of student life.

REFERENCES

- [1] –: *Misdemeanor law*. In Croatian. Official Gazette, 107/2007, 39/2013, 157/2013, 110/2015, 70/2017, 118/2018. (In Croatian).
- [2] –: *Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code*. In Croatian. Official Gazette 144/2012, https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2012_12_144_3076.html, accessed April 17th 2023,
- [3] Pakšić, B.H. and Kovač, N.: *Misdemeanour law at the service of drug suppression in the Republic of Croatia: drug possession without distribution intention*. In Croatian. Pravni vjesnik **36**(1), 79-98, 2020,
- [4] Duraković, D. *Medical Marijuana*. In Croatian. *Jahr* **7**(2), 331-342, 2016,
- [5] Markus Klarić, M.; Klarić, D.; Brborović, O. and Capak, K.: *Marijuana – Abuse and Medical Use*. In Croatian. Journal of Applied Health Sciences **6**(1), 137-151, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.24141/1/6/1/13>,
- [6] Dubreta, N.; Brezovec, E. and Miškić, F.: *Perception of Social Control and Marijuana Use Among Zagreb Students*. In Croatian. *Jahr* **14**(2), 2023,
- [7] EMCDDA: *Perspectives on drugs. Characteristics of frequent and high-risk cannabis users*. https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/pods/frequent-cannabis-users_en, accessed September 17th 2023,
- [8] Thanki, D., et al.: *Prevalence of daily cannabis use in the European Union and Norway*. EMCDDA, 2012,
- [9] Buljubašić, A.; Luketin, L. and Bekavac, A.M.: *Attitudes of young people toward addiction*. In Croatian. Croatian Journal of Health Sciences **3**(1), 7-15, 2023,
- [10] Glavak Tkalić, R.; Miletić, G.-M. and Sakoman, S.: *Prevalence of Substance Use Among the General Population: Situation in Croatia and Comparison with Other European Countries*. Social Research **22**(4), 557-578, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5559/di.22.4.01>,
- [11] Puharić, Z., et al.: *Intergenerational and Gender Differences in Sexual Life and Addictive Substance Use*. Archives of Psychiatry Research **56**(1), 49-62, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.20471/may.2020.56.01.05>,
- [12] Croatian Institute of Public Health: *Abuse of addictive substances in the general population of the Republic of Croatia*. In Croatian. https://www.hzjz.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Uporaba_sredstava_ovisnosti_u_opcoj_populaciji_RH_2019.pdf, accessed September 7th 2023,
- [13] Glavak Tkalić, R.; Sučić, I. and Dević, I.: *Motivation for substance use: why do people use alcohol, tobacco and marijuana?* Social Research **22**(4), 601-625, 2013, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5559/di.22.4.03>,
- [14] EMCDDA: *Statistical Bulletin 2023 – Prevalence of Drug Use*. https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/stats2023/gps_en, accessed June 24th 2023,

- [15] Cranford, J.A.; Eisenberg, D. and Serras, A.M.: *Substance use behaviors, mental health problems, and use of mental health services in a probability sample of college students*. Addictive Behaviors **34**, 134-145, 2009, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2008.09.004>,
- [16] Carliner, H., et al.: *The widening gender gap in marijuana use prevalence in the U.S. During a period of economic change, 2002–2014*. Drug Alcohol Dependence **170**, 51-58, 2017,
- [17] Cuttler, C.; Mischley, L.K. and Sexton, M.: *Sex differences in cannabis use and effects: A cross-sectional survey of cannabis users*. Cannabis Cannabinoid Research **1**(1), 166-175, 2016,
- [18] Greaves, L. and Hemsing, N.: *Sex and Gender Interactions on the Use and Impact of Recreational Cannabis International*. Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health **17**(2), No. 509, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17020509>,
- [19] Hemsing, N. and Greaves, L.: *Gender Norms, Roles and Relations and Cannabis-Use Patterns: A Scoping Review*. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health **17**(3), No. 947, 2020, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17030947>,
- [20] Parker, H.; Aldridge, J. and Measham, F.: *Illegal Leisure: The Normalization of Adolescent Recreational Drug Use*. Routledge, London, 1998,
- [21] Measham, F.: *"Doing gender"-"doing drugs": conceptualizing the gendering of drugs cultures*. Contemporary Drug Problems **29**, 335-373. 2002,
- [22] Aldridge, J.; Measham, F. and Williams, L.: *Illegal leisure revisited*. Routledge, London, 2011,
- [23] Rotermann, M. and Langlois, K.: *Prevalence and correlates of marijuana use in Canada*. Health Reports **26**(4), 10-15, 2015,
- [24] Legleye, S., et al.: *Is there a cannabis epidemic model? Evidence from France, Germany and USA*. International Journal of Drug Policy **25**, 1103-1112, 2014,
- [25] Johnson, R.M., et al.: *Past 15-year trends in adolescent marijuana use: Differences by race/ethnicity and sex*. Drug and Alcohol Dependence **155**, 8-15, 2015,
- [26] Dahl, S.L. and Sandberg, S.: *Female Cannabis Users and New Masculinities: The Gendering of Cannabis Use*. Sociology **49**(4), 696-711, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0038038514547896>,
- [27] Kolar, K.: *Women's Use of and Access to Illicit Cannabis: An Investigation of Gendered Norms among College Students in Canada*. Sex Roles **84**(7-8), 418-438. 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01176-4>,
- [28] Becker, H.: *Outsiders: Studies in Sociology of Deviance and Social Control*. Free Press, New York, 1963,
- [29] Coomber, R.; Moyle, L. and South, N.: *The Normalisation of Drug Supply: The Social Supply of Drugs as the "Other Side" of the History of Normalisation*. Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy **23**(3), 255-263, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3109/09687637.2015.1110565>,
- [30] Hathaway, A.D., et al.: *"It's Really No Big Deal": The Role of Social Supply Networks in Normalizing Use of Cannabis by Students at Canadian Universities*. Deviant Behavior **39**(12) 1672-1680, 2018, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2017.1411047>,

- [31] Duff, C.: *On the Legacy of Normalization*.
Addiction **115**(7), 1378-1381, 2020,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/add.15000>,
- [32] Hathaway, A.D.: *Marijuana and Tolerance: Revisiting Becker's Sources of Control*.
Deviant Behavior **18**(2), 103-124, 1997,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01639625.1997.9968048>,
- [33] Hallstone, M.: *Updating Howard Becker's Theory of Using Marijuana for Pleasure*.
Contemporary Drug Problems **29**(4), 821-846, 2002,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/009145090202900408>,
- [34] Measham, F. and Shiner, M.: *The Legacy of 'Normalisation': The Role of Classical and Contemporary Criminological Theory in Understanding Young People's Drug Use*.
International Journal of Drug Policy **20**(6), 502-508, 2009,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2009.02.001>,
- [35] Sears, D.O.: *College Sophomores in the Laboratory: Influences of a Narrow Data Base on Social Psychology's View of Human Nature*.
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **51**(3), 515-530, 1986,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.51.3.515>,
- [36] Ashraf, R. and Merunka, D.: *The Use and Misuse of Student Samples: An Empirical Investigation of European Marketing Research*.
Journal of Consumer Behaviour **16**(4), 295-308, 2017,
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/cb.1590>,
- [37] Peterson, R.A. and Merunka, D.R.: *Convenience Samples of College Students and Research Reproducibility*.
Journal of Business Research **67**(5), 1035-1041, 2014.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2013.08.010>,
- [38] Ilišin, V., ed.: *Sociological portrait of Croatian students*.
Institute for Social Research, Zagreb, 2014,
- [39] Galić, B.: *Changes in Sexist Discourse in Croatia? A Comparison Between 2004 and 2010 Research Results*. In Croatian.
Social Ecology **21**(2), 155-178, 2012.