

Parental Practices and Communication Styles Regarding Cannabis: Challenges in View of
Cannabis Decriminalization in Malta

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Abstract

In December 2021, Malta's Responsible Use of Cannabis Act was signed, allowing small amounts of cultivation and possession for personal use. This study aimed to identify what the current parental views, communication styles, practices, and challenges are regarding cannabis use in adolescents in Malta and if they are changing in light of the new cannabis legislation. The study utilized a mixed methods explanatory sequential design. First, a survey was completed by 100 parents of Year 11 students from Government, Independent, and Church schools. Next, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven female participants who volunteered their participation via the survey. The findings suggest that parents had generally unfavorable views concerning adolescent cannabis use and the new cannabis legislation. Parents appeared to take an authoritative approach to cannabis use and communicated the risks associated with using cannabis. Parents were open to discussing cannabis with their adolescent children, and the change in legislation did not affect their willingness to communicate about it. Parents were divided in their willingness to be honest about past use. The biggest challenge the participants faced was the normalization of cannabis use following the new legislation and how this would affect their adolescent children. The results of the study have important implications regarding the importance for policymakers to clearly communicate details of the new cannabis law as well as the effects of the new law on the perceptions, attitudes, and behavior of the younger generation over time, particularly underage cannabis use

Keywords: Cannabis, New Legislation, Parents, Communication, Adolescence

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List of Acronyms

ARUC: Authority on the Responsible Use of Cannabis

ESPAD: The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs

PCC: Parent-child connectedness

PST: Primary Socialization Theory

RML: Recreational Marijuana Legalization

SCT: Social Cognitive Theory

THC: Tetrahydrocannabinol

Chapter 1: Introduction

On the 18th of December 2021, a number of changes occurred regarding the use of cannabis in Malta, including an increase in the amount one can legally carry for personal use and the allowing of organizations, or cannabis associations, to be established. Evidence as to whether a change in the legal status of cannabis leads to an increase in use among youth is mixed (Cerdá et al., 2017), with some studies finding minimal effects (Mason et al., 2015) while others found an increase in use (Kerr et al., 2018). However, more favorable attitudes are observed among youth in states with legalized cannabis (Fleming et al., 2016). In Malta, cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug, and drug use is most prevalent among younger adults (EMCDDA, 2019). Cannabis use during adolescence may lead to a number of negative outcomes (Tapert et al., 2008; Chen et al., 2009).

Parents are fundamental in shaping how and if adolescents use cannabis and the attitudes adolescents hold toward cannabis (Lyons et al., 2021) and are thus the target of this study. Parent-adolescent communication may be a promising method of drug prevention (Pettigrew et al., 2017), as research shows that different communication styles and parenting practices may lead to different adolescent cannabis-use outcomes (Napper et al., 2016; Calafat et al., 2014; Pettigrew et al., 2017). The disclosure of past cannabis use by parents and parents' own cannabis use can also affect adolescent cannabis use outcomes (Kerr et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2016). Parents may face new challenges and concerns about adolescent cannabis use in light of a change in the legal status of cannabis (Jones et al., 2020).

Rationale

Analyzing how parents communicate about cannabis use and their parenting styles can provide valuable insights for developing prevention strategies that address parents' concerns about the most effective communication strategies to prevent or delay initiation. Additionally, it can help in developing harm-reduction strategies. With the normalization of

cannabis use taking place (Duff et al., 2011), it may be important to understand whether parental views, communication, and practices are changing in light of cannabis decriminalization and elaborate on what new concerns and challenges parents face as a result of this change. In the qualitative interviews, understanding how parents communicate and what parenting strategies they use when talking about cannabis use may elaborate on the data gathered from the questionnaire, as well as lead to an increased understanding of what is being said about cannabis by parents.

This study used a mixed methodology of surveys and semi-structured interviews. Most of the research in this area tends to be either purely quantitative or qualitative in nature, with mixed methodologies being rare. Kosterman et al. (2016) note that there is a lack of research on how the legal status of cannabis affects parenting practices, and this is an important area of investigation. Given the recent changes in the legal status of cannabis, there is a dearth of research on parental communication and practices related to adolescent cannabis use in Malta, making this study a potentially valuable contribution to our evolving understanding of cannabis use in Malta.

Aims

This study aimed to identify what the current parental views, communication styles, and practices regarding cannabis use in adolescents in Malta are and if/how a change in the legal status of cannabis was affecting parental views, communication, and practices regarding cannabis use among adolescents in Malta. It also sought to understand the new challenges parents face in light of cannabis decriminalization in Malta. The study thus aimed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What are the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?

- 2) What are the current parenting practices and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the new cannabis legislation?
- 3) (How) is the new cannabis legislation posing new challenges for parents?

The survey sought to answer what the current parental views, communication, and practices regarding cannabis use in adolescents in Malta are and if parents are facing challenges in light of the change in legislation. The statements were designed to inquire whether, for example, parents take an authoritarian approach (zero-tolerance) to adolescent cannabis use. As to whether a change in the legal status of cannabis is affecting parental communication and practices regarding cannabis use in adolescents in Malta, statements such as “I am more likely to talk about cannabis use with my child after the change in legislation” were posed to parents to see if a change is indeed occurring. Furthermore, the survey inquires whether parents are facing new challenges in light of the new cannabis legislation.

The qualitative interview was built on the results obtained in the survey. For example, a question in the interview was, “The survey showed that parents feel it is important to be honest about their past cannabis use if asked by their adolescent child. Why do you think this is the case, and do you agree?” These questions were designed in such a way as to both expand on the survey results as well as elaborate on any significant findings.

Key terms

Communication

Communication can be defined as the transmission of information (e.g., attitudes and values) from one person to another. In other words, “communication involves transmission of verbal and non-verbal messages. It consists of a sender, a receiver and channel of communication” (Munodawafa, 2008). This definition focuses on the sender and the receiver, which in this study are the parents and adolescents, respectively. Communication could also be defined as “the process of generating meaning by sending and receiving verbal and non-

verbal symbols and signs that are influenced by multiple contexts” (Jones, 2018). This definition captures the importance that multiple contexts have on communication. This thesis focuses on the communication occurring between parents and adolescents, specifically within the context of decriminalized cannabis use.

Parenting Styles

Parenting style refers to the level of responsiveness and control between a parent and their child. Different levels of these factors may lead to four different parenting styles, which are authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful (Baumrind, 1966; Estlein, 2021). This study aims to assess the current styles being used by parents in Malta when communicating about cannabis and if these styles are changing in light of a change in legal status.

Decriminalization

“Decriminalization is the de jure removal of criminal sanctions for the possession of drugs for personal use. These sanctions may be replaced by civil penalties ...by measures that divert people towards health or social support ... or by no sanction at all” (Stevens et al., 2019). Cannabis was already decriminalized in Malta before changes in legislation but was decriminalized to a much larger extent following the recent change in legislation. The extent and details of this change are discussed in the literature review.

Methodological Approach and Justification of Approach

This study used a mixed methods approach of quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews. This approach is advantageous as it allows researchers to leverage the benefits of each method while compensating for their respective limitations, such as using interviews to address the absence of participant voices in quantitative research (McCrudden et al., 2021). The rationale for mixing methods for this study was to triangulate the data in order to assess the degree of convergence or divergence in findings (Greene et al., 1989).

The particular mixed method chosen was an explanatory sequential design, meaning the quantitative results were expanded using qualitative methods. This design was chosen as I intended to explain significant, non-significant, surprising, and outlier results obtained in the survey (Creswell & Plano, 2018) using interviews. I feel this added depth and nuance to the study, and significant results emerged that would not have been possible had the study focused solely on qualitative or quantitative research methods. Thematic analysis was used to extract themes from the qualitative data. Thematic analysis was chosen as it is considered to be an essential method for qualitative analysis and is a versatile research technique that has the potential to offer a rich and holistic understanding of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is ideal for this study as it is often utilized to explore the perspectives of different participants, highlighting both commonalities and discrepancies between participants and producing unanticipated insights (King, 2004).

Mixed methods research is characterized by the integration of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, which are blended to complement each other throughout the research process (McCrudden et al., 2021). This means that both approaches informed and enriched each other as the study progressed. This process contributed to “inferential transparency” (Creamer, 2018), which helped explain how the findings from one type of data supported or supplemented the findings from the other type of data and how the conclusions were reached based on the overall analysis. In other words, it explicitly outlines how each approach contributes to the study’s findings.

Overview

This dissertation begins with a review of the literature concerning the current legal status of cannabis, the prevalence of cannabis use amongst adolescents in Malta, and the challenges parents face in light of a change in the legal status of cannabis. The review also discusses the impact parents have on adolescent socialization in general and adolescent

cannabis use specifically, covering various parental communication styles and parenting practices and the impact these factors have on adolescent cannabis use. Literature concerning the impact of parental disclosure of past cannabis use and current use of cannabis by parents is also discussed, along with the biopsychosocial consequences of adolescent cannabis use.

The methodology chapter follows the literature review, covering philosophical assumptions and the worldview adopted for this mixed methods study. It also details the steps involved in data collection and data analysis for both the quantitative survey and qualitative interviews, as well as the steps involved in integrating the two data sets using an explanatory sequential design. Ethical considerations involved in the design and implementation of both the survey and interview are also discussed.

The chapter after that displays the results obtained in the survey and the themes obtained from the interview. The integration of the results from the survey and interview is displayed, followed by a discussion of the results obtained and a concluding chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is first to outline the prevalence of cannabis use amongst adolescents in Malta and the consequences of adolescent cannabis use. The development of international cannabis policy is discussed next, along with the legal cannabis reform in Malta. Challenges for parents in the face of changes in cannabis legislation are also discussed. The role that parents play in the socialization of adolescents as well as the role parental communication and practises play on adolescent cannabis using trajectories, are evaluated. Finally, limitations found in the literature are explored.

Prevalence of Cannabis Use amongst Adolescents

The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) in 2019 reported 2% of Maltese students, who were 13 years old or younger, reported using cannabis, which is slightly less than the average of 2.4% for other European countries. 12% of Maltese students had used cannabis at some point in their life (4% below the European average), and 4.7% of Maltese students had used cannabis in the last 30 days of when the study was conducted, with 11% having used cannabis in the last 12 months. The prevalence of high-risk cannabis users was 3.4% of Maltese students at the time of the study (EMCDDA, 2020).

Consequences of Cannabis Use

The percentage of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) found in cannabis has grown substantially. In the 1980s, the concentration of THC was approximately 4%. In 2020, that number had risen to around 21.5%, which could heighten the chances of adverse effects and possible addiction (Ryan & Ammerman, 2017). In 2023, the percentage of THC may be even higher.

Adolescence is a vital stage of development that includes physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioural change (Gray & Squeglia, 2017). Adolescence is also linked to a wide range of risk factors that are associated with an elevated likelihood of drug

abuse (Hawkins et al., 1992) and thus is often the target of prevention efforts because one of the most significant factors leading to later substance abuse and misuse is early age of initiation (Newton-Howes & Boden, 2016). Oetting and Donnermeyer (1998) state that adolescence is a crucial period when the potential to pick up deviant norms is at its peak and has been termed “the age of susceptibility” (Miller-Day, 2008). Adolescent cannabis use has been linked with impairment in a variety of areas, including impairment in cognitive functioning (Tapert et al., 2008), an elevated risk of developing dependence to cannabis (Chen et al., 2009), increase rates of school dropouts (Lynskey et al., 2003) a heightened risk of developing a psychotic illness (Stockman, 2009; Arseneault, 2002), an elevated risk for later life depression (Schoeler et al., 2018), an elevated likelihood of taking part in risky behaviours (Guo et al., 2002), and an increased likelihood of self-harm (after accounting for psychopathology and other substance use) (Denissoff et al., 2021).

However, Tapert et al. (2008) state that it is “unknown whether marijuana use caused or contributed to these effects.” Initiating cannabis use at an early age may indicate a propensity to engage in risky behaviours in general (Hopfer et al., 2013). Moreover, the challenge of controlling for confounding variables that can influence both the use of cannabis and negative consequences can weaken the validity of any inference made regarding the negative impact of adolescent cannabis use.

How is international cannabis policy developing?

Policymakers across the globe are seeking out alternatives to dealing with illicit drug use that go beyond the criminalization of simple drug possession (Stevens et al., 2019). This search was likely catalyzed by the United Nations body (UNCEBC, 2019), which called for all members to push for alternatives to criminalization and conviction when appropriate, which includes decriminalizing drug possession for personal use.

In the 1970s, there was a reduction of penalties associated with personal consumption of cannabis, with Italy and Uruguay eliminating criminal penalties associated with personal use. Decriminalization and depenalization of cannabis occurred in many countries during the following 50 years or so (Kilmer & Pacula, 2016). Depenalization refers to the “reduction of the use of existing criminal sanctions,” while decriminalization refers to the “de jure removal of criminal sanctions for the possession of drugs for personal use.” Diversion, meanwhile, involves directing “people away from criminal sanctions and towards educative, therapeutic or social services” (Stevens et al., 2019). In Europe, moving towards decriminalization of drug possession has led to reduced levels of incarceration and may arguably decrease the barriers involved in seeking treatment by reducing stigma (Hughes et al., 2018). Dramatic policy changes during the past six years have radically altered the international cannabis market, including a significant increase in the markets for medical cannabis. And an increasing number of countries have legalized or are preparing to legalize non-medical cannabis (Bewley-Taylor et al., 2020).

Cannabis policies are being transformed on a global scale as the supply of cannabis moves from an illegal market to a legal market of “ordinary commodity” (for example, several US states, Uruguay, and Canada) (López-Pelayo et al., 2021). While the reduction of penalties for simple possession and/or cannabis use has been occurring and evolving for a number of years, the reduction of penalties linked with the selling of cannabis is a relatively new phenomenon (Kilmer & Pacula, 2016).

Legal Cannabis Reform in Malta

As of 18th December 2021, cannabis law in Malta was changed significantly. First, there was an amendment to the conduct certificate ordinance (Conduct Certificates Ordinance, 1934), which involved the deregistration of convictions that are now decriminalized or depenalized, which in this case apply to cannabis. A new authority was also

established called the Authority on the Responsible Use of Cannabis (ARUC), whose scope is to regulate cannabis use and implement harm reduction prevention and intervention strategies for cannabis use. Additionally, there were several amendments made to “The Drug Dependence (treatment not imprisonment) Act” (2015). Possessing cannabis not exceeding 7 grams does not constitute a crime as long as the individual is 18 years old and the cannabis is intended for personal use. Another notable amendment is that individuals can cultivate up to 4 plants of cannabis and be in possession of amounts not exceeding 50 grams of dried cannabis for personal use by a person 18 years old or older and within one’s own residence. Although not implemented yet, organizations (cannabis associations) can also be established with the purpose of cultivating cannabis plants for the organization’s members.

Attitudes and Behaviour Concerning Changes to Cannabis Legalization

The Flash Eurobarometer 493 (2021), which interviewed a representative sample of 25, 713 EU citizens ages 15 and over, found that overall, 62 % of participants were in favor of regulating cannabis rather than banning it outright (60% of Maltese participants were in favor of regulation). A study by Mason et al. (2015) found that a change in the legal status of cannabis had minimal effects on parent and adolescent marijuana-related attitudes and behavior. This could be due to the normalization of cannabis use taking place (Duff et al., 2011) or the fact that attitudes needed more time to shift after a change in legal status. Similar results were found after three years of legalization in Colorado, where use among adults and adolescents did not increase (Ghosh et al., 2017).

According to Kerr et al. (2018), the legalization of recreational marijuana (RML) is associated with increased use among college students, but the evidence for its effect on different age groups is inconsistent. For instance, when Washington legalized recreational cannabis, there was an increase in use by students in 8th and 10th grade, but use by 12th-grade students did not change (Cerdá et al., 2017). This increase in consumption could be due to a

shift in social norms resulting from legalization rather than a direct effect of legalization (Camarena-Michel, 2017). On the other hand, one study discovered that in Washington, cannabis use among adolescents remained stable after cannabis legalization (Dilley et al., 2019). These mixed findings indicate that the impact of RML on cannabis use may vary across different age groups.

Nevertheless, adolescents in states with RML may have more favorable attitudes toward cannabis use, such as decreased perception of its harms and more positive views towards using it, irrespective of usage rates (Fleming et al., 2016). Similar results were found by Kosterman et al. (2016), who found that approval of adult cannabis use increased after legalization, and there was also a reduction in the perceived harm of regular use. However, some argue that although the perception among both adults and adolescents that cannabis use is risky has reduced since the early 2000s, the prevalence of cannabis use among adolescents has remained relatively unchanged over the same period, with only minimal changes (Carliner et al., 2017).

Challenges for Parents

Parents disapprove of use by their adolescent children and worry that their children will be more exposed to cannabis after legalization. This concern about exposure may be due to the fact that legalization of adult-use will lead to increased availability of cannabis (opening of dispensaries) as norms in society are becoming increasingly pro-cannabis (Jones et al., 2020). More availability may further lead to more use by adolescents (Hopfer, 2014).

Parents feel compelled to communicate more with their adolescent children following changes in cannabis legalization in order to better inform them about cannabis, and parents also expressed the need to monitor their children's surroundings more closely (Jones et al., 2020). Skinner et al. (2016) found that the change in legal status resulted in mixed messages regarding the acceptability of using cannabis, and parents were worried that this would lead

to misinformation being communicated to adolescents. There is also a concern among parents that policy changes may cause adults who use cannabis to overlook its potential harm to adolescents around them, and they express concern about how limited they are in controlling the many avenues by which children could be exposed to cannabis use, such as the public and neighbors (Jones et al., 2020). This is also related to the normalization thesis (Duff et al., 2011) (explained below), which may help demonstrate how parents and their children are influenced by society's increasingly lenient attitudes regarding cannabis. Parents may face new challenges in terms of their children's exposure to cannabis use as the stigma surrounding its use decreases.

It may be difficult for parents to discuss drug use with their children given the stigma associated with drug use (Mallick, 2003) (although this stigma towards cannabis may be shifting (Jones et al., 2020)). Moreover, parents may encounter difficulty discussing cannabis with their adolescents due to the evolving legal status of cannabis worldwide and the mixed messages conveyed by media regarding its risks and benefits (Napper et al., 2016). Parents may also be confused over the law regarding cannabis, especially after a change in legal status (Mason et al., 2015). Despite this confusion, legal consequences of use are one of the most commonly focused themes in parent communication (Napper et al., 2016).

Normalization Thesis

Normalization can be described as “the movement of what had previously been a deviant and minority activity towards the mainstream” (Williams, 2016) and is characterized by more tolerant attitudes towards the activity (Asbridge et al., 2016). Hathaway et al. (2011) argue that illicit drug use carries a sense of identity and group membership, but cannabis “no longer designates a sub-group with a distinct ideology or pattern of behavior.” Hathaway et al. (2011) suggest that cannabis use is one component of an individual's life rather than a defining characteristic or primary identity, which aligns with Becker's (1963) concept of the

“master status.” However, the use of cannabis may still “evoke a deeply-rooted sense of cultural anxiety” (Hathaway et al., 2011). This may then lead to stigma, which could be seen as a tool used to punish individuals who do not conform to what society deems ‘normal’ (Hathaway et al., 2011). Despite this cultural anxiety and stigma, however, cannabis use among adolescents may become increasingly normalized (Zuckermann et al., 2021; Hathaway et al., 2015), which may create new challenges for parents. The normalization process is complex, however, and is “highly fraught with contradiction,” as in Western culture, there is a high degree of tension between tolerance and stigma regarding cannabis use (Hathaway et al., 2015). A more nuanced observation of the normalization of cannabis use may be that the status of cannabis within society could be viewed on a “normative continuum” in which cannabis is increasingly seen as more acceptable while retaining elements of social disapproval from earlier points on the continuum (Hathaway et al., 2011).

Parental-Adolescent Relationship, Communication, and Practices

Prevention researchers have stated that parent-adolescent communication is among the most effective approaches to preventing drug use (Pettigrew et al., 2017), and relationships act as “communication conduits” that allow connections to form between family members (Lander et al., 2013).

Parent-Child Connectedness (PCC)

PCC has become popular recently as a result of its purported protective effects on adolescent well-being and development (Barber & Schluterman, 2008). PCC may be defined as a child’s experiences of bonding, connection, and affection between them and their parents (Carver et al., 2016) and the extent to which this emotional bond is reciprocal and long-lasting. Lezin et al. (2004) state that although sharing similarities to attachment, the difference is that PCC recognizes that the parent-child relationship is a mutual interaction, with both parties actively engaged and involved within the relationship.

A vital component of PCC is parent-child communication which can be roughly divided into general and specific communication. General communication is evaluated in terms of satisfaction, quality, and frequency, while specific communication targets alcohol, tobacco, and drug use (Carver et al., 2016). According to Carver et al. (2016), adolescents are less likely to use drugs if they experience high levels of PCC and if the communication is effective and addresses both general and drug-use-specific topics. Additionally, adolescents tend to feel more at ease and secure when PCC is high, and communication is frequent and open. However, just communicating often is not sufficient; the quality of the communication also plays an essential role in preventing substance use. Conversely, frequent communication concerning cannabis use has been associated with adolescents perceiving their parents as more accepting of cannabis use (Napper et al., 2016).

Parental Socialization

Parental socialization plays a significant role in how emerging adults and adolescents use cannabis and the attitudes they hold about cannabis use (Lyons et al., 2021). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) may explain this role, as it proposes that parents serve as a model for their children's attitudes and behaviors. According to SCT, children learn about social norms through communication, observation, and experience within their social environment. Families provide the foundation of socialization for children, and the information children receive from their parents (explicitly or implicitly) greatly influences their views and behaviors throughout their lives (Bandura, 1986). As the legalization of cannabis and its use become more normalized and ubiquitous (Zuckermann et al., 2021; Hathaway et al., 2015), social norms and socialization surrounding its use may resemble those related to alcohol consumption. Instead of strictly prohibiting its use, harm-reduction communication may become more prevalent (Lyons et al., 2021).

Similarly, Primary Socialization Theory (PST) (Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998) states that social behaviors, whether normative or deviant, are acquired through learning and are “products of the interaction of social, psychological, and cultural characteristics, and that norms for social behaviors, including drug use, are learned predominantly in the context of interactions with the primary socialization sources.” Deviance is not simply learned when there is a decay in prosocial bonds and norms; both prosocial and deviant norms are learned through primary socialization. Prevention efforts are often informed by PST, as it highlights the impact that parental communication can have on their children’s attitudes and behavior toward substance use (Kam & Yang, 2013). Miller-Day (2002) shows that parent-child communication can act as a safeguard against the possibility of initiating early substance use by influencing adolescent attitudes and behaviors.

Parenting and Communication Styles

Baumrind (1991) classifies parenting styles and associated concepts into two distinct dimensions: parental responsiveness and parental control. Responsiveness refers to “the extent to which parents are attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to their children’s needs,” while control refers to “the extent to which parents are rigid, demanding, and confrontational in their communication with their children” (Estlein, 2021). The four parenting styles result from the combination of these two dimensions, which are authoritative (low responsiveness and high control), permissive (high responsiveness and low control), authoritarian (low responsiveness and high control), and rejecting–neglecting (low responsiveness and low control) (Estlein, 2021; Baumrind, 1966).

Authoritarian parents “shape, control, and evaluate the behavior and attitudes of the child in accordance with a set standard of conduct, usually an absolute standard” (Baumrind, 1966, p. 890). Authoritarian parenting could be defined as having strict rules with little warmth (Pettigrew et al., 2017). Strict rules also define authoritative parenting, but

authoritative parents establish limits while showing warmth and collaborating with their children (Calafat et al., 2014). Parents who are permissive “behave in a nonpunitive, acceptant, and affirmative manner toward the child’s impulses, desires, and actions” (Baumrind, 1966, p.889). Parents who are permissive do not impose control or boundaries on their children and instead allow the child to self-regulate.

Napper et al. (2016) identified three types of communication when parents discuss cannabis use with college-aged children: risk, permissive, and cannabis use communication. Risk communication refers to discussing the risks involved in using cannabis. Like permissive parenting, permissive communication involves communicating to the child that they can make their own choices about using cannabis. Permissive communication may also involve harm reduction communication, where parents do not outright forbid the use of cannabis but discuss measures their child can take if they choose to use cannabis (for example, do not get into a car with someone who has used cannabis). Cannabis use communication involves talking about cannabis use with the child (for example, legal status, opinions about cannabis use, etc.)

Although communication and parenting styles may seem intuitively related, Estlein (2021) claims that the theoretical frameworks of communication and parenting styles “rarely meet,” and he attempts to do so by conceptualizing the terms “person-centered messages” and “interpersonal cognitive complexity” (Dillard, 2008) found in responsive parenting and communication. Person-centered messages refer to the emotional and relation component found in communication, while interpersonal cognitive complexity allows individuals to understand and produce messages in varying refined and complex ways

Impact of Parental Communication and Parenting Styles

Napper et al. (2016) reported that when parents discuss cannabis use with their college-aged children, the most frequently used forms of communication were permissive communication and communication focused on risks. They found that the use of risk

communication was associated with a higher likelihood of a college student remaining abstinent from cannabis use. However, there was no significant link between risk communication and either the frequency of cannabis use or negative outcomes resulting from cannabis use. This kind of communication may also not be advantageous for individuals who have already initiated marijuana use. In addition, when risk communication occurs, individuals who have not encountered significant adverse consequences following cannabis use may view their parents as unreliable sources of information. Parental monitoring may be more effective for these students, especially in preventing heavier cannabis use (Napper et al., 2014). Low levels of parental monitoring combined with associating with cannabis-using peers may predict adolescent exposure to cannabis in college (Pinchevsky et al., 2011).

Meanwhile, greater permissive communication was linked with higher approval of cannabis use attitudes, a higher probability of non-abstinence, a higher degree of use over the past year, and a higher degree of negative consequences (however, it was not possible to draw causal inferences in the study due to its cross-sectional design) (Napper et al., 2016). In contrast to the above results, a European study found that youth who had parents who were permissive or authoritative reported drastically reduced substance use compared to parents who were authoritarian or neglectful (Calafat et al., 2014). Regardless of parenting style, it seems that warmth and bidirectional communication (communicating *with* rather than *at* adolescents) are key features in optimal parenting, but it may also depend on the cultural background in which the parent-child communication is taking place (Calafat et al., 2014).

Chaplin et al. (2014) found that when parents' communication involves discussions about drug scenarios with adolescents, adolescents had lower blood pressure responses to the topic and a reduced likelihood of using substances. In contrast, parental discussion involving rules was linked with elevated heart rate and blood pressure responses in adolescents and an elevated likelihood of using substances. Placing excessive emphasis on rules and discipline

while neglecting other areas has been associated with increased substance use in adolescents who have already initiated substance use (Ennett et al., 2001). On the other hand, Vermeulen-Smit et al. (2015) found that setting clear rules is strongly linked with a lower likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours, not only for cannabis use but risk behaviours in general (de Looze et al., 2012). Furthermore, there was an association between criticism/negative parenting and elevated cortisol responses, leading to a greater likelihood of substance use. Thus, communication involving conversations about drug use scenarios and less focus on rules and criticism may make adolescents feel more comfortable discussing drug use and may be linked to a lower degree of drug use (Chaplin et al., 2014).

Pettigrew et al. (2017) found two significant categories related to parental communication: mixed messages and the “never talked” style. Mixed messages refer to the “do as I say, not as I do” kind of communication, where parents may engage in substance use like alcohol use but prohibit use by adolescents, thus sending a mixed message. With substances like alcohol, parents may convey their disapproval of alcohol consumption while also offering safe rides home for their adolescent children after consuming alcohol (Miller-Day & Dodd, 2004). According to Reimuller et al. (2011), parents may approve of youth drinking on specific occasions or under adult supervision. “Never talked” refers to parents not addressing drug use because parents believe these conversations are unnecessary or feel a lot of uncertainty about the topic. Pettigrew et al. (2017) found that the group that reported never having talked to their parents about substance use had the highest risk of engaging in substance use.

From the adolescent’s perspective, a study showed that the most frequently used strategy was encouraging adolescents to use their own judgment in terms of substance use, with fewer than 50% of respondents stating that their parents had given them any information regarding drugs and drug use (Miller-Day, 2008). Miller-Day (2008) further argues that this

contradicts the public health message of “parents as the antidrug” and states that “parental socialization via communication is multifaceted.”

Parental Disclosure

One of the most commonly observed types of permissive communication is when parents disclose their past cannabis use and the negative consequences they experienced as a result (Napper., 2016). Parents often feel apprehensive about discussing their past drug use with their adolescent children in a way that does not condone or encourage drug use (Napper et al., 2014). Parents might believe that disclosing their own history of cannabis use during discussions with their children could enhance their credibility (Skinner et al., 2016). Research has suggested that parental disclosure may be linked with younger adolescents holding more approving attitudes toward drug use and the perception that their parents approve of it (Kam & Middleton, 2013). Parents’ disclosure of past cannabis use is linked to an increased probability of their children using cannabis (Kerr et al., 2015).

Parental Use

There is a strong link between parental substance use and their children’s use of substances (Knight et al., 2013). Children of parents who use cannabis are at a greater risk of initiating cannabis use themselves (Kerr et al., 2015). For example, Bailey et al. (2016) found that parental cannabis use and attitudes toward cannabis use were associated with their children’s substance use. Kosterman et al. (2016) found that the majority of parents in their research had experimented with cannabis at some point in their lives, with more than one-third of them having used cannabis within the last year. Friese (2017) states that adolescents may interpret their parents’ current or past use of cannabis as an indication that cannabis use is not harmful.

Jones et al. (2020) found that there are differences and similarities between cannabis-using and non-using parents in their experiences and attitudes. The majority of both types of

parents do not want their children to smoke cannabis. They also agreed that cannabis is more present in their social environment after a change in legal status. The differences between cannabis-using and non-using parents occurred when they were asked whether they were concerned about adult cannabis use at home and how comfortable they were with their youth exposure and use. Parents who use cannabis themselves were more inclined to adopt a harm reduction strategy by instructing their children on how to use it safely and how to abstain from driving while under its influence.

Mixed Results of Communication Studies and Lack of Research

While parent communication is a common way parents convey their beliefs, attitudes, and expectations concerning cannabis, there is a dearth of research in this area. Moreover, the limited studies that have analyzed how parents communicate with adolescents about cannabis have provided mixed results. The main reason could be that “communication is multidimensional and the construct has been operationalized differently across studies” (Napper et al., 2016). Communicating about substance use may not be homogenous or used in the same way among all parents and adolescents, all cultures, ages, and genders.

Miller-Day and Dodd (2004) suggest that in order to fully understand the complexity of parent-adolescent communication, it is important to examine what is being said, who is involved, when and where the communication takes place, why the communication is happening, and how the communication is conducted. Miller-Day and Dodd (2004) developed the concept of “drug talks,” which encompasses four different approaches parents use to communicate messages about substance use to adolescents. These talks reflect two variables: timing (ongoing and targeted) and directedness (direct and indirect). Findings show that directedness is more influential than timing (i.e., frequency) in preventing or reducing youth substance use. This suggests that continuous communication with adolescents

regarding substance use may not be necessary, as long as parents effectively and explicitly communicate their expectations towards their children's substance use.

Gender, Culture, and Other Factors

There may also be gender variations in parent-adolescent communication about drug use. A study found that communication with fathers may have a stronger protective effect against cannabis use in sons compared to communication with mothers, while communication with both fathers and mothers may not be effective in preventing substance use in daughters (Luk et al., 2010). Kam and Yang (2013) suggest that communication between mothers and children involving messages that discourage substance use may lead to the formation of personal norms that discourage substance use. Andrews et al. (1993) found that when mothers discuss the adverse health outcomes of using cannabis with their adolescent child, the child is less likely to use cannabis. Furthermore, warnings from mothers in two-parent households were unrelated to cannabis initiation, while warnings from fathers were linked to a higher probability of cannabis initiation, regardless of marital status.

Aside from gender differences, Sorkhabi (2005) proposes that further investigation is required to draw conclusions about the degree to which cultural elements like individualism and collectivism affect the development of children. The ideal approach to parenting could be influenced by and depend on the cultural environment in which parent-child interactions and connections occur (Calafat et al., 2014).

Choi et al. (2017) suggest that different parents use different communication styles because each family holds a unique worldview that impacts how members within the family interact and perceive their social environment and how members communicate with each other. Therefore, family-based interventions cannot be uniformly applied to all families as each family is unique and may have different needs and specific circumstances.

Conclusion

The most significant limitation found in the research is that the topic of how changes in legislation lead to changes in parenting and communication has barely been explored. Given the profound impact that parents may have on adolescents' cannabis-using trajectory, it is vital that more impetus is given to research in this area as the legal status of cannabis continues to change and evolve, along with our behaviors and attitudes towards it.

The next chapter covers the methodology used for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter covers the philosophical assumptions, worldview, and theoretical framework used to inform the study. The data collection process is then discussed, including sampling procedures, obtaining permissions and recruiting participants, recording the data, and administering the procedures. This section is followed by explaining the data analysis process, which includes preparing and exploring the data and analyzing the data. The procedures are then discussed to interpret and integrate data in the mixed method analysis.

Restating the Aims and Objectives

The study aimed to ascertain the current parental views, communication styles, and parenting practices regarding adolescent cannabis use and if these have changed or are being influenced by the recent change in cannabis legislation. The aim was also to see if parents are facing any new challenges in light of the change in legislation. A mixed methods methodology was used to satisfy these aims. The questionnaire (see Appendices A and B) was designed to ascertain what the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use are, as well as what communication styles and parenting practices are being used regarding adolescent cannabis use and if these factors have changed in light of the change in legal status. The interviews (see Appendices C and D) elaborated on the questionnaire results and provided nuance to any significant results from the questionnaire. The results from the survey and interview were then integrated to see if the results obtained in the survey were confirmed and expanded on in the interview or if data from the survey was in discordance with data obtained from the interview.

Philosophical Assumptions

This study used a critical realist ontology, which acknowledges there is a “real world” that is independent of our perceptions, theoretical assumptions and constructions, i.e., objective reality, and a constructivist epistemology which views our understanding of this

“real world” as constructed by our perceptions, i.e., subjective knowledge of this reality (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The study thus intended to find objective change in the “real world,” in this case, whether changes in legislation lead to changes in parenting practices and communication styles (quantitative survey). The study also intends to understand the subjective epistemological viewpoint of the participants, how parents view adolescent cannabis use, and any concerns they have as a result of the change in legislation (qualitative interview).

Worldview

Within Dewey’s pragmatism is the idea that, on the one hand, our experience and knowledge of the world are defined and constrained by the nature of the world. On the other hand, what we understand about the world is limited to how we interpret our experiences (Morgan, 2014). We can thus only understand the world based on our own experiences, shaped by our individual perspectives, biases, and assumptions. This idea implies that there is an objective reality, but our experience of it is limited to our subjective knowledge and understanding of it.

A pragmatic worldview goes against the “incommensurability thesis” (Ghiara, 2019) and instead focuses on “shared meaning and joint action” (Morgan, 2007), i.e., to what extent can two research fields (in this study, quantitative and qualitative) understand each other (shared meaning), and to what extent can they work together to reach the same goal (joint action). In this study, both shared meaning and joint action were utilized to reach the goal of integrating quantitative and qualitative results.

A pragmatic worldview also acknowledges that the data collected may not perfectly fit the research questions and is thus a “commitment to uncertainty” (Yvonne, 2009). This implies that findings require reflection and abductive reasoning to acquire a more holistic understanding of the data and for the integration of the quantitative and qualitative results to

occur. It is important to note that just because a pragmatist worldview goes against the paradigm wars and uses a “what works” approach to research rather than the forced dichotomy created amongst exclusively qualitative and quantitative researchers, pragmatism is “not an excuse for sloppy research and pragmatic should never be confused with expedient” (Yvonne, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The ecological systems model was used to frame this study. There are four levels in Bronfenbrenner’s model of ecological systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Taking parents as an example, the parent would be at the center of concentric circles. The microsystem is the immediate environment and/or people the parent interacts with, such as adolescents in the home. The mesosystem could be defined as the interaction of microsystems, such as the interaction between the neighborhood and the adolescent. The exosystem “characterizes links between a social setting in which the person does not have an active role and the person’s immediate context,” such as adolescent relationships with peers. Finally, the macrosystem includes the larger context in which cultural norms, policies, and laws are found (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). Each of these systems interacts with and influences the others, creating a complex web of relationships. Overall, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory was used to understand the various systems and factors that influence a parent’s development and parenting style and how these systems interact with and influence each other. Specifically, the focus was on how the macro system, which includes changes in policy and the normalization of cannabis, influences the parent’s microsystem, including communication and parenting practices used with adolescents regarding cannabis use. Put in another way, the focus is on how changes in policy are affecting the way parents communicate and use practices with their adolescent children.

Explanatory Sequential Design

A mixed methods explanatory sequential design was used in this study. Justifications for using this approach are discussed in the introduction. The first phase was quantitative, and the results were expanded upon during the qualitative interviews to help explain the quantitative results. This design was chosen because it sheds light on why the quantitative results were obtained and how they could be explained using qualitative data (Creswell, 2018). The same sample was used in the qualitative interviews as in the questionnaire. Since the purpose of using an explanatory sequential design is to enhance and elaborate upon the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2018), the most eligible participants for the qualitative interviews are those who contributed to the quantitative research. However, the number of participants was much smaller for the interviews due to logistical reasons. Enough qualitative data was collected, and significant themes were developed that expanded on quantitative results.

Data collection

Sampling procedures

The population that was studied were parents of adolescents who are in Form 5. The study included all types of parents of adolescents (including biological, adoptive, foster, and step-parents). Parents of any age, gender, and ethnicity were included in the study to include a diverse population. The schools selected were two public schools, one private school, and two church schools so as to identify whether communication styles and parenting practices differ according to school type. The study only included one private school because it was the only one that agreed to participate out of all contacted. Interest from schools was gauged by sending emails to the heads of schools asking them if they would be interested in participating in the study (see Appendices E and F). The emails also included the information letters for the questionnaires (see Appendices G and H) Schools were chosen on a first-come,

first-served basis, as not many schools agreed to participate. Since the response rate from participants was so low through the recruitment from schools, recruitment through social media (Facebook) was carried out to obtain more responses (see Appendices I and J to see Facebook post). It was specified that parents must be from a government, public, or private school and that the survey targeted only parents of adolescents in Form 5. 100 responses were gained in the quantitative study, which included all submissions, i.e., convenience sampling was used.

A note was added at the end of the questionnaire asking if any participants would like to participate in an interview, so participants were chosen from the same sample as the questionnaire (parallel sampling (Collins et al., 2007)). Participants for the interview were recruited on a first-come, first-served basis.

Obtaining Permission and Recruiting Participants

Permission was obtained from MEYR Research Ethics Committee for the government schools, from SfCE for the church schools, and individual approval was obtained from the respective private school. Approval from FREC was also obtained before recruitment began. Ethical clearance from FREC (see Appendix K) was gained on 26th January 2023 after trying to gain approval since 21st June 2022. The surveys were distributed shortly after 26th January 2023. Participants for the quantitative part were recruited by contacting heads of schools and asking them to forward the questionnaire to parents of adolescents who are in Form 5. Participants for the qualitative interview were recruited after corresponding with interested participants that contacted the researcher through the email provided at the end of the survey.

Recording the Data

The survey was created on Google Forms. Eisenberg's (2019) questions and themes were partly used to design the survey, which are:

“(1) Are parents having conversations about marijuana with their children? (2) What are parents saying to their children about marijuana? (3) What are parents doing to address or prevent underage marijuana use by their children? (4) What challenges are parents facing in the new context of legal marijuana? (5) What strategies would help parents with these challenges?” (Eisenberg, 2019)

The questionnaire had 27 questions covering demographics, policy changes and perceptions of cannabis use, parental communication, and practices regarding cannabis, parental use, and challenges for parents. Most questions involve a three-point scale, ranging from disagree, agree, or don't know. A few examples of the survey items are, “New legislation regarding cannabis has led me to having a more favorable view of teenage cannabis use” and “My child is more likely to use cannabis following the new legislation.” The sections that did not involve a three-point scale were demographic information, which asked questions about gender, age, etc., and questions about parental use, which asked about past and recent use.

Face validity was established by piloting the questionnaire and asking for feedback. Based on the recommendations of Moore et al. (2011), a questionnaire was created and piloted on 10 individuals (parents of adolescents) to check for any challenges faced when answering the questions and gather feedback as to whether the questionnaire was relevant and appropriate for what it was assessing. Any questions considered difficult to comprehend were modified, and any questions deemed irrelevant were omitted from the questionnaire. To evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the pilot survey, a statistical test was conducted using SPSS to calculate Cronbach's Alpha. The resulting value of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.683, indicating moderate reliability of the survey.

The first step of moving from quantitative to qualitative was identifying which quantitative results needed to be explored through qualitative data collection. This was

primarily done by conducting quantitative data analysis and examining the data to determine any unclear and unexpected findings that required further explanation and significant results. After the follow-up questions were designed and the interview questions were chosen, participants volunteered for the qualitative interview. Interviews were carried out, and the audio recordings were collected.

Administering the Procedures

Data collection for the questionnaire began on 26/01/2023 and ended on 10/03/2023. 100 participants answered the questionnaire. Variables were standardized by calculating the mean and standard variation for each variable. Consent was obtained from participants before the survey was answered (see Appendices L and M)

For the qualitative interviews, data collection began on 14/03/2023 and ended on 03/04/2023. The interviews lasted approximately 10-15 mins. Seven participants took part in the interviews, all of whom had adolescent children in private schools. Consent was obtained from participants (see Appendices N and O) and the information letters were distributed to the parents (see Appendices P and Q) before the interviews commenced. Interviews were recorded using a recording device when the interviews happened face to face, and the interview was recorded on Zoom when interviews occurred online. Audio for all interviews was then transcribed.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data in this mixed methods research, quantitative data were analyzed separately using quantitative methods, while qualitative data were analyzed using qualitative methods. Additionally, strategies for combining the quantitative and qualitative datasets and results were employed, resulting in a mixed methods analysis. This section outlines the data preparation process, data exploration, and data analysis.

Preparing the Data

For quantitative data analysis, the raw data gathered from the questionnaire was converted into a form useful for data analysis. The data from Google Forms were converted to an Excel spreadsheet, then uploaded onto SPSS. Responses were converted into numerical data. Data entry errors were also cleaned from the database.

Steps laid out by Castleberry & Nolen (2018) for conducting thematic analysis were followed, which include 1) compiling, 2) disassembling, 3) reassembling, 4) interpreting, and 5) concluding. The first step was compiling the qualitative data. The audio recordings were transcribed using MAXQDA. Verbatim transcriptions of the data were created. While transcribing the data, the transcription was checked for accuracy by listening to the recordings multiple times and then formatted and organized appropriately.

Exploring the Data

Exploring the quantitative data required carrying out a descriptive analysis (mean, standard deviation, variance) to identify patterns/trends in the data. Descriptive statistics were produced for all the main variables. Exploration of the qualitative data involved reading through all the transcripts to establish a holistic understanding of the data. Initial thoughts were written down as short memos in the margins of the transcripts.

Analyzing the Data

Chi-squared tests were utilized to identify and demonstrate significant associations between variables. The analysis of the quantitative data was carried out with the use of SPSS and moved from descriptive analysis to inferential analysis.

For the interviews, the second step in the thematic analysis was disassembling (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This involved taking apart the data and constructing meaningful groupings, which was done through coding. Qualitative data analysis began by coding the data on the typed transcript using MAXQDA. Code words deemed to be of interest due to their relevance to the research questions were assigned to text segments.

The next step of thematic analysis before moving onto mixed methods analysis and integration was reassembling the data, which involved grouping codes into main themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The data was reassembled by grouping the codes together based on similarities. The codes that were grouped together were carefully analyzed to check if there was a consistent underlying theme between them. The final themes were then developed, as well as subthemes with codes that provided nuance and insight into the main theme.

The next steps were the interpretation of the data and conclusions drawn from the data gathered (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). These steps were initially carried out in the results section and elaborated upon in the discussion section. Interpretation in the thematic analysis is made by drawing analytical conclusions from the established themes (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The interpretation was carried out by initially providing insight into the established themes. In the discussion, these insights are combined with data from the quantitative study and mixed methods analysis to provide implications of all the results.

Mixed Methods Analysis and Interpretation: Integration

There were three levels at which the integration of quantitative and qualitative data took place: the study design level, the methods level, and the interpretation and reporting level (Fetters et al., 2013). The integration at the study design level started with the conceptualization of the study and was accomplished by choosing a sequential explanatory framework. This involved, as explained above, gathering and examining quantitative data and subsequently utilizing the findings to guide the collection and analysis of qualitative data.

Integration at the methods level (Fetters et al., 2013) occurred through connecting, building, and merging (Creswell et al., 2011). Integration through connecting was carried out by linking the quantitative and qualitative data through the sampling procedure. In other words, the participants chosen for the qualitative interview were chosen from the quantitative

participants. Building occurred when the qualitative interview was built on the data obtained in the quantitative survey. Merging happened when the two databases were brought together for analysis

Lastly, integration happened at the interpretation and reporting level (Fetters et al., 2013) by displaying both sets of information (qualitative and quantitative) under each other. Significant statistical data obtained in the survey are displayed first, followed by quotes from the qualitative interview that help explain and elucidate the information gathered in the survey. Quantitative and qualitative data sets were also analyzed to determine the best “fit” of data integration. This analysis was carried out by determining if there was confirmation (both sets of data confirm one another), expansion (if qualitative data expanded on data gathered for the survey), and discordance (if the two data sets are inconsistent and contradict one another) (Fetters et al., 2013).

Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge the impact I had on the study in an attempt to “enhance the trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability” (Finlay, 2002) involved in my role as the researcher. This follows two of Finlay’s (2002) variants of reflexivity, which include introspection and intersubjective reflection. Introspection involved examining my own experience, personal meanings, and reactions during the study, as well as examining the experiences, personal meanings, and reactions of the participants. I was cognizant of my demeanor during the interviews and tried to remain neutral in how I reacted to participant answers when there was something I agreed with or did not agree with.

Reflexivity as intersubjective reflection (Finlay, 2002) was adopted in order to view the self in relation to the participants, i.e., how the participants viewed me. I have no way of truly knowing how participants viewed me, but asking parents what parenting and communication styles regarding cannabis use they use with their adolescent child is quite a

delicate topic. They may have felt like I was being judgemental if they had lenient and permissive parenting and communication styles regarding cannabis, and so they may have given answers that were more socially desirable.

Ethical Considerations

Respect was shown towards all participants in every aspect, from the phrasing of the survey and interview questions to the manner in which I engaged with them. Their responses were faithfully documented to guarantee that their views and opinions were valued and given due attention. Prior to conducting the research, informed consent was obtained from participants, and all details regarding the study and the potential impacts of their participation were thoroughly communicated to them. Specific authorization to capture audio recordings during the interviews was requested. Participation was completely voluntary, and no form of pressure or deception was employed. The study allowed participants to withdraw their participation at any point, and during the interview, they were given a choice to have their information removed from the research if they wished.

The study took necessary measures to ensure that participation in the research did not cause any harm or negative consequences. Topics that had the potential to cause emotional distress were avoided. The survey and interview only included questions related to the research topic, and no intrusive questions were included. Complete confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, real names were substituted with pseudonyms for the qualitative interview, and any information that could lead to identification was left out of the research. The data was safeguarded by securely storing and protecting it from unauthorized access. Appropriate, ethical, valuable, and credible research methods and data analysis techniques were selected to honor the time and effort given by the participants (Vanclay et al., 2013).

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter analyzes the quantitative and qualitative data separately and then integrates the data. By using a mixed-methods approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative data, I was able to present quantitative findings and substantiate them with the recorded experience of parents' views, parenting practices, and communication styles and the challenges they face in light of the change in cannabis legal status. This chapter is structured in such a way as to shed light on the research process. This is done by first briefly restating the rationale of the study, restating the research questions, analyzing the quantitative (using SPSS) and qualitative data (using thematic analysis) separately, and integrating the qualitative and quantitative data.

Restating the Rationale and Research Questions

Parents are key figures in influencing whether and how adolescents use cannabis, as well as their attitudes toward it (Lyons et al., 2021). One potential approach to preventing drug use in adolescents is through communication between parents and their children (Pettigrew et al., 2017). Research has shown that different parenting styles and communication strategies can lead to varying outcomes in adolescent cannabis use (Napper et al., 2016; Calafat et al., 2014; Pettigrew et al., 2017). Additionally, disclosure of past cannabis use by parents, as well as their own use of the drug, may also impact adolescent cannabis use (Kerr et al., 2015; Bailey et al., 2016). With the changing legal status of cannabis, parents may face new challenges and concerns related to adolescent cannabis use (Jones et al., 2020).

The study, thus, focused on answering the following research questions:

- 1) What are the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?

- 2) What are the current parenting practices and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the new cannabis legislation?
- 3) (How) is the new cannabis legislation posing new challenges for parents?

Analysis of Quantitative Data

Sample demographics

A total of 100 individuals (79% female) participated in the study. The mean age of the sample was 48 years ($M = 47.36$, $SD = 4.89$) (Figure 1). 62% were parents of children from a private school, 30% from a church school, and 8% from a government school. The majority of participants (89%) were married, 9% were separated, and 2% were never married. The majority of participants (98%) identified as being a biological parent, while only 2% reported being an adopted parent. 92% of the households were two parents with a child/children at home, and 8% were one parent with a child/children at home. The majority (51%) of parents were employed full-time, 22% had part-time employment, and 16% were self-employed. A small percentage of participants were homemakers (5%), students (3%), retired (1%), and unemployed (2%). The majority of the participants (58%) have completed tertiary education, followed by 26% who have completed post-secondary education and 13% who have completed secondary education. One participant completed a diploma (1%), and 2% are currently studying at the University of Malta.

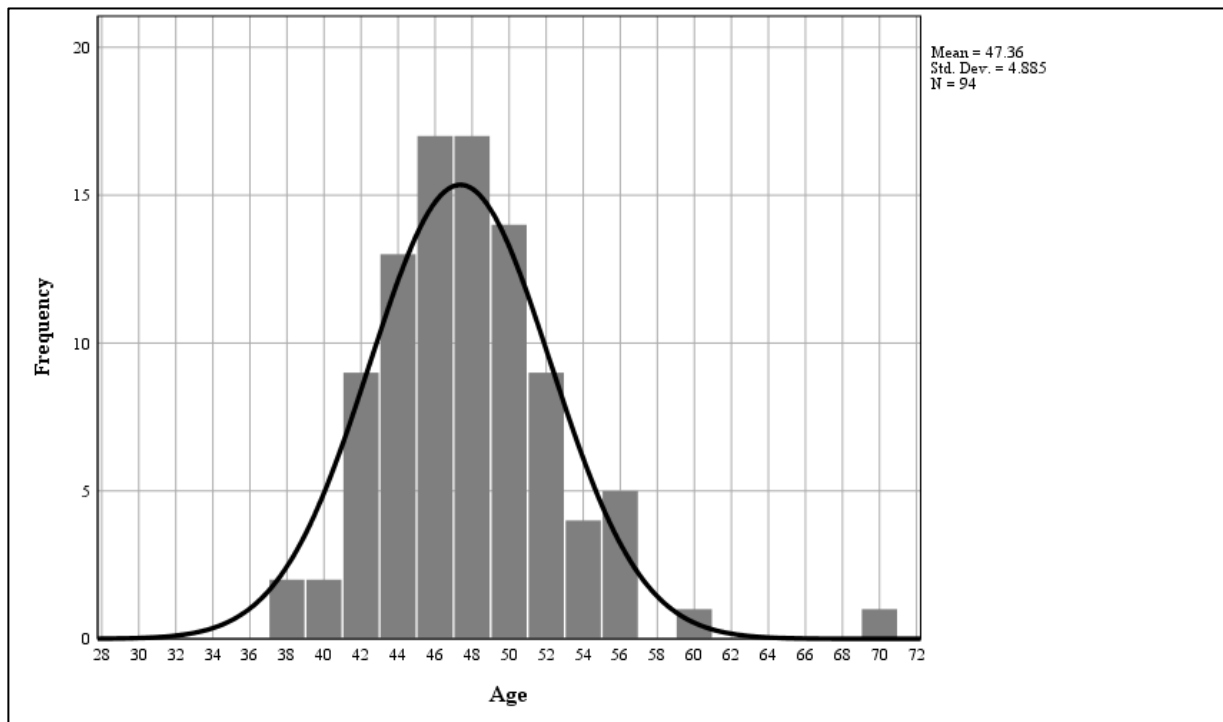
Figure 1*Age of Participants*

Table 1*Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants*

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean
School Type	Private	62	62%	
	Church	30	30%	
	Government	8	8%	
Gender	Male	20	20%	
	Female	79	79%	
	Prefer not to answer	1	1%	
Age				47
Marital Status	Married	89	89%	
	Separated	9	9%	
	Never married	2	2%	
Parent Type	Biological	98	98%	
	Adopted	2	2%	
Household composition	2 parents with child/children at home	92	92%	
	1 parent with child/children at home	8	8%	
Employment Status	Full-time employment	51	51%	
	Part-time employment	22	22%	
	Unemployed	2	2%	
	Self-employed	16	16%	
	Home-maker	5	5%	
	Student	3	3%	
	Retired	1	1%	
Level of Education	Tertiary education	58	58%	
	Post-secondary education	26	26%	
	Secondary education	13	13%	
	Presently reading for a Masters	1	1%	
	Currently at UOM	1	1%	
	Diploma	1	1%	

Table 2 carries the results of the survey obtained from 100 participants.

Table 2

Survey Results

9) I am fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis use in Malta	Agree	%	70
	Disagree	%	17
	Don't know	%	13
10) New legislation regarding cannabis has led me to having a more favorable view of teenage cannabis use	Agree	%	8
	Disagree	%	81
	Don't know	%	11
11) My child will have more favorable views regarding cannabis use following the new legislation	Agree	%	34
	Disagree	%	44
	Don't know	%	22
12) It would be easier for my child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation	Agree	%	84
	Disagree	%	8
	Don't know	%	8
13) My child is more likely to use cannabis following the new legislation	Agree	%	49
	Disagree	%	25
	Don't know	%	26
14) I am more likely to talk about cannabis use with my child after the change in legislation	Agree	%	66
	Disagree	%	23
	Don't know	%	11
15) Talking about cannabis use with my child will lead to my child using cannabis	Agree	%	3
	Disagree	%	82
	Don't know	%	15
16) If my child and I were talking about cannabis and my child asked me about my past cannabis use, I would be honest and tell them the truth	Agree	%	89
	Disagree	%	6
	Don't know	%	5

17) I have a zero-tolerance approach to cannabis use	Agree	%	47
	Disagree	%	40
	Don't know	%	13
18) I set concrete rules with regards to cannabis use	Agree	%	72
	Disagree	%	15
	Don't know	%	13
19) I have warned my child about the health consequences of using cannabis	Agree	%	91
	Disagree	%	4
	Don't know	%	5
20) My child is old enough to make their own choices regarding cannabis use	Agree	%	17
	Disagree	%	78
	Don't know	%	5
21) I monitor what my child does, where they go and who their friends are	Agree	%	96
	Disagree	%	4
	Don't know	%	0
22) My communication with my child about cannabis use is ongoing	Agree	%	55
	Disagree	%	37
	Don't know	%	8
23) My communication with my child about cannabis use is specific to certain situations	Agree	%	50
	Disagree	%	42
	Don't know	%	8
26) I find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to my child about cannabis use ever since its legal status has changed	Agree	%	11
	Disagree	%	86
	Don't know	%	3
27) I feel I have very little influence over my child's decision to smoke cannabis	Agree	%	31
	Disagree	%	57
	Don't know	%	12

As can be seen from Table 2, the most agreed upon item is 21, “I monitor what my child does, where they go and who their friends are.” The most disagreed upon item is 15, “Talking about cannabis use with my child will lead to my child using cannabis.”

Grouping variables according to research questions

Survey items 9-13 (see Table 2) addressed the research question, “What are the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?” Items 14-23 (see Table 2) were used to address the research question, “What are the current parenting practices and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?”. Items 26 and 27 (see Table 1) were used to address the research question, “(How) is the new cannabis legislation posing new challenges for parents?”. Items 24 and 25 (see Table 2) were used to check for an association between past and current cannabis users’ communication and parenting practices.

Research Question 1: What are the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?

70% of parents feel they are fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis use in Malta. 81% stated that they do not feel that new legislation regarding cannabis has led them to have a more favorable view of teenage cannabis use. 44% of parents disagreed that their child would have more favorable views regarding cannabis use following the new legislation. 84% of parents felt it would be easier for their child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation, while 49% believed their child is more likely to use cannabis following the new legislation. A number of significant associations were found between the following survey items:

Table 3*Significant Associations Found in Relation to Research Question 1*

Significant Associations	Chi-square (X²)
90% of parents (n= 63) that are fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis use in Malta agree that it would be easier for their child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 11.16, p < .05$
53% of parents (n=43) who believe that new legislation did not lead them to having more favorable views about adolescent cannabis use also believe that their adolescent child will not have more favorable cannabis views following the new legislation.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 37.04, p < .01$
68% of parents (n=23) who believed that their child will have more favorable views regarding cannabis use following the new legislation and 50% of parents (n=22) who disagreed also believed that their child is more likely to use cannabis following the new legislation.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 37.03, p < .01$
58% of parents (n=49) who believe it would be easier for their child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation also believed their child is more likely to use cannabis following the new legislation	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 26.16, p < .01$

Research Question 2: What are the current parenting practices and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?

The majority of participants agreed that: they are more likely to talk about cannabis use with their children after the change in legislation (66%), they would be honest about past cannabis use if asked by their adolescent child (89%), they set concrete rules regarding cannabis use (72%), they have warned their child about the health consequences of using cannabis (91%), and they monitor what my child does, where they go and who their friends are (96%). On the other hand, the majority of participants disagreed that talking about cannabis use with their child will lead to their child using cannabis (82%), and disagreed that

their child is old enough to make their own choices regarding cannabis use (78%). A number of significant associations were found between the following survey items:

Table 4

Significant Associations Found in Relation to Research Question 1

Significant Associations	Chi-square (X^2)
99% of parents (n=65) who are more likely to talk about cannabis use with their child after the change in legislation also monitor what their child does, where they go and who their friends are.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 6.42, p < .05$
92% of parents (n=61) who are more likely to discuss cannabis use with their children following the change in the law are also likely to be truthful about their own past use of cannabis when asked by their adolescent child.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 12.31, p < .05$
80% of parents (n=66) who did not believe that talking about cannabis use with their child will lead them to using cannabis also disagreed that their child is old enough to make their own choices regarding cannabis use.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 12.68, p < .05$
92% of parents (n=82) who would be honest about past use agreed that they would warn their child about the health consequences of using cannabis.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 18.43, p < .05$
85 % of parents (n=40) who have a zero-tolerance approach to cannabis use also set concrete rules to cannabis use. 60% of parents (n= 24) who do not have a zero-tolerance approach also set concrete rules.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 19.41, p < .01$
57% of parents (n=55) who monitor their child also have ongoing communication about cannabis with them.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 7.09, p < .05$
68% of parents (n=65) who monitor their child also feel that they are more likely to talk about cannabis use with their child after the change in legislation	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 6.42, p < .05$

Research question 3: (How) is the new cannabis legislation posing new challenges for parents?

86% of parents do not find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to their child about cannabis use ever since its legal status has changed, and 57% of parents disagreed with the statement “I feel I have very little influence over my child’s decision to smoke cannabis.”

A significant association was found between the following:

Table 5

Significant Associations Found in Relation to Research Question 3

Significant Associations	Chi-square (X^2)
85% of parents (n=73) who do not find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to their child about cannabis use ever since its change in legal status also do not think that talking about cannabis use with their child will lead their child to using cannabis.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 6.42, p < .05$

Current And Past Cannabis Use

36% of parents have taken cannabis in the past, with 60% answering no and 4% answering “Prefer not to answer.” 96% of parents have not taken cannabis in the past 30 days, with only one participant answering yes and 3% preferring not to answer. Significant associations were found between the following survey items:

Table 6

Significant Associations found between Parenting Styles and Current and Past Use

Significant Association	Chi-square (X^2)
65% of parents (n=39) who have never taken cannabis take a zero-tolerance approach to cannabis use while 61.1% of parents (n=22) who have taken cannabis in the past do not take a zero-tolerance approach to cannabis use	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 19.74, p < .01$

93% of parents who have not used cannabis in the last 30 days have also warned their child about the health consequences of using cannabis	$X^2(4, N=100) = 12.81, p < .01$
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Analysis of Qualitative Data: Thematic Analysis

This section holds the results of a thematic analysis utilized to analyse data from the interview. The main themes gleaned from the data are Uncertainty, Normalization and Openness to Communication. Each themes carries subthemes that helped elaborate and provide nuance to the results obtained.

Table 7

Themes from Thematic Analysis

THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3
Uncertainty	Normalization	Openness to Communication
SUBTHEME 1.1	SUBTHEME 2.1	SUBTHEME 3.1
Uncertainty about the new law	Concern of outside influences	Levels of self-disclosure about past use
SUBTHEME 1.2		SUBTHEME 3.2
Uncertainty about the effects and content of cannabis		Role of the adolescent
		SUBTHEME 3.3
		Situated conversations

Uncertainty

There was a lot of uncertainty around the topic of underage cannabis use, and a feeling of anxiety was felt in some participants' tone as they expressed concern about topics

related to adolescent cannabis use. The main uncertainty was felt towards the new law and the effects and content of cannabis.

Uncertainty about the new law

Participants were uncertain about what the new law entails. One participant was unsure about why there are what appear to be “shops of cannabis” around Malta and asks whether “these shops, are actually selling or not — I mean you see two shops of cannabis, in St Julians, what do they do? (P3)”

A participant who has a medical prescription for cannabis was also unsure about the new laws involving cannabis:

“so the law — even I don't know the law — and I've got this prescription. I mean, as I understand it, boy uh kids at 15/16 or not, can't and go get a prescription I'm imagining, I don't even know, I'm going to be honest” (P6).

They also express that the new law is “not very clear, at all” (P6). Participants were also unsure about whether the new law allows adolescents aged 15-16 to legally smoke cannabis, and asked whether “they still have to go through a GP no? or not? (P2)”.

“—the thing is I'm not even sure maybe I'm ignorant cos I'm not doing it all the time—is there an out— a ban on children smoking or... (P1)”.

One parent felt that there should be a clearer indication of what the new law entails “because the way it was portrayed is that it can be taken freely” (P4).

Personal Views About the New Law. The parents that expressed their personal views about the new cannabis law were against it, and they feel like it is sending the wrong message to adolescent children, stating that they “don't think it should have been legalized the way it was so, you know, I think you're giving kids another platform to mess around on” (P6). Some participants are vehemently against the new law, stating that it serves no purpose and that they should “make it illegal again”, and that “there's absolutely no need for it to be legalized,

it's totally extra in my opinion. Anyway they're gonna have it" (P3). Another participant shared similar views, comparing Malta to Amsterdam and stating "we've become worse frankly", referring to the new law as "stupid" and "banal" (P1).

Uncertainty about the effects and content of cannabis

Some participants expressed concern about the uncertainty surrounding the effects of cannabis use. One parent shared concern about the different species and strains of cannabis, and the different effects they might have.

"you don't really know what's in it." I mean these are 100 — I don't know how many different species of whatever. If—what you're smoking in India you're not smoking in Malta" (P1).

They compare cannabis use with other substances as a reference point, and state that adolescents might have a positive view of cannabis because of a lack of awareness of the health consequences of using cannabis.

"like the cigarettes, you know, you buy a pack of cigarettes you see a dying person, what is— what does cannabis do —they think it's natural. Unfortunately it's given the — it's a natural thing, but there are consequences, you know" (P1).

They also share that their worries now have extended beyond alcohol use, and that before their "worry was my son was going to get hammered on beer and— and this sort of thing" (P1). A participant also made reference to alcohol to state that there is more regulation regarding alcohol, and expresses concern and uncertainty about how cannabis and people who use cannabis are going to be monitored and regulated.

"I mean with alcohol we all know, I mean—yes you can say—you can compare alcohol to this— some people tell me "you drink" and I smoke —it's different because if I go out I know I can have a certain amount of alcohol, if I get—got caught drink driving I can be

tested—who's testing these people? I mean the van driver who comes for my children in the morning, who's testing him?" (P3).

They also share concern that "the other risk is obviously that it's beginning of something else, another addiction, they'll get bored of this and move on to another" (P3). This participant's biggest concern and uncertainty was around the mixing of alcohol and cannabis, a topic that I did not explore in this dissertation.

"They're mixing now, they're mixing—they're young, they're experimenting, they go out, they drink, they drink—they drink vodka I think more than anything else—I mean 'they drink', we all drink I mean as I said I'm not one who doesn't drink I love my drink, but now unfortunately they're mixing cannabis with drink which is—the two put together is lethal practically. And they have no clue—no one's telling them anything—but you can't check cannabis, you can check for alcohol you can never check for cannabis" (P3).

One parent was more concerned about the effect of alcohol than cannabis on adolescents.

"booze causes a lot more, you know, drunk driving, brawls. So there is that—so I'm more concerned about that—him getting into a car with someone who's wasted, him doing something stupid, because he's wasted, you know, as we all did. So I—I think that is more worrying." (P6)

The Developing Brain. Parents were concerned about the effect cannabis has on the adolescent brain, and the effect it can have on their potential:

"my biggest issue with my adolescent children are (sic) that I feel it can affect the development of their brain. I feel that it could slow them down, that they could have—their potential would—would be reduced incredibly" (P3).

"he shouldn't mess around with his m—mind, his mind is developing. It's one thing seeing, a friend who's 50 60 plus smoking dope or my—his brain is fully developed, "but

yours is developing you don't know what it's gonna do to you, so don't mess around... that is what we tell them" (P1).

Some parents used this concern as a talking point with their adolescent children, telling them that "your brain is not fully formed, you are nowhere near ready, and everything will have a negative impact" (P6). One parent was "against the use of cannabis, especially at such a young age because the brain is still forming, I feel that um it can only do harm, there's no good in it" (P3) and asks "has anyone ever checked what— what effects it can have on the brain? You know the use of cannabis—I feel it will definitely have an effect" (P3). These concerns were exacerbated by the feeling that cannabis use has become normalized ever since the change in legal status.

Normalization

Parents were also concerned about the normalization of cannabis use, and how it has become pervasive around our society since a more lenient approach to cannabis use has brought about a reduction in stigma.

"First of all there's no more stigma, around cannabis, before [pause] if somebody was smoking cannabis they wouldn't walk into my house and roll a joint, today they feel they can. Even when you rent out a property today, I mean I have to actually now put in a contract to not grow cannabis because it's not legal to do it the way you think you're doing it, and no smoking of cannabis, not just smoking, smoking of cannabis so, it's there it's around us it's everywhere so, that's why it's foreground I think" (P1).

They are also concerned that "it's just *everywhere*, everything's acceptable, they've opened every single door, there doesn't seem to be any form of discipline related to it, and if you're contrary to it, you're seen as negative" (P1). One parent was not really concerned that it is more available, rather that it is more accepted within society.

“I just obviously talk about it more now because, it’s obviously more— I wouldn’t say more available because I said before I believe it’s always been available um I just believe it’s more accepted it’s more like — it’s not like you have to hide to do it or you have to meet up at somebody’s houses now it’s just done everywhere” (P3).

They also share feel that:

“if they were trying to reduce the black-market supply there’s still a lot of it around so, with the law or without the law, even though I mean, I had a friend of mine who was very much involved in this law, you know there could have been some control— I don’t believe there is any sort of control” (P3).

One parent shares how the new law has created the perception that there are no repercussions to underage cannabis use and that it may seem to the adolescent that it is normal to smoke cannabis:

“whereas before it was totally illegal, so maybe somebody would think twice before um purchasing or—or would think, “listen, I might get myself into trouble here.” Um now, they’ll be a bit more relaxed, so they’ll be more tempted to— to try it out, you know, so if it doesn’t have any uh—Well, if it doesn’t have specific repercussions, you know” (P5).

Concern of outside influences

For some parents, the decriminalization of cannabis has led to concerns about individuals around the adolescent smoking and having an influence on them. One parent emphasises that there is no exposure to smoking within their family, but the adolescent may be exposed to it by friends of the parents.

“we are (sic) very non-smoking family, we don’t smoke cigarettes, we don’t uh, smoke at all, there’s no exposure in my family um, so if there would be they’d be outside influences and maybe one or two mothers or fathers who might smoke [pause] and they do, we have friends, my friends who smoke so my kid’s exposure I would say is to that” (P1).

A challenge may also be that they do not have control of outside influences since adults are allowed to smoke cannabis now, and they “can’t take it against other people who do it because now it’s like, they’ve got the right to do it” (P3).

“The biggest challenge is that it’s so okay to do it now, you know what I mean? There’s no, restrictions on it and— no one can— no one can stop anyone else from doing it even if they’re doing it around you, it’s like they’ve got every right to — *that* is the biggest challenge, now it’s totally acceptable to do it” (P3).

One participant shares that people who adolescents who look up to are smoking now. They also share that their concern is not necessarily that it is more available now but that it is more acceptable.

“Were (sic) we were young they weren’t—it wasn’t so much of a problem it was always around, um now it’s in their faces, and now it’s people they respect smoking as well, so all of a sudden there’s been a bit of a, shift in that, exposure in that it’s people they like, you know not — not the drop out of the class smoking—whatever...” (P1)

They are also concerned about influence coming from within the family.

“there was a lot of interest especially cos of my 19-year-old, you know asking us questions and asking us what is acceptable what is not — informing us that most of her friends now are smoking dope very openly... so then, obviously the boys who are younger, teenagers, they’re very interested because these are people they look up to” (P1).

Openness to Communication

Overall parents do not feel influenced by the new law in their openness to talk about cannabis use with their adolescent child.

“I think your relationship with your child is your relationship with your child. Things didn’t change in my house because it was legislated for or against or this and that. I mean, we would have had this conversation because a friend went to India so I don’t—I don’t

believe that cos my government has decided to do this *stupid* banal legalization, all of a sudden I'm more open with my kids. I have to be more aware. But not necessarily no my relationship is what it is." (P1)

This idea of your relationship with your child being unchanged by a change in legislation is echoed by another parent who says that "parents who would be more likely to talk to their children would do so and parents who are less likely, you know, and—and happy to sweep things under the carpet would do so as well" (P5) and that a more permissible law "wouldn't have changed the way I would have spoken to them about it" (P5). Even if there was no change in law they "definitely would have gone into it, like we've gone into a number of other different topics, which are maybe taboo or—or delicate" (P5).

Another parent shares this sentiment of talking about "taboo" or "delicate" topics, stating that a law or a change in law does not impact their openness to talk about these topics.

"...sex is illegal for him, but I still spoke to him about it because I mean, you know— so I don't think the law has encouraged or discouraged — I was always gonna talk to him about all these things" (P6).

A parent also shares the above views, stating that they have been discussing cannabis use with their children since the children were young.

"we've been speaking about it aha since the children were young really, all of them not just—but let's focus on the teens um since the teen was young we've been having these conversations, we're—we're— as parents, we don't shy away from any conversation, obviously age appropriately, but, we don't really shy away from any conversation — we don't really make anything taboo in the house." (P7)

They also feel confident in their ability to bring up the topic regardless of the change in legal status.

“...it's easy for us to explain the difference between “Okay, go ahead. It's a free for all to —listen. You can use but...Or these are the effects or it's illegal for this reason and that reason or it's legal here or there, and it's legal here or there for this.” So it's okay. I think I —I don't— I don't feel it would change the way we approach it or I don't think it could change our level of difficulty in dealing with it” (P7).

One participant also feels that relationships between adolescents and their parents are different to how they were, and that now “it's based more on um—trust, and more on honesty, and um — again it doesn't really matter whether it's before or after the— the change in legislation” (P2).

One participant felt that the new law has influenced the likelihood of talking about cannabis:

“they are influencing in a way that the subject can be easily brought up because of the policies which are in place, but then sort of I use the policies to make them aware that I said it's not, you know, you can go ahead and smoke” (P4).

Levels of self-disclosure about past use

Although parents expressed general openness to talk about cannabis use and this openness was unaffected by the new legislation, some parents were not so sure about the topic of past use. Participants shared varying views about disclosing their own past use of cannabis. P1 stated they do not feel like their child needs to know about their past use.

“I don't think they need to know for now. Issa—not even my 19 year old 20 year old knows. I don't see why... I give them what they need to know. Issa at 50 I might tell her she's 50 now “yes at your age I did” [laughs] I'm a liar” (P1).

A participant felt that what they did in the past has no relevance to how their child should act and what they should do, mainly because the circumstances and context are different.

“I’ve always taken the approach with my children “what I did um doesn’t have to affect the way you um act” I mean, circumstances are *completely* different from—from when I was an adolescent so what I did and didn’t do is—is—is not material, I don’t think to their um — to the way they behave” (P5).

A participant expressed conflict about not telling them, stating ‘I’ve thought about it, I’ve given it thought “am I being a hypocrite?” Am I, you know, double standard (sic)” (P6) and stating that they are “a bit old fashioned and I think, you know, I’m here to be his parent and give him the boundaries”. They also feel that their child is “too emotionally immature for now”. They go on to share that:

“I am also parent first, not a friend. So I have no— that’s my stance um I have spoken to him about it, I have told him “this, like alcohol, like anything, you are *too young* and immature to handle anything.” I’ve told him “I understand the curiosity to experiment. I’ve done— I told him with booze. I told him “yes, of course, I went and got drunk when I was 16. *But* I didn’t like it — So I’m not being very completely truthful with him, you know?” (P6)

Both P1 and P6 express that they feel their child will take it as an incentive i.e. if you did it at that age, then I can do it. They state that “the moment you tell your child you’ve done this at this age, then all of a sudden it’s—it’s alright” (P1). P6 feels that “he will take it down “My mom does it. So it’s okay” and that their:

“concern is he will misconstrue anything I say, as he seems to do with, you know, be home at 11 “ I thought you said half eleven” kind of thing. So I feel he’s too young, too immature, mentally, for me to have that conversation” (P6).

One participant seemed to take a middle approach, indicating they would share their past use but in a somewhat diminished manner:

“I wouldn’t be so, so frank but um [laughs] I’ll try and be a little bit more — tone it down, with my answer um [pause] but I mean any questions that they would —they have, they’re very free to come...” (P2).

On the other end of the spectrum, some participants feel that they would be completely honest about their past use as it may help educate their child about real experiences:

“I have no problem being honest about the use of cannabis, I believe that it will only put things into perspective for the children um and real experience— real experiences can bet— you can be better informed by them, you know?” (P3).

P4 shared this sentiment, taking a harm reduction view with their perspective:

“I think it is important because I mean I — I grew up in a generation where, people are suffering the repercussions of the cannabis and, people got into trouble for it in my day and — so it’s easier to be honest about it and to keep in moderation in my view”.

One participant shared that disclosing past use might make you “more approachable as a parent” and that “if you divulge that you've transgressed as well or you've made mistakes or even if it's not a mistake, you've experimented yourself, I think they would come to you with their experiments more” (P7).

Curiosity

Although only mentioned by one participant, it is worth noting the role curiosity could play in adolescents experimenting with a new substance, stating that they “believe that one of the reasons for youth, of anything, actually, not just cannabis, alcohol, cigarettes um other drugs if-if they've been —is curiosity” (P7). They feel that disclosing past use with their adolescent child:

“could also help to stifle the curiosity, for example “ah my mother said, you know, she tried it and it made her a bit paranoid, for example, that that's the effect it has on me so this

is what I tell the kids like I'm an over thinker and it just makes me more of an overthinker. I'd love for it to relax me, I'd love for there to be something that has that effect on me, but there isn't unfortunately um so I say like, you know, if it wasn't for me, I recognize it wasn't for me, and I didn't do it again, or I did this very, very limited number of times um in my life" (P7).

They also note that they could tell their children "it's okay that it's not for you, you know, you say so kind of, because that would um maybe relieve a bit of the peer pressure over it as well" (P7).

Role of the adolescent

Another limitation to the openness mentioned is that the adolescent plays a role in the relationship dynamic, and whether the conversation is brought up or not. One parent shares that "if she had to ask I'll happily you know, broach the subject, but so far if there are no questions, I don't really want to put anything in her mind" (P2) indicating that, although they are open to talk about cannabis use, it depends on the adolescent to bring up the topic.

Parents bring up adolescent characteristics to share how their adolescent's traits affect how they talk to them about it, stating that "The conversation is quite open, but it's not detailed. Um, he's never—he's reserved so he's never one to, ask too much about things he knows we don't approve of" (P1), also sharing that "we're dealing also with hormones... and we're dealing with a very *grumpy* boy" (P1).

When asked if they are facing new challenges, one parent makes reference to their adolescent's disposition, sharing that "not really, no um because my son is quite, so far, quite a prude... he's not giving me reason to — for concern" (P5).

Another parent shares that they are in a "privileged position" that their adolescent child is:

"very academically inclined um very into his history and um also loves his video games and loves to socialize with his friends. So he's only started — just started going out and

they seem to do very nerdy things, which is very sweet, you know, they go to um restaurants together or play hide and seek in a common garden or something like that so um I'm speaking from a privileged position here. I don't know how my conversation with him would be had he said that he had tried it for example or had he said that he's using it" (P7).

When mentioning peer pressure, this parent also states that the adolescent's disposition also comes into play, and that the "teen in question is very, very strong minded so again, peer pressure, I don't see it being an issue for him" but that "curiosity might be, I suppose, he's a very intuitive, very intelligent child, so perhaps he would want to, I don't know, experiment" (P7).

Situated conversations

Parents used certain situations or contexts to bring up the topic of cannabis use, indicating that their openness to communicate was also partially contingent on specific circumstances. One parent shares a situation where her adolescent child finds her medical cannabis prescription:

"So my son, this is why— saw a prescription ...even though I'm very careful because I have no intention of it being— so I explained to him that this is a medical prescription. So I spoke to him in that context, and then I also spoke to him... Okay, so when it came to the medical, I told him, I said this, you know, this is a prescription like any other. This is for my condition. This is not taken as a drug." (P6)

Another parent states that they were in another country where cannabis was legal, and used the situation to talk about cannabis use.

"We also recently came back from a trip to the... which was where cannabis was smelt everywhere, so we—we actually spoke about it quite a bit" (P5).

One parent used the change in legal status itself as an opportunity to talk about cannabis use with their adolescent child, stating that “we had a lot of talk in our family when, it was legislated and they were talking about—when the authority got set up (P1)

Another parent uses a situation where their children are exposed to the smell of cannabis to bring about the topic of cannabis use.

“We happen to have a neighbour who smokes regularly and therefore these conversations kind of came naturally before the legal thing came through. Um and the children were smelling it very often and they heard us exclaim like, “Ah this is cannabis, this is the smell of cannabis.” Or “This is the smell of marijuana” and so they were curious and they started asking. So we explained very factually actually um what it is um its effects, both positive and negative” (P7).

Although having open and situated conversations, one parent shared that “there would be the conversation at the kitchen table, but we wouldn’t, focus on it because I do believe that if I focus too much on it will become the forbidden fruit” (P1) indicating that their conversations are open but non-specific.

Conclusion

Overall parents were uncertain about the new law and were concerned about the effect cannabis has on the adolescent brain. The biggest concern it seemed was that cannabis use has become normalized and acceptable since the change in legal status, and parents were concerned about what effect this normalization will have on their adolescent children.

Parents seemed open to having conversations about cannabis and seemed unaffected by the change in legal status in their willingness to talk about cannabis use, but there were limitations and contingencies to that openness. These limitations did not come about by the change in legal status but rather by other contingencies such as the role and disposition of the adolescent. There was also a limitation on how much parents disclose about their past use.

Their reason for not disclosing past use was not one of shame or embarrassment about past use but rather what effect their disclosure would have on their adolescent child. However, parents were divided in this respect, with some parents feeling that it is important to disclose past use.

The results of this thematic analysis are now compared with the survey results to see whether there is confirmation, expansion or discordance between the results.

Mixed Methods Analysis and Integration

The following shows the integration of data from the questionnaire and interview. The results of the survey are shown followed by the qualitative results and whether the results from the interviews expand and/or confirm findings from the survey, or whether there is discordance between the two.

The Developing Brain

Parents expanded on the results obtained in the survey by explaining what health consequences they have warned their adolescent children about. 91% of parents in the survey had warned their child about the health consequences of using cannabis. Parents in the interviews explained that they mainly spoke about the developing brain and how cannabis can impact it.

Expansion: he shouldn't mess around with his mind, his mind is developing. It's one thing seeing, a friend who's 50 60 plus smoking dope or my — his brain is fully developed, "but yours is developing you don't know what it's gonna do to you, so don't mess around" (P6)

Confirmation: the other thing arguments, as I said, I've always used is "your brain is not fully formed, you are nowhere near ready, and everything will have a negative impact." (P6)

Uncertainty about the new law

70% of parents in the survey stated they are fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis.

Discordance: so the law — even I don't know the law — and I've got this prescription. I mean, as I understand it, boy uh kids at 15/16 or not, can't and go get a prescription I'm imagining, I don't even know, I'm going to be honest (P6)

Discordance: The fact that it is legal, has confused me. Because [pause] I don't think — first of all let's go back —not "I don't think", the law is not very clear, at all. (P6)

Discordance: they still have to go through a GP no? or not? (P2)

Discordance: —the thing is I'm not even sure maybe I'm ignorant cos I'm not doing it all the time—is there an out— a ban on children smoking or... (P1)

Levels of disclosure

89% of parents in the survey shared that they would be honest about past cannabis use if asked by their adolescent child.

Discordance: No, I've never been honest I've lied through my teeth... I give them what they need to know (P1)

Discordance: at the age of 18, 19 and even younger I never touched a cigarette or cannabis so they needn't know anything about that I give them what they need to know. Issa at 50 I might tell her she's 50 now “yes at your age I did” [laughs] I'm a liar. (P1)

Discordance: you know the moment you tell your child you've done this at this age, then all of a sudden it's—it's alright (P1)

Discordance: What I didn't tell him is that I have often uh used marijuana recreationally in the past, and I have no intention of telling him (P6)

Discordance: my concern is he will misconstrue anything I say, as he seems to do with, you know, be home at 11 “I thought you said half eleven” kind of thing. So I feel he's too young, too immature, mentally, for me to have that conversation. (P6)

Discordance: I'm a bit old fashioned and I think, you know, I'm here to be his parent and give him the boundaries, you know, to help him um it's— I've thought about it, I've given it thought “am I being a hypocrite?” Am I, you know, double standard, and my end— And there, it should be noted, their father doesn't agree with me... I think he's too emotionally immature for now. Even though he can be very mature in some ways, you know, he will take it down “My mom does it. So it's okay.” I feel. (P6)

Discordance: I've always taken the approach with my children “what I did um doesn't have to affect the way you um act” I mean, circumstances are *completely* different from from when I

was an adolescent so what I did and didn't do is— is—is not material, I don't think to their um — to the way they behave. (P5)

92 % of parents in the survey (n=82) who would be honest about past use agreed that they would warn their child about the health consequences of using cannabis.

Expansion: I think it is important because I mean I — I grew up in a generation where, people are suffering the repercussions of the cannabis and, people got into trouble for it in my day and — so it's easier to be honest about it and to keep in moderation in my view (P4)

Confirmation: I have no problem being honest about the use of cannabis, I believe that it will only put things into perspective for the children um and real experience— real experiences can bet— you can be better informed by them, you know? (P3)

Expansion: I feel that, first of all, it makes you more approachable as a parent, if you — if you divulge that aha you've transgressed as well or you've made mistakes or even if it's not a mistake, you've experimented yourself, I think they would come to you with their experiments more (P7)

Openness to Communicate

The majority of parents (86%) in the survey did not report experiencing increased difficulty or discomfort when discussing cannabis use with their children, despite the change in its legal status.

Confirmation and Expansion: I think nowadays it's quite different the way... parent's relationships are with their children, I think it's based more on... trust, and more on honesty, and ... again it doesn't really matter whether it's before or after the— the change in legislation (P2)

Confirmation and Expansion: I don't think the legislation would have affected the ease or the comfort. I think parents who would be more likely to talk to their children would do so and

parents who are less likely, you know, and—and happy to sweep things under the carpet would do so as well (P5)

Expansion: it's no more difficult it's less difficult to talk to our children about it so I agree um as I said I don't bring up the subject specifically but since it — now in the eyes of the children I feel that it's treated in the same way as alcohol and cigarettes... so I feel I need to approach the subject and — because of the misconceptions of the law (P4)

66% of parents in the survey stated they would be more likely to talk to their child about cannabis use after the change in legislation. Contrary to the survey results, however, most parents in the interviews did not feel that they are more likely to talk about cannabis.

Discordance: I think your relationship with your child is your relationship with your child. Things didn't change in my house because it was legislated for or against or this and that. I mean, we would have had this conversation because a friend went to....so I don't—I don't believe that cos my government has decided to do this stupid banal legalization, all of a sudden I'm more open with my kids. I have to be more aware. But not necessarily no my relationship is what it is (P1)

Discordance: I don't think the law has encouraged or discouraged — I was always gonna talk to him about all these things (P6)

Discordance: I probably would have—mhux I probably, I definitely would have gone into it, like we've gone into a number of other different topics, which are maybe taboo or—or delicate (P5)

Discordance: we've been speaking about it since the children were young really, all of them not just—but let's focus on the teens um since the teen was young we've been having these conversations, we're—we're— as parents, we don't shy away from any conversation, obviously age appropriately, but, we don't really shy away from any conversation — we don't really make anything taboo in the house. (P7)

Normalization

84% of parents in the survey felt like cannabis would be easier to obtain for adolescents following a change in legislation.

Confirmation: the new challenge is it's just everywhere, everything's acceptable, they've opened every single door, there doesn't seem to be any form of discipline related to it, and if you're contrary to it, you're seen as negative you know? (P1)

Confirmation: it's made it easier... the legalization has made it much much easier (P3)

Discordance: No, I don't agree that it would be easier. I think it would be more difficult for adolescents to obtain it now because there are going to be less pathways, um, for—for people to obtain it illegally. And the only way an adolescent can obtain it, with the new laws, is illegally um so I—I think that there are going to be pathways that are going to be— where previously opened up are going to be closed off (P7)

Discordance: No, I don't agree. I think anything is easy to obtain in Malta, anything, anything at any age, um it was like that when I was younger, but it was not regulated. And today, my son, with all the regulations there are can still go to Paceville, go into bars, go into clubs, buy booze. So weed is not my main concern in this respect, I have to be honest. (P6)

49% of parents in the survey felt that adolescents are more likely to use cannabis following the change in legislation. 58% of parents (n=49) who believe it would be easier for their child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation also believed their child is more likely to use cannabis following the new legislation

Confirmation: Whereas before it was totally illegal, so maybe somebody would think twice before um purchasing or—or would think, “listen, I might get myself into trouble here.” Um now, they'll be a bit more relaxed, so they'll be more tempted to— to try it out, you know, so if it doesn't have any uh—Well, if it doesn't have specific repercussions, you know (P5)

Confirmation: I think you're giving kids another platform to mess around on” (P6).

The results of the quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods analysis are now discussed, and implications and conclusions are drawn from all the data.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter presents a discussion of the results concerning parental views, practices, and communication styles regarding cannabis and the challenges that a sample of parents of children in year 11 (aged 15-16 years) are facing in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta. The results are discussed by addressing each research question.

Research question one: What are the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?

Parents generally had unfavorable views concerning adolescent cannabis use, despite the shift towards a more permissive legal status. Viewing policies as being more permissive has been associated with parents' lower perceived risk of cannabis use for their children (Wisk et al., 2019). Similar to the available literature, parents in the study disapproved of their adolescent children using cannabis (Jones et al., 2020). Apart from feeling that their children are too young to consume cannabis, the reasons for being against adolescent cannabis use may also be due to the fear of the unknown and uncertainty involving cannabis. Indeed, some parents took a "*better the devil you know*" approach to cannabis use as they were more aware of the dangers involved in alcohol use and what to say to their children about the risks of using alcohol, such as not to get into a car with someone who has consumed alcohol. Compared to other substances like alcohol, cannabis also poses several distinctive challenges for parents to address, including the various routes of administration and unknown variability in THC (Ramer et al., 2021). One parent in the current study also shared that individuals can be tested for alcohol use but not cannabis use, which makes it impossible to check if drivers are intoxicated, making particular reference to individuals who drive her child to school. Another parent, in contrast, shared that she was more concerned about the effects of alcohol than cannabis on adolescent development. Some research indicates that the negative effects of alcohol on adolescent development are more pronounced

than cannabis, although demographically homogenous and small samples were noted (Lees et al., 2021).

Parents also generally held unfavorable views toward the new cannabis law. One of the main concerns that emerged from this study is discordance between parents stating that they are fully aware of the new laws about cannabis (70% of participants agreed that they are fully aware of the new law) and the qualitative results showing the opposite. Some parents could not differentiate between medical and recreational cannabis, and even those with a medical cannabis license were not fully aware of the new laws involving cannabis. Parents were generally not aware of the age limit for adolescent cannabis use. Mason et al. (2015) found that only 57% of participants in their study knew the correct legal limit after the legalization of cannabis and found that both parents and adolescents displayed uncertainty in their understanding of fundamental aspects of what is legal and illegal with regard to the new law. This uncertainty about the law and the way the media often presents the risks and benefits of cannabis in a way that is often ambiguous or open to interpretation (Mirken 2006) may be presenting challenges for parents when addressing cannabis use with their children (Napper et al., 2016).

A study by Mason et al. (2015) found that there was not much perceived change in the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents and parents after the legalization of cannabis. Similarly, in the current study, parents did not agree that new legislation regarding cannabis has led them to have a more favorable view of teenage cannabis use (81%), and 53% of parents believed that new legislation did not lead them to have more favorable views about adolescent cannabis use also believed that their adolescent children will not have more favorable cannabis views following the new legislation. This could either mean that these unfavorable views were already firmly established before the change in legislation or that they require more time to change, given the recency of the new law (Mason et al., 2015).

Research question two: What are the current parenting practices and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?

Overall, parents in the study seemed to take an authoritative approach to cannabis use, with 72% of parents setting concrete rules and only 49% having a zero-tolerance approach regarding cannabis use. Establishing concrete rules is strongly associated with a lower likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors (Vermeulen-Smit et al., 2015), not only for cannabis use but also for general risky behaviors (de Looze et al., 2012). Conversely, Ennett et al. (2001) found that conversations that focus excessively on rules and discipline without considering other factors, such as the potential negative outcomes of substance use, may result in increased substance consumption among adolescents who are starting to use substances.

Although the majority of parents in the current study established concrete rules, Carver et al. (2016) suggest that there is a distinction between discussing rules and enforcing them: when parents set and enforce rules about substance use, adolescents are less inclined to use drugs or alcohol. However, if parents only talk to their children about these rules without taking any action to enforce them, adolescents are more likely to engage in substance use. Chaplin et al. (2014) proposed that discussing rules could make adolescents feel uneasy or that rules might be ignored if parents talk about them but do not enforce them. They also found that talking about drug-use rules with parents was linked to increased heart rate and blood pressure responses, as well as a greater probability of using substances. Interviewed parents of the current study did not express what the consequences would be if they found out their adolescent child had smoked cannabis. However, some shared that they have established concrete rules and spoke to their children about their expectations.

Authoritative parenting involves setting firm boundaries, but unlike authoritarian parenting, it is characterized by a more adaptable and flexible approach and involves creating space for dialogue and cooperation, all of which were seen in the way participants answered the interview questions. Authoritative parents balance the imposition of limits with affection and teamwork with their children (Calafat et al., 2014). In contrast, although children with authoritarian parents tend to report a higher level of substance use compared to those with authoritative parents, some studies have shown no discernible difference or even an opposite association (Becoña et al., 2011). This may be due to the aspect of “demandingness” that exists in both styles, which reflects the aspect of parental control that has been associated with less adolescent drug use (Fagan et al., 2012). Contrary to this, an indulgent parenting style in Europe had similar adolescent substance-use outcomes as authoritative parenting (Calafat et al., 2014). Both indulgent and authoritative parenting styles are characterized by warmth. Therefore, demandingness and warmth appear to have the most positive impact on adolescent substance-use outcomes. Both demandingness and warmth were present among parents in the current study.

The importance of parenting style for adolescent substance use outcomes may not be as significant as previously believed, however, and it appears that associating with deviant peers and engaging in deviant behavior may be more critical for adolescent substance use outcomes than any overall parenting style (Berge et al., 2016). Primary Socialisation Theory states that in adolescence, social behavior is often learned through interactions with groups of peers, and peer groups can convey either positive or negative social norms, but typically it is peer groups that transmit negative norms (Oetting and Donnermeyer, 1998). None of the parents in the interviews specifically mentioned concerns about their adolescent child being influenced by their peers, as their focus was more on the challenges of normalization in

general. This is surprising, as peers are usually considered a significant part of an adolescent's microsystem when considering adolescent development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Irrespective of the approach to parenting, it appears that displaying affection and engaging in two-way communication (as opposed to one-way communication directed at adolescents) are crucial aspects of effective parenting (Calafat et al., 2014) and positive parent-child relationships characterized by warmth may reduce substance use among adolescents and prevent other unfavorable outcomes (Pettigrew et al., 2017). When parents in this study shared how they set rules regarding cannabis, it was evident that they were coming from a place of warmth and utmost care for the well-being of their adolescent children. Although they shared different anxieties and concerns regarding the new law, all participants were at least willing and open to have conversations and communicate with their adolescent children. This willingness and openness may facilitate microsystemic interactions between the parent and their adolescent children (Carver et al., 2016; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The effectiveness of parenting style and parent-child communication may also be influenced by the cultural context in which it occurs (Choi et al., 2017). For example, a study conducted in Nicaragua found that an expressive family environment is associated with prevention communication, which in turn is associated with reduced instances of substance use (Pettigrew et al., 2017b). It is thus vital to consider various family factors, beyond just parenting style, like parental drug use, the degree of emotional support and affection, the structure of the family, and the impact of cultural background (Becoña et al., 2011). Malta carries its own unique cultural context, so it is important to consider findings from the current study and other research in light of this unique context. The macrosystem, in which culture is held, can have varying degrees of influence over other subsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In addition to the impact of culture on communication, it should also be noted that the common prescription to "discuss drug use with your child" does not consider the fact that

every parent has their own way of discussing sensitive and sometimes taboo topics with their children. This advice assumes that all parents communicate in the same way and are equally expressive. In fact, some parents in the current study seemed much more expressive than others, both in the way they opened up about their thoughts on the subject as well as how they shared conversations they had had with their children. However, family communication theory has shown that parents differ in their communication style, and in some families where communication is less expressive, it may not be comfortable for parents to have open discussions about drugs and substance use, and different approaches may be more appropriate to avoid a one size fits all approach to parenting styles and communication practices (Calafat et al., 2014).

A microsystem holds complex interactions and communication between individuals and those around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although many similarities were found between participants, it is very apparent that parenting style and communication between the parents and adolescents in the study is multidimensional (Napper et al., 2016) and may depend on a number of factors, including gender.

Gender-specific Parenting

Considering that most survey respondents and all participants in the interviews were mothers, it is important to look at the differences in the role of maternal and paternal influences on adolescent substance use outcomes. Mothers interviewed for the current study seemed to favor authoritative parenting styles over permissive ones, although one parent mentioned using permissive parenting and communication styles. They generally also had negative views towards adolescent cannabis use. Some mothers also mentioned they had used cannabis somewhat recently, with one parent stating that she had a medical prescription for cannabis.

A study by Kokotovič et al. (2022) revealed that a mother's permissive parenting style significantly predicted adolescent cannabis use, but maternal attitudes regarding adolescent cannabis use and paternal cannabis use have an even greater impact on adolescent cannabis use. Kokotovič et al.'s (2022) results also showed that a mother's authoritative parenting style diminishes the probability of adolescent cannabis use compared to the permissive parenting style. Furthermore, in cases where the mother did not hold a negative view towards their child's cannabis use, the likelihood of the adolescent using cannabis increases almost three-fold. Regarding parental cannabis use, the likelihood of adolescent cannabis use by adolescents increases by more than six times if mothers used cannabis and by more than eleven if fathers used cannabis (Kokotovič et al., 2022).

Clearly, maternal and paternal attitudes, parenting styles, and personal use have different effects on adolescent substance use outcomes. Parents in the current study may thus have different degrees of influence on their adolescent's substance-use outcomes according to their gender. However, this is a very tentative claim, as fathers who answered the survey were in the minority (20%). This is discussed further in the limitations.

Risk Communication

91% of parents stated that they had warned their children about the health consequences of cannabis use. They mainly focused on the developing adolescent brain and expressed concern about how cannabis use could impact it. Although it is unclear whether the effects observed are a result of cannabis use or if cannabis use played a role in causing these effects (Tapert et al., 2008), or if these negative effects are a result of pre-existing differences that lead to increased drug use (Jacobus & Tapert, 2014). Research has shown that adolescents who engage in regular and heavy cannabis use may experience deficits in neurocognitive function, changes in both the macrostructure and microstructure of the brain, and changes in brain functioning (Jacobus & Tapert, 2014).

Parents in this study generally expressed to their children that they are too young to make any independent decisions regarding cannabis use, with 78% of parents disagreeing that their children are old enough to make their own choices regarding cannabis use. The belief that adolescents are too young to make informed decisions about substance use is consistent with developmental theories that suggest that adolescents are still in the process of developing cognitive and decision-making skills (Hartley & Somerville, 2015). Adolescence is a critical period of development that encompasses physiological, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral change (Gray & Squeglia, 2017). Since early adolescence involves the development of adolescents' cognitive skills, it may be essential to include them in discussions about cannabis use to allow them to develop their thinking, learning, and reasoning skills to improve their decision-making (Miller-Day & Kam, 2010). Parents in the study aimed to communicate responsible decision-making and prevent the potential negative consequences of adolescent cannabis use.

Napper et al. (2016) found that while risk communication was associated with a higher likelihood of a student abstaining from cannabis use, it was not found to have an effect on the frequency of use or negative consequences. Adolescents who have already started using cannabis may also not benefit from this type of communication. In this case, research has indicated that monitoring may be more effective (Napper et al., 2014). Thus, monitoring could be seen as a safety net if adolescents have already started using cannabis.

Monitoring

96% of participants in the survey monitored what their children do, where they go, and who their friends are. This may indicate a high level of parental involvement and concern for their children's well-being. Research shows that high levels of parental monitoring predict significantly less use of a number of substances, including cannabis use (Clark et al., 2012). 68% of parents in the current survey who monitor their children also feel that they are more

likely to talk about cannabis use with their children after the change in legislation, and 57% of parents who monitor their children also have ongoing communication about cannabis with them. Increasing parental monitoring and communication could be an effective approach to preventing adolescent cannabis use (Tobler & Komro, 2010; Kokotovič et al., 2022) and the risk involved in general (Li et al., 2000). Simply increasing communication may be insufficient; however, the conversations must be of high quality in order to have a protective effect. High-quality communication carries bidirectional communication, where adolescents feel heard in the interaction (Carver et al., 2016).

Effect of a Change in Legislation on Parenting Style and Communication Practices

The survey showed that 66% of parents felt it is more likely that they will talk about cannabis use with their children after the change in legislation, which may suggest that the change in the legal status of cannabis could have prompted more communication about cannabis use among parents and their adolescent children. Furthermore, 86% of parents did not find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to their children about cannabis use ever since its legal status changed. Research shows that after cannabis legalization, parents felt more inclined to monitor and have conversations with their adolescent children to provide them with a better understanding of cannabis, as well as employ more harm-reduction tactics after the legalization of cannabis (Jones, 2020).

Contrary to the survey results, however, parents in the qualitative study generally felt unaffected by the legislation in their likelihood to talk about cannabis use with their children, and they seem to base their decision to talk to their children about cannabis use on their need to model and educate rather than as a result of external circumstances such as a change in legal status. According to Primary Socialization Theory (Oetting & Donnermeyer, 1998), social behaviors, whether normative or deviant, are acquired through learning, and deviance is not simply learned as a result of the decay of prosocial bonds and norms but rather

prosocial and deviant norms are learned through primary socialization. Parents may thus still act as powerful models for learning despite societal changes and external influences.

85% of parents who did not find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to their children about cannabis use ever since its change in legal status also did not think that talking about cannabis use with their children would lead to their children using cannabis. In fact, parent-child communication can act as a safeguard against the possibility of initiating early substance use by influencing adolescent attitudes and behaviors (Miller-Day, 2002). According to Mallick (2003), discussing drug use can be an extremely challenging task for parents, especially because of the stigma associated with drug use. However, from both the survey and interviews, parents seemed open to discussing cannabis use. Adolescents experience ease and are more comfortable when there are high levels of parent-child connectedness (PCC), which include parental communication and openness (Carver et al., 2016). According to Markham et al. (2010), parent-child communication involves the ability of parents and adolescents to discuss a broad range of subjects, including sensitive topics such as substance use and sex. Parents in the current study generally did not feel reluctant to talk to their children about a sensitive topic such as cannabis use, as they shared that they also had spoken to their children about a wide range of topics that they considered to be “taboo” such as sex and substance use. Pettigrew et al. (2017) encourage communication about drugs not as a reactive strategy (e.g., communication resulting from a change in legal status) but rather as a proactive one.

Pettigrew et al. (2017) found that adolescents of parents who were never spoken to about cannabis use may be at high risk for cannabis use. 55% of parents in the survey stated that their communication with their children is ongoing. In contrast, however, frequent communication between parents and their adolescent children about cannabis use has been linked to the perception among adolescents that their parents are more accepting of the use of

cannabis (Napper et al. 2016) and more frequent parental communication about drug use, in general, has been linked to earlier initiation of cannabis use (Nonnemaker et al. 2012). Therefore, measuring the frequency of parental discussions on subjects like cannabis use may not fully grasp the intricate nature of parent-child communication, and there is a need to evaluate various aspects of parent-child communication regarding cannabis (Napper et al., 2016).

Parental Disclosure

Research shows that one of the most common types of permissive communication is when parents disclose their past cannabis use and the negative outcomes they encountered, as noted by Napper et al. (2016). As seen in the survey results, 89% of participants shared that they would be honest about their past cannabis use. In a sample of college students, Napper et al. (2016) revealed that the most consistently positive associations were found between permissive parental communication and the attitudes and behaviors of students towards cannabis, where higher levels of permissive communication were associated with the perception that parents were more approving of cannabis use, more positive attitudes towards cannabis in students, increased chances of not abstaining, more frequent consumption, and more negative consequences resulting from marijuana use.

There was discordance in the mixed methods analysis, where, although some parents stated they would be honest about past use, some did not agree. Research has shown that parents often struggle with how to disclose their past use without appearing to condone drug use by their children (Napper et al., 2014). Parents in the current study stated that they felt like it would be an incentive for their child if they told them that they had used it in the past, and they felt that disclosure of their past use might normalize use for their adolescent children and may make it seem more acceptable, which could also reduce the perceived risks and consequences of using the drug, leading to a greater likelihood that adolescents may

experiment with cannabis. Research has indicated that parental disclosure of past use may actually result in younger adolescents having more favorable attitudes toward drug use and believing that their parents approve of it (Kam & Middleton, 2013). According to Friese (2017), adolescents may perceive parents who currently use or have used cannabis in the past as evidence that cannabis use is not harmful. Additionally, Kerr et al. (2015) found that parents' disclosure of past cannabis use was linked with a higher likelihood of their children using cannabis.

Studies have shown that parents may view disclosing their past cannabis use as a way to increase their credibility when discussing the topic of cannabis use with their children (Skinner et al., 2016). Some parents in this study also felt that talking about past use will put things into perspective for the children and that it is better to be honest about past use so that adolescents can learn from their mistakes and/or experiences. Disclosure in itself may not be an issue but instead could be an indicator that parents are more receptive to the idea of using cannabis (Napper et al., 2016)

Past and Current Use

Whereas 36% of parents in the study reported having taken cannabis in the past, 96% of parents stated that they had not used cannabis in the past 30 days. Regarding past cannabis use, 65% of parents who have never taken cannabis took a zero-tolerance approach to cannabis use, while 61% of parents who have taken cannabis in the past did not. This could indicate that parents who have never taken cannabis are more likely to take a zero-tolerance approach than parents who have taken it in the past, which suggests that personal experience with cannabis use may influence a parent's attitude towards adolescent cannabis use and what parenting style they adopt. Jones et al. (2020) found that there are both similarities and differences in the experiences and attitudes of parents who use cannabis versus those who do not, where the majority of both types of parents did not approve of their children smoking

cannabis. They acknowledged that it is more prevalent in their social environment due to changes in its legal status. The differences were that cannabis-using parents were more inclined to adopt a harm reduction strategy by teaching their children how to consume it safely and avoid driving while under the influence.

Research question three: (How) is a change in the legal status of cannabis posing new challenges for parents?

The biggest challenge faced by participants was the normalization of cannabis use following the new legislation. Participants in the survey felt that it is now easier for their children to obtain cannabis (84%) following the new legislation. Parents who thought that their children would find it easier to access cannabis following the new legislation also believed that their children were more likely to use cannabis in light of the new legislation (58%). Some parents in the interviews felt that cannabis would be more widely available after the change in legal status. Research has revealed that increased availability could result in greater cannabis use among adolescents (Hopfer, 2014). However, research has also shown that although there is a decrease in the degree to which adolescents perceive potential risks associated with its use after the legalization of cannabis (Ghosh et al., 2017; Carliner et al., 2017), legalization may not necessarily lead to a rise in adolescent use (Sarvet et al., 2018; Ghosh et al., 2017). In fact, Dilley et al. (2018) found that the rates of cannabis use among adolescent populations remained stable following legalization. After the legalization of recreational cannabis in Washington, there was an increase in use among 8th and 10th graders but use among 12th graders was unchanged (Cerdá et al., 2017). This increase in use may result from a change in social norms resulting from legalization rather directly from legalization per se (Camarena-Michel, 2017). An increase in use may result from a broader change in attitudes and behaviors toward cannabis that coincides with legalization but does not depend on it (Kosterman et al., 2016). Normalization of cannabis among adolescents may

therefore result from a reduction in stigma towards cannabis use and its associated risks rather than an increase in availability (Camarena-Michel, 2017).

Hathaway et al. (2011) claim that the use of cannabis can still create strong cultural anxiety and stigma. This cultural anxiety after the change in legislation was felt by some participants who expressed uncertainty about the new law, the content of cannabis, and the effects of cannabis use on the developing brain. Nevertheless, despite this cultural anxiety and stigma, the use of cannabis among adolescents is becoming more commonplace (Zuckermann et al., 2021; Hathaway et al., 2015). Parents felt there was no more stigma, and people no longer felt the need to hide it, creating more exposure for adolescent children. Research has shown that parents are concerned that changes in cannabis policy might cause adults who use cannabis to disregard the potential harm that their cannabis use will have on the concerned parent's children (Jones et al., 2020). The parent's mesosystem, which refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence between microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), showed how parents believed that their friends (the parent's friends) and other family members around the adolescent who use cannabis might influence their own adolescent children. Parents shared their concern that since people can legally smoke cannabis now, they feel they can do little to control these factors in the mesosystem. Parents in the study felt like people that would have been hesitant to smoke at someone else's house might feel like they now have the right to do so. Research shows that parents express apprehension about their inability to control the various ways through which children could be exposed to cannabis use (Jones et al., 2020). Elements within the parent's macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) may thus be leading to a sense of powerlessness, where the change in legislation may be leading to the normalization of cannabis use, which could lead to adolescents becoming more exposed to cannabis use, despite parents trying to control the avenues through which adolescents are exposed to cannabis.

Conclusion

Although the focus of this study has been the effect of parental communication and practices on adolescents, it is vital to briefly acknowledge the role adolescents play in the interaction and ensure that the adolescent is not portrayed as a “passive agent influenced by parents” (Darling, 2007). Parents in the interviews mentioned certain factors that influenced how they speak to their adolescent children, including the adolescent’s reserved disposition and certain personality traits that influenced the communication process.

The combination of an adolescent’s longing for autonomy and the diminished perception of parents’ authority may lead to parents having to acquire knowledge about their adolescent children from the adolescent themselves; thus, open communication and monitoring may be dependent on the adolescent’s willingness to disclose information about their cannabis use (Darling, 2007).

This chapter discussed the findings of the study. The next chapter presents the implications of the above findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

It is unknown how the new cannabis law in Malta will impact adolescent cannabis use rates and outcomes. Nevertheless, parents may have a significant influence on adolescent substance use outcomes. The study identified what the current parental views of adolescent cannabis use are, what parenting and communication styles are being utilized with regard to cannabis use, and what challenges parents are facing in light of the new law involving cannabis.

Parents who participated in the current study appeared to have unfavorable views about cannabis use in adolescence, mentioning they are concerned about how it will affect the adolescent's developing brain. They also had unfavorable views about the new law involving cannabis, although a few parents did mention using cannabis recently. Therefore, despite the change in legal status, parents still hold unfavorable views about adolescent cannabis use.

The parents also seemed to take an authoritative approach to cannabis use with their adolescent children by establishing concrete rules and being open and willing to communicate about cannabis use. They also communicated the risks of cannabis use and monitored their children. As discussed in the literature review, these factors may act as protective factors regarding earlier age of onset of cannabis use (Napper et al., 2016; Pettigrew et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2012; Vermeulen-Smit et al., 2015). Even though the survey showed that parents were more likely to talk about cannabis following the change in legislation, parents in the interviews seemed unaffected by the law in their openness to talk about cannabis use with their adolescent children.

While 89% of parents said they would disclose past use if asked by their adolescent child, parents who were interviewed were divided in their willingness to disclose past use, with some saying it is important to disclose past use in order to educate their children, and others withholding this information due to fear that their child will misconstrue it as their

approval of cannabis use. The overall findings suggest that parents' attitudes towards cannabis use and their willingness to communicate with their children about cannabis use were primarily driven by their concern for their children's well-being rather than by changes in the legal status of cannabis.

Parents' major concern was that the new law has led to the normalization of cannabis use, and they felt that their adolescent children would find it easier to obtain and use cannabis. Parents were worried about cannabis use now being "everywhere" and mentioned concern about what impact outside influences will have on their adolescent children and their limited ability to control these influences. They also stated it would be easier for adolescents to obtain cannabis following the legislation.

This study shed light on a small yet nonetheless salient sector of society. Although generalizations should be made with caution, results nevertheless showed the challenges parents are experiencing in the context of decriminalized cannabis and what parenting styles and communication strategies are being employed in light of this new context.

Limitations

Although the surveys were distributed to one private school, two public schools, and two church schools, the majority of respondents for the questionnaire were from private schools, with 62% reporting that their child attends a private school, 30% reporting a church school, and 8% reporting a government school. The actual selection of schools also carried limitations due to the low number of schools that agreed to participate. The schools chosen were the only ones who agreed to participate in the study. Furthermore, only parents who had children in private schools participated in the interviews. This might have distorted results towards views, parenting practices, and communication styles of only parents who have children in private schools. This is significant as parents of children from different school types may have varying views on adolescent cannabis use and what communication practices

and parenting styles they use with their adolescent children. Furthermore, the majority of respondents in the survey were female, and all participants in the interviews were female. This may skew results as mothers and fathers may have differing views on adolescent cannabis use and how they parent and communicate with their children. There was also a low participant count for both the surveys and interviews, so any generalizations should be made with caution.

Since the study used convenience sampling due to a low number of participants, the study was prone to volunteer bias, a “systematic error due to differences between those who choose to participate in studies and those who do not” (Jordan et al., 2013). This may have led to results not being representative of the population of interest. Parents who answered the survey and volunteered for the interview may differ in their willingness to discuss and talk about the topic of adolescent cannabis use. The results and interpretations may thus not accurately reflect the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of the broader population of parents regarding adolescent cannabis use. The results from the study may also reflect views, communication, and parenting styles employed by parents who are not actively using cannabis, as 96% of parents in the survey had not taken cannabis in the past 30 days.

Social Desirability

Social desirability bias is when participants in a study tend to give responses that they believe are socially acceptable or desirable instead of expressing their genuine thoughts, emotions, and attitudes. This tendency leads to socially desirable responses while minimizing those considered socially undesirable or less desirable (Grimm, 2010). Particularly for the interview, participants may have been uncomfortable divulging information about how they talk to their children about cannabis use and their own views about cannabis use, especially to a stranger (the interviewer), and may therefore have given answers that they deemed to be more socially acceptable and desirable.

Future Recommendations

One participant mentioned that it would be interesting to see if their views, communication styles, and parenting practices will change the older the children get. A longitudinal study, therefore, may reveal how communication and parenting styles between a parent and their adolescent children change over the years. Furthermore, a parent also expressed that they parent and communicate with their older children who are a different gender from their child who is in Form 5 in a different way. Although this study showed the views of parents and their parental and communication styles regarding adolescents who are in Form 5, expanding the study to a wider age group and comparing different communication and parenting practices depending on the age and gender of adolescents could provide a more nuanced findings regarding how and whether a change in the legal status of cannabis has an impact on parenting practices and communication styles regarding cannabis use.

Accounting for the adolescent's role in communication would provide valuable information as to whether there is a discrepancy between what parents are saying and what adolescents are receiving. For example, parents may feel that disclosing their past use may make them seem more credible, but adolescents may interpret it as "You do it, so I can too."

From a socioecological point of view (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the situation should be monitored on the level of the parent and whether macrosystemic influences impact their attitudes and behaviors over time (the new legislation and the normalization of cannabis), i.e., whether there is an increase in use and greater approval of use among parents over time, and if there is an increase in use and approval, what effect (if any) is this increase having on their adolescent children. Although the current study showed that 96% of parents in the survey had not taken cannabis in the past 30 days, this situation may change over time and should be assessed accordingly.

More generally, although this study shed light on the views of a small sample of parents, and thus the views are a reflection of this limited sample, it would be interesting to conduct a national study on the impact of the new cannabis law on the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in adolescents and the general population. I feel it is vital to monitor if and how the new cannabis law is affecting adolescents and the general population and whether there has been a significant increase in use and individuals seeking treatment related to excessive cannabis use in order to see what policymakers can do to address the situation. The situation should also be monitored to see what the positive impact of the new cannabis legislation has been, for example, whether there has been a decrease in arrests and legal consequences related to cannabis use or whether individuals experience less shame and stigma as a result of the law. The aim of all this should be to carefully monitor the impact the new cannabis legislation has had on society in order to have a holistic understanding of how the situation in Malta evolves over time.

Implications for Policy and Practice Development

This study sheds light on parents' concerns and challenges, which may carry implications for policymakers. More effort should be made by policymakers to clearly communicate details of the new cannabis law, especially as they relate to underage cannabis use, as it seems authorities did not properly communicate the details of the law. Parents in the survey stated they were fully aware of the law, while most parents in the interviews stated they were unsure about what the new law entails. The implication here is that it may lead parents and adolescents to unintentionally engage in illegal behaviors due to having no or minimal knowledge of new laws involving cannabis. For example, it may lead to some parents smoking cannabis in front of minors even though it is illegal to do so. Raising awareness about the new laws could involve public education campaigns, targeted and

detailed information for parents, and clear information about the legal risks associated with cannabis use.

Since parents in this study appear to have taken a “risk communication” approach to cannabis use, it may be best for educational institutions and policymakers to educate both parents as well as adolescents on factual material concerning the consequences of adolescent cannabis use. If adolescents do not view their parents as a reliable source of information about cannabis, then parents talking about the risks associated with its use may not have a direct impact on their attitudes and behaviors (Napper et al., 2016). Parents in the current study were open and willing to talk about cannabis with their adolescent children. This openness and willingness to communicate could be fostered to include accurate and balanced messages when discussing cannabis use with their adolescent children.

Concluding note

I feel that it is important for policymakers to acknowledge the potential impact that altering cannabis policies has on parents and adolescents, as well as ensure that measures are in place to address these concerns fully. It should be noted that this study does not assume that a change in legal status will lead to an increase in use among adolescents, as research has shown that while adolescent attitudes toward cannabis may become more favorable after legalization, it does not necessarily lead to an increase in use among adolescents. This does not mean that precautions should not be in place to prevent and reduce the impact cannabis use can have on adolescents.

Furthermore, besides the positive impact that parental attitudes, communication, and behavior can have on preventing adolescent cannabis using outcomes and harm reduction, there are other factors to consider when attempting to prevent cannabis use and promote harm reduction, such as school-based harm reduction and prevention programs, stress-coping interventions, as well as participation in extracurricular activities such as team and endurance

sports. Responsibility should thus not rest solely on the parents, and a more holistic approach to prevention and harm reduction should be employed to achieve the most desirable outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Questionnaire: English

This questionnaire will cover topics regarding parenting practises and communication styles in light of cannabis decriminalization in Malta. These questions are referring to parenting practises and communication styles you use with your child who is in Form 5.

Demographic information

1) What school does your child attend?

Church school

Government school

Private school

Other (specify) _____

2) What gender do you identify as?

Male

Female

Non-binary

Prefer not to answer

Please indicate your age _____

3) What is your marital status?

Never Married

Married

Divorced

Separated

Widow(er)

I don't know

Prefer not to answer

4) Please indicate which type of parent you are

Biological

Adoptive

Foster

Step parent

Other (specify)

Prefer not to answer

5) What is your household composition?

1 parent with child/children at home

2 parents with child/children at home

Other (specify)

6) What is your current employment status?

Full-time employment

Part-time employment

Unemployed

Self-employed

Home-maker

Student

Retired

7) What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

tertiary education

post-secondary education

secondary education

other (specify)

Policy changes and perceptions of cannabis use

8) I am fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis use

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

9) New legislation regarding cannabis has led me to having a more favourable view of teenage cannabis use

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

10) My child will have more favourable views regarding cannabis use following the new legislation

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

11) It would be easier for my child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

12) My child is more likely to use cannabis use following the new legislation

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

Parental communication and practices

13) I am more likely to talk about cannabis use with my child after the change in legislation

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

14) Talking about cannabis use with my child will lead to my child using cannabis

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

15) If my child and I were talking about cannabis and my child asked me about my past cannabis use, I would be honest and tell them the truth

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

16) I have a zero-tolerance approach to cannabis use

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

17) I set concrete rules with regards to cannabis use

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

18) I have warned my child about the health consequences of using cannabis

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

19) My child is old enough to make their own choices regarding cannabis use

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

20) I monitor what my child does, where they go and who their friends are

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

21) My communication with my child about cannabis use is ongoing

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

22) My communication with my child about cannabis use is specific to certain situations

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

Parental use

23) Have you ever taken cannabis?

Yes

No

Prefer not to answer

24) Have you taken cannabis in the last 30 days?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Challenges for parents**25) I find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to my child about cannabis use ever since its legal status has changed**

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

26) I feel I have very little influence over my child's decision to smoke cannabis ever since its legal status has changed

Disagree

Agree

Don't know

Interviews are being carried out alongside this questionnaire. Should you be interested, kindly contact me on the following email address: thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt. Should you choose to participate, an information and consent form will be sent. After consent is received, you will be asked to attend a face-to-face/online interview for approximately 1 hour at a location of your convenience, and you will be asked to answer question about if/how the legal status of cannabis is affecting your parenting practices and communication styles. The interview will be audio recorded.

Appendix B

Questionnaire: Maltese

Dan il-kwestjonarju se jkopri suġġetti dwar prattiċi ta' trobbija u stili ta' komunikazzjoni fid-dawl tad-dekriminalizzazzjoni tal-kannabis f'Malta. Dawn il-mistoqsijiet jirreferu għal prattiċi ta' ġenituri u stili ta' komunikazzjoni li inti tuża mal-wild tiegħek li qiegħed fil-Form 5.

Informazzjoni demografika

1) Liema skola jattendi l-wild tiegħek?

Skola tal-Knisja

Skola tal-Gvern

Skola privata

Oħrajn (speċifika) _____

2) Ma' liema sess inti tidentifika?

Raġel

Mara

Mhux binarju

Nippreferi li ma nwegibx

Jekk jogħġbok indika l-età tiegħek _____

3) X'inhu l-istat ċivili tiegħek?

Qatt ma żżewwiġt

Miżżewweġ

Divorzjat

Isseparat

Armel jew armla

Ma nafx

nippreferi li ma nweġibx

4) Jekk joghġbok indika liema tip ta' ġenitur int

Bijoloġiku

Adottiv

Foster parent

Step parent

Oħrajn (speċifika)

nippreferi li ma nweġibx

5) X'inh i-kompożizzjoni tad-dar tieghek?

Ġenitur wiehed bil-wild jew ulied id-dar

żewġ ġenituri bil-wild jew ulied id-dar

Oħrajn (speċifika)

6) X'inh i-istatus ta' impjieg attwali tieghek?

Impjieg full-time

Impjieg part-time

Mingħajr impjieg

Nahdem għal rasi

Home-maker

Student

Irtirat

7) X'inh i-oghla grad jew livell ta' edukazzjoni li lestejt?

edukazzjoni terzjarja

edukazzjoni post-sekondarja

edukazzjoni sekondarja

Oħrajn (speċifika)

Bidliet fil-politika u perċezzjonijiet dwar l-użu tal-kannabis

8) Jiena konxju bis-sħiħ dwar il-liġijiet il-ġodda dwar l-użu tal-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

**9) Il-leġislazzjoni ġdida dwar il-kannabis wasslitni biex ikolli harsa aktar favorevoli
dwar l-użu tal-kannabis fost l-adolessenti**

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

**10) Il-wild tieghi se jkollu fehmiel aktar favorevoli dwar l-użu tal-kannabis wara l-
leġislazzjoni l-ġdida**

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

11) Ikun aktar faċli għall-wild tieghi li jikseb il-kannabis skont il-leġislazzjoni l-ġdida

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

12) Il-wild tieghi huwa aktar probabbli li juża l-kannabis wara l-leġislazzjoni l-ġdida

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

Komunikazzjoni u prattiċi tal-ġenituri

13) Huwa aktar probabbli li nitkellem dwar l-użu tal-kannabis mal-wild tiegħi wara l-bidla fil-leġislazzjoni

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

14) Li nitkellem dwar l-użu tal-kannabis mal-wild tiegħi se jwassal biex huwa juża l-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

15) Jekk jien u l-wild tiegħi kellna nitkellmu dwar il-kannabis u l-wild tiegħi jistaqsieni dwar l-użu tal-kannabis tiegħi fl-imghoddi, jien inkun onest u ngħidlu il-verità

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

16) Għandi approċċ ta' tolleranza zero għall-użu tal-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

17) Jien nistabbilixxi regoli konkreti fir-rigward tal-użu tal-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

18) Wissejt lill-wild tieghi dwar il-konsegwenzi fuq is-sahha tal-użu tal-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

19) il-wild tieghi huwa kbir biżżejjed biex jaghmel l-ghazliet tieghu stess dwar l-użu tal-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

20) Jiena nissorvelja x'jaghmel il-wild tieghi, fejn imur u min huma l-hbieb tieghu

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

21) Il-komunikazzjoni tieghi mal-wild tieghi dwar l-użu tal-kannabis ghadha ghaddejja

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

22) Il-komunikazzjoni tieghi mal-wild tieghi dwar l-użu tal-kannabis hija speċifika ghal ċerti sitwazzjonijiet

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

Użu mill-ġenituri

23) Qatt hadt il-kannabis?

Iva

Le

nippreferi li ma nwegibx

24) Hadt il-kannabis fl-ahhar 30 jum?

Iva

Le

nippreferi li ma nwegibx

Sfidi għall-ġenituri

25) Insibha aktar diffiċli u/jew skomda biex nitkellem mal- wild tieghi dwar l-użu tal-kannabis minn mindu nbidel l-istatus legali tal-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

26) Inhoss li ftit li xejn għandi influwenza fuq id-deċiżjoni tal-wild tieghi li jpejjep il-kannabis

Ma naqbilx

Naqbel

Ma nafx

Qed isiru intervisti flimkien ma' dan il-kwestjonarju. Jekk inti interessat, jekk jogħġbok ikkuntattjani fuq l-indirizz elettroniku li ġej: thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt. Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, tintbagħat formola ta' informazzjoni u kunsens. Wara li tirċievi l-kunsens, inti tintalab tattendi intervista wiċċ imb wiċċ jew online għal madwar siegħa fpost tal-konvenjenza tiegħek, u tintalab twieġeb mistoqsija dwar jekk/kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis

qed jaffettwa il-prattiċi tat-trobbija tiegħek u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni. L-intervista se tkun irrekordjata bl-awdjo

Appendix C

Interview Questions: English

The aim of my study is to analyse how the legal status of cannabis affects parenting practices and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use. These question are in reference to your adolescent child who is in Form 5.

A survey was conducted prior to conducting this interview, so some questions will reflect data gathered from the survey

Feel free to skip any question you don't want to answer or feel like we've already covered

1. Are you having conversations about cannabis use with your adolescent child? If so, what are you communicating to them about cannabis use? If not, why not?
2. Are policy changes influencing how you talk about cannabis use with your adolescent child? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. With regards to your adolescent child, are you facing new challenges in light of the new legislation involving cannabis? If so, what challenges are you facing?
4. The survey showed that parents believed it would be easier for adolescents to obtain cannabis following the new legislation. There are 2 parts to this question:
 - 1 Why do you think this is the case, and do you agree?
 - 2 What measures do you think should be taken to prevent underage cannabis use?
5. The survey revealed that parents are more likely to talk about cannabis use with their child after the change in legislation. Why do you think this is the case, and do you agree?
6. The survey showed that parents feel it is important to be honest about their own past cannabis use if asked by their adolescent child. Why do you think this is the case, and do you agree?

7. The survey showed that parents do not find it more difficult or uncomfortable to talk to their child about cannabis use ever since its legal status has changed. Why do you think this is the case, and do you agree?

Appendix D

Interview Questions: Maltese

L-għan tal-istudju tiegħi huwa li janalizza kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis jaffettwa l-prattiki tat-trobbija u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni rigward l-użu tal-kannabis fost l-adolexxenti. Dawn il-mistoqsijiet huma b'referenza għall-wild adolessenti tiegħek li jinsab fil-Form 5.

Sar stħarriġ qabel ma saret din l-intervista, għalhekk xi mistoqsijiet se jirriflettdu d-dejta miġbura mill-istħarriġ

Hossok liberu li taqbez kwalunkwe mistoqsija li ma tridx twieġeb jew li tħossok li diġà koprejna

1. Qed ikollok konversazzjonijiet dwar l-użu tal-kannabis mal-wild adolessenti tiegħek? Jekk iva, x'qed tikkomunikahom dwar l-użu tal-kannabis? Jekk le, għaliex le?

2. Il-bidliet fil-politika qed jinfluwenzaw kif titkellem dwar l-użu tal-kannabis mal-wild adolessenti tiegħek? Jekk iva, kif? Jekk le, għaliex le?

3. Fir-rigward tal-wild adolessenti tiegħek, qed tiffaċċja sfidi godda fid-dawl tal-leġiżlazzjoni l-għdida li tinvolvi l-kannabis? Jekk iva, liema sfidi qed tiffaċċja?

4. L-istħarriġ wera li l-ġenituri jemmnu li jkun aktar faċli għall-adolessenti li jiksbu l-kannabis wara l-leġiżlazzjoni l-għdida. Hemm 2 partijiet għal din il-mistoqsija:

A: Għaliex taħseb li dan hu l-każ, u taqbel? u B: Liema miżuri taħseb li għandhom jittieħdu biex jiġi evitat l-użu tal-kannabis taht l-età?

5. L-istħarriġ wera li huwa aktar probabbli li l-ġenituri jittelmu dwar l-użu tal-kannabis mat-tfal tagħhom wara l-bidla fil-leġiżlazzjoni. Għaliex taħseb li dan huwa l-każ, u inti taqbel?

6. L-istħarriġ wera li l-ġenituri jhossu li huwa importanti li huma jkunu onesti dwar l-użu tagħhom stess tal-kannabis fil-passat, jekk mitluba mil-wild adolessenti tagħhom. Għaliex taħseb li dan huwa l-każ, u inti taqbel?

7. L-istħarriġ wera li l-ġenituri ma jsibuhiex aktar diffiċli jew skomdu li jitmellmu ma' uliedhom dwar l-użu tal-kannabis minn mindu nbidel l-istatus legali tagħha. Għaliex taħseb li dan huwa l-każ, u inti taqbel?

Appendix E

Email to schools: English

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Thomas Coppini and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master of Science in Addiction Studies. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta; this is being supervised by Dr Anna Grech. This letter is an invitation to parents to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what the parent's involvement would entail, should they decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to analyse how the legal status of cannabis affects parenting practices and communication styles. The parent's participation in this study may inform prevention strategies that will address parental concerns about which communication strategy is best to use to prevent cannabis use, as well as inform harm reduction strategies. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should they choose to participate, they will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. A note will be added at the end of the questionnaire asking if they would like to take part in an interview. Should they choose to participate in the interview, they will be asked to attend a face-to-face/online interview for approximately 1 hour at a location of their convenience. The interview will be audio recorded. If the participants choose to take part in the interview, they will be asked to send the researcher an email to organise a time and date, thus disclosing personal information (their email address). This data will only be available to people who need it for research purposes. These include the researcher, the supervisor and (in exceptional circumstances) the examiners for verification purposes.

There are no direct benefits to the parents or anticipated risks in taking part.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, they are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. They are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for them. Any data collected from the questionnaire will be anonymous at source and it will not be possible to erase any data once they hit the submit button. The participants may skip over any questions that they do not wish to answer. A consent form will be provided for both the questionnaire and interview.

I am requesting that you kindly forward the questionnaire to the parents of students who are in their final year of studies (form 5). Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

99822564

Research Supervisor

Appendix F

Email to schools: Maltese

Għażiż Sinjur/Sinjura,

Jisimni Thomas Coppini u jien student fl-Università ta' Malta, bħalissa qed naqra għal Master of Science fl-Istudji tal-Vizzji. Bħalissa qed nagħmel studju ta' riċerka għad-dissertazzjoni tiegħi bit-titlu Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta; dan qed ikun issorveljat minn Dr Anna Grech. Din l-ittra hija stedina lill-ġenituri biex jipparteċipaw f'dan l-istudju. Hawn taħt għandek issib informazzjoni dwar l-istudju u dwar x'jiġifieri l-involviment tal-ġenitur, jekk jiddeċiedi li jiehdu sehem.

L-għan tal-istudju tiegħi huwa li janalizza kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis jaffettwa l-prattiki tat-trobbija u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni. Il-parteċipazzjoni tal-ġenitur f'dan l-istudju tista' tinforma strateġiji ta' prevenzjoni li se jindirizzaw it-tħassib tal-ġenituri dwar liema strateġija ta' komunikazzjoni hija l-aħjar li tuża biex tipprevjeni l-użu tal-kannabis, kif ukoll tinforma strateġiji għat-tnaqqis tal-ħsara. Kwalunkwe data miġbura minn din ir-riċerka se tintuża biss għall-finijiet ta' dan l-istudju.

Jekk jagħzlu li jipparteċipaw, huma jintalbu jimlew kwestjonarju li jiehu bejn wieħed u ieħor 10-15-il minuta biex jimlew. Se tiżdied nota fl-aħħar tal-kwestjonarju li tistaqsi jekk jixtiequx jieħdu sehem f'intervista. Jekk jagħzlu li jipparteċipaw fl-intervista, huma jintalbu jattendu intervista wiċċ imb wiċċ jew online għal madwar siegħa f'post tal-konvenjenza tagħhom. L-intervista se tkun irrekordjata bl-awdjo. Jekk il-parteċipanti jagħzlu li jieħdu sehem fl-intervista, huma jintalbu jibagħtu email lir-riċerkatur biex jorganizza ħin u data, u b'hekk jiżvelaw informazzjoni personali (l-indirizz elettroniku tagħhom). Din id-dejta tkun disponibbli biss għal nies li jeħtieġuha għal skopijiet ta' riċerka. Dawn jinkludu r-riċerkatur, is-superviżur u (f'ċirkostanzi eċċezzjonali) l-eżaminaturi għal skopijiet ta' verifika.

M'hemm l-ebda benefiċċji diretti għall-ġenituri jew riskji antiċipati meta tiegħu sehem.

Il-parteciċipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju hija għal kollox volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, huma liberi li jaċċettaw jew jirrifjutaw li jipparteċipaw, mingħajr il-bżonn li jagħtu raġuni. Huma liberi wkoll li jirtiraw mill-istudju fi kwalunkwe ħin, mingħajr il-bżonn li jipprovdu xi spjegazzjoni u mingħajr ebda riperkussjonijiet negattivi għalihom. Kwalunkwe data miġbura mill-kwestjonarju tkun anonima fis-sors u mhux se jkun possibbli li titħassar l-ebda data ladarba tolqot il-buttuna ta' sottomissjoni. Il-parteciċipanti jistgħu jaqbzu kwalunkwe mistoqsija li ma jixtiequx iwieġbu. Se tiġi pprovduta formola ta' kunsens kemm għall-kwestjonarju kif ukoll għall-intervista.

Qed nitlob li ġentilment tgħaddi l-kwestjonarju lill-ġenituri tal-istudenti li qegħdin fl-aħħar sena tal-istudji tagħhom (formola 5).

Jekk għandek xi mistoqsijiet jew tħassib, tista' tikkuntattja lili nnifsi jew lis-supervizur tiegħi fuq id-dettalji pprovduti hawn taħt.

Dejjem tiegħek,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

99822564

Supervizur tar-Riċerka

Appendix G

Information Letter Questionnaire: English

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Thomas Coppini and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master of Science in Addiction Studies. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta; this is being supervised by Dr Anna Grech. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to analyze how the legal status of cannabis affects parenting practices and communication styles. Your participation in this study may inform prevention strategies that will address parental concerns about which communication strategy is best to use to prevent cannabis use, as well as inform harm reduction strategies. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be kindly asked to fill in a questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Data collected will be anonymous.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason.

You are also free to quit the survey at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Any data collected from the questionnaire will be anonymous at source and it will not be possible to erase any data once you hit the submit button. If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

All data collected will be stored in an anonymous form on completion of the study and following publication of results. A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference, and a consent form is being included should you wish to take part in the study.

Interviews are being carried out alongside this questionnaire. Should you be interested, kindly send an email on the address provided below. An email address will also be provided at the end of the survey. If you wish to participate, kindly send me an email directly on that email address. Should you choose to participate, an information and a consent form will be sent. After consent is received, you will be asked to attend a face-to-face/online interview for approximately 1 hour at a location and time of your convenience, and you will be asked to answer question about if/how the legal status of cannabis is affecting your parenting practices and communication styles. The interview will be audio recorded.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt; you can also contact my supervisor over the phone: 99822564 or via email: Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Sincerely,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Appendix H

Information Letter Questionnaire: Maltese

Għażiż Sinjur/Sinjura,

Jisimni Thomas Coppini u jien student fl-Università ta' Malta, bħalissa qed naqra għal Master of Science fl-Istudji tal-Vizzji. Bħalissa qed nagħmel studju ta' riċerka għad-dissertazzjoni tiegħi bit-titlu Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta; dan qed ikun issorveljat minn Dr Anna Grech. Din l-ittra hija stedina biex tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju. Hawn taht għandek issib informazzjoni dwar l-istudju u dwar x'jiġifieri l-involviment tiegħek, jekk tiddeċiedi li tiegħu sehem.

L-għan tal-istudju tiegħi huwa li janalizza kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis jaffettwa l-prattiki tat-trobbija u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni. Il-parteċipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju tista' tinforma strateġiji ta' prevenzjoni li se jindirizzaw it-tħassib tal-ġenituri dwar liema strateġija ta' komunikazzjoni hija l-aħjar li tuża biex tipprevjeni l-użu tal-kannabis, kif ukoll tinforma strateġiji għat-tnaqqis tal-ħsara. Kwalunkwe data miġbura minn din ir-riċerka se tintuża biss għall-finijiet ta' dan l-istudju.

Jekk tagħżel li tipparteċipa, ġentilment tintalab timla kwestjonarju li jiehu bejn wieħed u ieħor minn 10 sa 15-il minuta biex jimtela.

Id-dejta miġbura tkun anonima.

Il-parteċipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju hija għal kollox volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, inti liberu li taċċetta jew tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tagħti raġuni.

Inti wkoll liberu li tieqaf mill-istħarriġ fi kwalunkwe ħin, mingħajr il-ħtieġa li tipprovdi ebda spjegazzjoni u mingħajr ebda riperkussjonijiet negattivi għalik. Kwalunkwe dejta miġbura mill-kwestjonarju se tkun anonima fis-sors u mhux se jkun possibbli li titħassar l-ebda dejta ladarba tolqot il-buttuna 'Issottometti'. Jekk tagħżel li tipparteċipa, jekk jogħġbok innota li

m'hemmx benefiċċji diretti għalik. Il-parteciċipazzjoni tiegħek ma tinvolvi l-ebda riskju magħruf jew antiċipat.

Id-dejta kollha miġbura tinħażen f'forma anonima mat-tlestija tal-istudju u wara l-pubblikazzjoni tar-riżultati. Kopja ta' din l-ittra ta' informazzjoni qed tiġi pprovduta lilek u għal referenza futura, u qed tiġi inkluża formola ta' kunsens jekk inti tixtieq tiegħu sehem fl-istudju.

Qed isiru intervisti flimkien ma' dan il-kwestjonarju. Jekk inti interessat, jekk jogħġbok ibgħat email fuq l-indirizz ipprovdut hawn taħt. Indirizz elettroniku se jiġi pprovdut ukoll fl-aħħar tal-istħarriġ. Jekk tixtieq tipparteċipa, gentilment ibgħatli email direttament fuq dak l-indirizz elettroniku. Jekk tagħżel li tipparteċipa, tintbagħat informazzjoni u formola ta' kunsens. Wara li nirċievi l-kunsens mingħandek, inti tintalab tattendi intervista wiċċ imb wiċċ jew online għal madwar siegħa f'post u ħin tal-konvenjenza tiegħek, u tintalab twieġeb mistoqsija dwar jekk jew kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis qed taffettwa l-prattiċi tat-trobbija tiegħek u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni. L-intervista se tkun irrekordjata bl-awdjoo.

Grazzi għall-ħin u l-konsiderazzjoni tiegħek. Jekk għandek xi mistoqsijiet jew tħassib, jekk jogħġbok toqgħodx lura milli tikkuntattjani bl-e-mail thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt; tista' wkoll tikkuntattja lis-superviżur tiegħi fuq it-telefon: 99822564 jew permezz ta' email:

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Sinċerament,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Superviżur tar-Riċerka

Appendix I

Facebook post: English

Good morning all. I am a student at the University of Malta, currently reading for a Master of Science in Addiction Studies. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled “Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta”; this is being supervised by Dr Anna Grech. This post is an invitation to parents of adolescents who are in Form 5/Year 11 to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to analyse how the legal status of cannabis affects parenting practices and communication styles regarding cannabis. Your participation in this study may inform prevention strategies that will address parental concerns about which communication strategy is best to use to prevent cannabis use in adolescents, as well as inform harm reduction strategies. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

The questionnaire will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

There are no direct benefits to the parents or anticipated risks in taking part.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Any data collected from the questionnaire will be anonymous at source and it will not be possible to erase any data once you hit the submit button. You may skip over any questions that you do not wish to answer. A consent form will be provided for the questionnaire.

Should you wish to participate, kindly access the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/.../1FAIpQLSdo2tEYD31.../viewform...>

I also am requesting that you kindly share this post and forward the questionnaire to other parents of students who are in their final year of studies (Form 5/Year 11).

Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Research Supervisor

Appendix J

Facebook post: Maltese

Jisimni Thomas Coppini u jien student fl-Università ta' Malta, bħalissa qiegħed nistudja għal Master of Science fl-Istudji tal-Vizzji. Bħalissa qed nagħmel studju ta' riċerka għad-dissertazzjoni tiegħi bit-titlu “Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta”; dan qed ikun issorveljat minn Dr Anna Grech. Dan il-post huwa stedina lill-ġenituri ta' adolexxenti li qegħdin fil-Form 5/Year 11 biex jipparteċipaw f'dan l-istudju. Hawn taħt għandek issib informazzjoni dwar l-istudju u dwar x'jiġifieri l-involviment tiegħek, jekk tiddeċiedi li tiegħu sehem.

L-għan tal-istudju tiegħi huwa li janalizza kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis jaffettwa l-prattiki tat-trobbija u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni rigward il-kannabis. Il-parteeċipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju tista' tinforma strateġiji ta' prevenzjoni li se jindirizzaw it-tħassib tal-ġenituri dwar liema strateġija ta' komunikazzjoni hija l-aħjar li tuża biex tipprevjeni l-użu tal-kannabis fl-adolexxenti, kif ukoll tinforma strateġiji għat-tnaqqis tal-ħsara. Kwalunkwe data miġbura minn din ir-riċerka se tintuża biss għall-finijiet ta' dan l-istudju.

Il-kwestjonarju jieħu madwar 10-15-il minuta biex jitlesta.

M'hemm l-ebda benefiċċji diretti għall-ġenituri jew riskji antiċipati meta tiegħu sehem. Il-parteeċipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju hija għal kollox volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, inti liberu li taċċetta jew tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tagħti raġuni. Int liberu wkoll li tirtira mill-istudju fi kwalunkwe ħin, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tipprovdi ebda spjegazzjoni u mingħajr ebda riperkussjonijiet negattivi għalik. Kwalunkwe dejta miġbura mill-kwestjonarju se tkun anonima fis-sors u mhux se jkun possibbli li titħassar l-ebda dejta ladarba tikklikkja fuq 'Submit'. Tista' taqbez kwalunkwe mistoqsija li ma tixtieqx twieġeb. Jekk tixtieq tipparteċipa, gentilment għafas fuq dan il-link:

<https://docs.google.com/.../1FAIpQLSfUy0yutHG.../viewform...>

Qed nitlob ukoll li ġentilment taqsam din l-istedina u tgħaddi l-kwestjonarju lil
ġenituri oħra ta' studenti li jkunu fl-aħħar sena ta' studji tagħhom (Form 5/Year 11).
Jekk għandek xi mistoqsijiet jew tħassib, tista' tikkuntattja lili nnifsi jew lis-supervizur tiegħi
fuq id-dettalji pprovduti hawn taht.

Dejjem tiegħek,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Appendix K

Ethical Clearance from FREC

24/04/2023, 09:09

University of Malta Mail - Research Ethics Application - Approved by FREC, no UREC decision needed



Thomas Coppini <thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt>

Research Ethics Application - Approved by FREC, no UREC decision needed

SWB FREC <research-ethics.fsw@um.edu.mt>

26 January 2023 at 14:58

To: Thomas Coppini <thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt>

Cc: Anna Grech <anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt>, Gottfried Catania <gottfried.catania@um.edu.mt>

REDP Application ID: SWB-2022-00300

Dear Thomas Coppini,

Your ethics application regarding your research titled *Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta* has been **approved**.

Faculty Research Ethics Committees are authorised to review and approve research ethics applications on behalf of the University of Malta, except in the case of sensitive personal data. In this regard, your ethics proposal **does not need to be sent to UREC-DP**. Hence, **you may now start your research**.

Disclaimer: The research team should note that only the English versions of the documents submitted have been reviewed by FREC. It is the duty of the research team to ensure that all documents in Maltese (or any other language) are faithful translations of the English version.

Regards,



Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Faculty for Social Wellbeing
Room 113, Humanities A Building
+356 2340 2237/3220
um.edu.mt/socialwellbeing/students/researchethics



Appendix L

Consent form Questionnaire: English

My name is **Thomas Coppini** and I am currently reading for a Master of Science in Addiction Studies at the **University of Malta**.

I am currently conducting research that aims to analyse the legal status of cannabis and how it affects parenting practises. The survey that you have been invited to complete forms part of this study. This will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. Any data collected from this survey will be used solely for purposes of this study. There are no direct benefits or anticipated risks in taking part. Participation is entirely voluntary, i.e., you are free to accept or refuse to participate.

You may skip over any questions that you do not wish to answer. You can withdraw at any point during the survey until the point that you hit the “submit” button. Since the data will be anonymous, the researcher will have no way of tracing your response after the survey has been terminated.

I will not be gathering IP addresses (a note will be added at the end of the questionnaire asking whether you would like to participate in an interview. Provision of an email address will only be required should you choose to participate in this interview and wish to contact me for further details regarding the interview).

Interviews are being carried out alongside this questionnaire. Should you be interested, kindly send an email directly to me on the following email address: thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt. Should you choose to participate, an information and consent form will be sent. After consent is received, you will be asked to attend a face-to-face/online interview for approximately 1 hour at a location and time of your convenience, and you will be asked to answer question about if/how the legal status of cannabis is affecting your parenting practices and communication styles. The interview will be audio recorded.

If you wish to participate in this study, please click the button that says “I agree to participate”. If not, please close the browser window (or click "I do not wish to participate"). Should you have any questions or concerns, you may contact myself or my supervisor on the details provided below.

Yours Sincerely,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

99822564

Research Supervisor

DECLARATION BY RESPONDENT: I hereby confirm that I am 18 years of age or older. I am aware that completing and submitting this anonymous questionnaire implies that I am participating voluntarily and with full informed consent on the conditions listed above.

- I agree to participate – begin survey
- I do not wish to participate – exit the survey

Appendix M

Consent form Questionnaire: Maltese

Jisimni Thomas Coppini u bħalissa qed naqra għal Master of Science fl-Istudji tal-Vizzji fl-Università ta' Malta.

Bħalissa qed nagħmel riċerka li għandha l-għan li tanalizza l-istatus legali tal-kannabis u kif din taffettwa l-prattiki tat-trobbija. L-istħarriġ li ġejt mistieden timla jifforma parti minn dan l-istudju. Dan se jiehu madwar 15-il minuta biex tlesti. Kwalunkwe data miġbura minn dan l-istħarriġ se tintuża biss għall-finijiet ta' dan l-istudju. M'hemm l-ebda benefiċċji diretti jew riskji antiċipati meta tiehu sehem. Il-parteciċpazzjoni hija kompletament volontarja, jiġifieri, inti liberu li taċċetta jew tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa. Tista' taqbez kwalunkwe mistoqsija li ma tixtieqx twieġeb. Tista' tirtira fi kwalunkwe ħin matul l-istħarriġ sal-punt li tolqot il-buttuna "issottometti". Peress li d-dejta se tkun anonima, ir-riċerkatur ma jkollu l-ebda mod kif jitraċċa r-rispons tiegħek wara li l-istħarriġ ikun ġie tterminat.

Mhux se nkun niġbor indirizzi IP (se tiżdied nota fl-aħħar tal-kwestjonarju li tistaqsi jekk tixtieqx tipparteċipa f'intervista. Il-provvista ta' indirizz elettroniku tkun meħtieġa biss jekk inti tagħzel li tipparteċipa f'din l-intervista u tixtieq ikkuntattjani għal aktar dettalji dwar l-intervista).

Qed isiru intervisti flimkien ma' dan il-kwestjonarju. Jekk inti interessat, jekk jogħġbok ibgħat email direttament lili fuq dan l-indirizz elettroniku: thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt. Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, tintbagħat formola ta' informazzjoni u kunsens. Wara li nirċievi l-kunsens, inti tintalab tattendi intervista wiċċ imb wiċċ/online għal madwar siegħa f'post u ħin tal-konvenjenza tiegħek, u tintalab twieġeb mistoqsija dwar jekk/kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis qed taffettwa l-prattiki tat-trobbija tiegħek u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni. L-intervista se tkun irrekordjata bl-awdjoo.

Jekk tixtieq tipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju, jekk jogħġbok ikklikkja fuq il-buttuna li tghid "Naqbel li tipparteċipa". Jekk le, jekk jogħġbok aghlaq it-tieqa tal-browser (jew ikklikkja "Ma nixtieqx nipparteċipa").

Jekk għandek xi mistoqsijiet jew tħassib, tista' tikkuntattja lili jew lis-superviżur tiegħi fuq id-dettalji pprovduti hawn taht.

Dejjem tiegħek,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

99822564

Superviżur tar-Riċerka

Appendix N

Consent form Interview: English

Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta

I, the undersigned, give my consent to take part in the study conducted by Thomas Coppini.

This consent form specifies the terms of my participation in this research study.

1. I have been given written and/or verbal information about the purpose of the study; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and any questions that I had were answered fully and to my satisfaction.
2. I also understand that I am free to accept to participate, or to refuse or stop participation at any time without giving any reason and without any penalty. Should I choose to participate, I may choose to decline to answer any questions asked. In the event that I choose to withdraw from the study, any data collected from me will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is pseudonymized or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in a pseudonymized form. (pseudonymized means a code will be used instead of your real name e.g. respondent A).
3. I understand that all reasonable precautions will be taken by the researcher to ensure that my identity is not revealed in the research outputs. Personally identifiable data will be stored safely and securely, and separate from any pseudonymised data.
4. I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview in which the researcher will ask questions to analyse how the legal status of cannabis affects parenting practices and communication styles. I am aware that the interview will take

approximately 1 hour. I understand that the interview is to be conducted in a place and at a time that is convenient for me.

5. I understand that my participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks
6. I understand that there are no direct benefits to me from participating in this study. I also understand that this research may benefit others by analysing parental communication and parenting styles regarding cannabis use which may inform prevention strategies that will address parental concerns about which communication strategy is best to use to prevent cannabis use, as well as inform harm reduction strategies
7. I understand that, under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation, I have the right to access, rectify, and where applicable, ask for the data concerning me to be erased.
8. I understand that all data collected will be stored in a pseudonymized form on completion of the study and following publication of results
9. I have been provided with a copy of the information letter and understand that I will also be given a copy of this consent form.
10. I am aware that, by marking the first-tick box below, I am giving my consent for this interview to be audio recorded and converted to text as it has been recorded (transcribed).

MARK ONLY IF AND AS APPLICABLE

- ☐ I agree to this interview being audio recorded
- ☐ I do not agree to this interview being audio recorded

11. I am aware that extracts from my interview may be reproduced in these outputs using a pseudonym.
12. I am aware that my data will be pseudonymised. The codes that link my data to my identity will be stored securely and separately from the data (including audio recordings), in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer. Any material that identifies me as a participant in this study will be stored securely for the duration of the study.
13. I am aware that my identity and personal information will not be revealed in any publications, reports or presentations arising from this research.
14. I understand that identifiable data is only available to people who need it for research purposes. These include the researcher, the supervisor and (in exceptional circumstances) the examiners for verification purposes

I have read and understood the above statements and agree to participate in this study.

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

99822564

Appendix O

Consent form Interview: Maltese

Prattiċi tal-ġenituri u stili ta' komunikazzjoni rigward il-kannabis: Sfidi fid-dawl tad-dekriminalizzazzjoni tal-kannabis f'Malta

Jien, hawn taht iffirmat, nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex niehu sehem fl-istudju li qed isir minn Thomas Coppini. Din il-formola ta' kunsens tispeċifika t-termini tal-partecipazzjoni tiegħi f'dan l-istudju ta' riċerka.

1. Inghatajt informazzjoni bil-miktub u/jew verbali dwar l-iskop tal-istudju; Kelli l-opportunità li nagħmel mistoqsijiet u kwalunkwe mistoqsija li kelli għet imwiegħa bis-sħiħ u għas-sodisfazzjon tiegħi.
2. Nifhem ukoll li jien liberu li naċċetta li nipparteċipa, jew li nirrifjuta jew inwaqqaf il-partecipazzjoni tiegħi kwalunkwe hin mingħajr ma nagħti l-ebda raġuni u mingħajr ebda penali. Jekk nagħzel li nipparteċipa, nista' nagħzel li nirrifjuta li nwiegħeb kwalunkwe mistoqsija li ssir. Fil-każ li nagħzel li nirtira mill-istudju, kwalunkwe dejta miġbura mingħandi tithassar sakemm dan ikun teknikament possibbli (pereżempju, qabel ma tiġi psewdonimizzata jew ippubblikata), sakemm it-tħassir tad-data ma jagħmilx impossibbli jew ifixkel serjament il-kisba tal-għanijiet tar-riċerka, f'liema każ għandha tinżamm f'forma psewdonimizzata. (psewdonimizzat ifisser li se jintuża kodiċi minflok ismek reali eż. partecipant A).
3. Nifhem li l-prekawzjonijiet raġonevoli kollha se jittiehdu mir-riċerkatur biex jiżgura li l-identità tiegħi ma tiġix żvelata fir-riżultati tar-riċerka. Id-dejta identifikkabbli personalment tinhażen b'mod sikur u sigur, u separata minn kwalunkwe dejta psewdonimizzata.
4. Nifhem li ġejt mistieden biex nipparteċipa f'intervista li fiha r-riċerkatur se jistaqsi mistoqsijiet biex janalizza kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis jaffettwa l-prattiċi tat-trobbija u l-

istili ta' komunikazzjoni. Jiena naf li l-intervista se tiegħu madwar siegħa. Nifhem li l-intervista għandha ssir f'post u f'hin li jkun konvenjenti għalija.

5. Nifhem li l-partecipazzjoni tiegħi ma tinvolvi l-ebda riskju magħruf jew antiċipat

6. Nifhem li m'hemm l-ebda benefiċċji diretti għalija mill-partecipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju.

Nifhem ukoll li din ir-riċerka tista' tibbenefika lil haddiehor billi tanalizza l-komunikazzjoni tal-ġenituri u l-istili tat-trobbija rigward l-użu tal-kannabis li jistgħu jinfurmaw strateġiji ta' prevenzjoni li jindirizzaw it-thassib tal-ġenituri dwar liema strateġija ta' komunikazzjoni hija l-aħjar li tintuża biex tipprevjeni l-użu tal-kannabis, kif ukoll tinforma strateġiji għat-tnaqqis tal-ħsara.

7. Nifhem li, skont ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-Dejta (GDPR) u l-leġislazzjoni nazzjonali, għandi d-dritt li naċċedi għal, nirrettifika, u fejn applikabbli, nitlob biex titħassar id-data li tikkonċernani.

8. Nifhem li d-dejta kollha miġbura se tinħażen f'forma psewdonimizzata mat-tlestija tal-istudju u wara l-pubblikazzjoni tar-riżultati

9. Ġejt ipprovdut b'kopja tal-ittra ta' informazzjoni u nifhem li se ningħata wkoll kopja ta' din il-formola ta' kunsens.

10. Jiena naf li, billi nimmarka l-ewwel kaxxa hawn taht, qed nagħti l-kunsens tiegħi biex din l-intervista tiġi rreġistrata bl-awdjo u tiġi kkonvertita fi kliem kif ġie rreġistrat (traskritt).

IMMARKA BISS JEKK U KIF APPLIKABBLI

☐ Naqbel li din l-intervista tiġi rreġistrata bl-awdjo

☐ Ma naqbilx li din l-intervista tiġi rreġistrata bl-awdjo

11. Jiena naf li siltiet mill-intervista tiegħi jistgħu jiġu riprodotti f'dawn l-‘outputs’ bl-użu ta' psewdonimu.

12. Jiena naf li d-dejta tiegħi se tiġi psewdonima. Il-kodiċijiet li jorbtu d-dejta tiegħi mal-identità tiegħi se jinħażnu b'mod sigur u separat mid-dejta (inklużi r-reġistrazzjonijiet tal-awdjo), go fajl ikkodifikat fuq il-kompjuter protett bil-password tar-riċerkatur, u r-riċerkatur u s-superviżur tar-riċerka biss se jkollhom aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni. Kwalunkwe materjal stampat jitqiegħed f'kexxun msakkar. Kwalunkwe materjal li jidentifikani bħala parteċipant f'dan l-istudju se jinħażen b'mod sigur għat-tul tal-istudju.

13. Jiena naf li l-identità u l-informazzjoni personali tiegħi mhux se jiġu żvelati fl-ebda pubblikazzjoni, rapporti jew preżentazzjonijiet li joħorgu minn din ir-riċerka.

14. Nifhem li data identifikabbli hija disponibbli biss għal nies li jeħtieġuha għal skopijiet ta' riċerka. Dawn jinkludu r-riċerkatur, is-superviżur u (f'ċirkostanzi eċċezzjonali) l-eżaminaturi għal skopijiet ta' verifika

Qrajt u fhimt id-dikjarazzjonijiet ta' hawn fuq u naqbel li nipparteċipa f'dan l-istudju.

Isem tal-parteeipant: _____

Firma: _____

Data: _____

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

99822564

Appendix P

Information Letter Interview: English

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Thomas Coppini and I am a student at the University of Malta, presently reading for a Master of Science in Addiction Studies. I am presently conducting a research study for my dissertation titled Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta; this is being supervised by Dr Anna Grech. This letter is an invitation to participate in this study. Below you will find information about the study and about what your involvement would entail, should you decide to take part.

The aim of my study is to analyze how the legal status of cannabis affects parenting practices and communication styles. Your participation in this study may inform prevention strategies that will address parental concerns about which communication strategy is best to use to prevent cannabis use, as well as inform harm reduction strategies. Any data collected from this research will be used solely for purposes of this study.

Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to attend a face-to-face/online interview for approximately 1 hour at a location of your convenience, and you will be asked to answer question about if/how the legal status of cannabis is affecting your parenting practices and communication styles. The interview will be audio recorded if the interview is held face to face. If held online, the interview will be held through Zoom, and you are permitted to keep your cameras turned off to minimize identifiability in the recordings. Prior to the interview, you will be also instructed as to how to change your 'Zoom name' to only display your pseudonym, so that the recordings as well as the transcripts are pseudonymized. Pseudonymized means a code will be used instead of your real name.

Data collected will be treated confidentially and pseudonymized. All reasonable precautions will be taken to ensure that your identity is not revealed in the research outputs. Identifiable data is only available to people who need it for research purposes. These include the researcher, the supervisor and (in exceptional circumstances) the examiners for verification purposes.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary; in other words, you are free to accept or refuse to participate, without needing to give a reason. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide any explanation and without any negative repercussions for you. Should you choose to withdraw, any data collected from your interview will be erased as long as this is technically possible (for example, before it is pseudonymized or published), unless erasure of data would render impossible or seriously impair achievement of the research objectives, in which case it shall be retained in a pseudonymized form.

If you choose to participate, please note that there are no direct benefits to you. Your participation does not entail any known or anticipated risks.

Please note also that, as a participant, you have the right under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national legislation to access, rectify and where applicable ask for the data concerning you to be erased. All data collected will be stored in a pseudonymized form on completion of the study. The codes that link your data to your identity will be stored securely and separately from the data (including audio recordings), in an encrypted file on the researcher's password-protected computer, and only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to this information. Any hard-copy materials will be placed in a locked cabinet/drawer. Any material that identifies you as a participant in this study will be stored securely for the duration of the study. Personal data will be deleted September 2025.

A copy of this information sheet is being provided for you to keep and for future reference.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by e-mail thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt; you can also contact my supervisor over the phone: 99822564 or via email: Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Sincerely,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

Anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Research Supervisor

Appendix Q

Information Letter Interview: Maltese

Jien jisimni Thomas Coppini u jien student fl-Università ta' Malta, bħalissa qed nistudja għal Master of Science fl-Istudji tad-Dipendenzi (Addiction Studies). Bħalissa qed nagħmel riċerka għat-teżi tiegħi bit-titlu “Parental practices and communication styles regarding cannabis: Challenges in view of cannabis decriminalization in Malta”. Dan qed ikun issorveljat minn Dr Anna Grech. Din l-ittra hija stedina biex inti tipparteċipa f'din ir-riċerka. Hawn taħt għandek issib informazzjoni dwar ir-riċerka u dwar x'jiġifieri l-involvement tiegħek, jekk tiddeċiedi li tiegħu sehem.

L-għan tal-istudju tiegħi huwa li janalizza kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis jaffettwa l-prattiċi tat-trobbija u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni. Il-parteeipazzjoni tiegħek f'dan l-istudju tista' tinforma strateġiji ta' prevenzjoni li se jindirizzaw it-tħassib tal-ġenituri dwar liema strateġija ta' komunikazzjoni hija l-aħjar li tuża biex tipprevjeni l-użu tal-kannabis, kif ukoll tista' tinforma strateġiji għat-tnaqqis tal-ħsara. Kwalunkwe dejta miġbura minn din ir-riċerka se tintuża biss għall-finijiet ta' dan l-istudju.

Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, tinalab tattendi intervista wiċċ imb wiċċ jew online għal madwar siegħa f'post tal-konvenjenza tiegħek, u tinalab twieġeb mistoqsija dwar jekk jew kif l-istatus legali tal-kannabis hux qed jaffettwa il-prattiċi tat-trobbija tiegħek u l-istili ta' komunikazzjoni. L-intervista tiġi rreġistrata bl-awdjo jekk l-intervista ssir wiċċ imb wiċċ. Jekk tinżamm online, l-intervista ssir permezz ta' Zoom, u inti tista' żżomm il-kamera tiegħek mitfija biex timminimizza l-identifikazzjoni fir-reġistrazzjonijiet. Qabel l-intervista, int se tingħata wkoll struzzjonijiet dwar kif tibdel l-isem taż-‘Zoom’ tiegħek biex turi biss il-psewdonimu tiegħek, sabiex ir-reġistrazzjonijiet kif ukoll it-traskrizzjonijiet ikunu psewdonimizzati. Psewdonimizzat ifisser li kodiċi se jintuża minflok l-isem reali tiegħek.

Id-dejta miġbura tiġi ttrattata b'mod kunfidenzjali u psewdonimizzata. Se jittieħdu l-prekawzjonijiet raġonevoli kollha biex jiġi żgurat li l-identità tiegħek ma tiġix żvelata fir-riżultati tar-riċerka. Id-dejta identifikabbli hija disponibbli biss għal nies li jeħtieġuha għal skopijiet ta' riċerka. Dawn jinkludu r-riċerkatur, is-superviżur u (f'ċirkostanzi eċċezzjonali) l-eżaminaturi għal skopijiet ta' verifika.

Il-parteeipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju hija għal kollox volontarja; fi kliem ieħor, inti liberu li taċċetta jew tirrifjuta li tipparteċipa, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tagħti raġuni. Int liberu wkoll li tirtira mill-istudju fi kwalunkwe ħin, mingħajr ma jkollok bżonn tipprovdi ebda spjegazzjoni u mingħajr ebda riperkussjonijiet negattivi għalik. Jekk tagħzel li tirtira, kwalunkwe dejta miġbura mill-intervista tiegħek tithassar sakemm dan ikun teknikament possibbli (pereżempju, qabel ma tiġi psewdonimizzata jew ippubblikata), sakemm it-tħassir tad-dejta ma jagħmilx impossibbli jew ifixkel serjament il-kisba tal-għanijiet tar-riċerka, f'liema każ għandha tinżamm f'forma psewdonimizzata.

Jekk tagħzel li tipparteċipa, jekk jogħġbok innota li m'hemmx benefiċċji diretti għalik. Il-parteeipazzjoni tiegħek ma tinvolvi l-ebda riskju magħruf jew antiċipat.

Jekk jogħġbok innota wkoll li, bħala parteċipant, għandek id-dritt taħt ir-Regolament Ġenerali dwar il-Protezzjoni tad-Dejta (GDPR) u l-leġiżlazzjoni nazzjonali li taċċedi għal, tirrettifika u (fejn applikabbli) titlob li tithassar id-data li tikkonċernak. Id-dejta kollha miġbura tinħażen f'forma psewdonimizzata mat-tlestija tal-istudju. Il-kodiċijiet li jorbtu d-dejta tiegħek mal-identità tiegħek se jinħażnu b'mod sigur u separat mid-dejta (inklużi r-registrazzjonijiet tal-awdjo), go fajl ikkodifikat fuq il-kompjuter protett bil-password tar-riċerkatur, u r-riċerkatur u s-superviżur tar-riċerka biss ikollhom aċċess għal din l-informazzjoni. Kwalunkwe materjal stampat jitqiegħed f'kexxun imsakkar. Kwalunkwe materjal li jidentifikak bħala parteċipant f'dan l-istudju se jinħażen b'mod sigur għal kemm idum l-istudju. Id-dejta personali se tithassar f'Settembru 2025.

Grazzi għall-hin u l-konsiderazzjoni tiegħek. Jekk għandek xi mistoqsijiet jew tħassib, jekk jogħġbok toqgħodx lura milli tikkuntattjani bl-e-mail thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt; tista' wkoll tikkuntattja lis-supervizur tiegħi fuq il-mobajl: 99822564 jew permezz ta' email:

anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Sinċerament,

Thomas Coppini

thomas.coppini.15@um.edu.mt

Dr. Anna Grech

anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

Supervizur tar-Riċerka

Appendix R

Summary of Dissertation

Aims

The study aimed to identify parental views, communication styles, and practices regarding adolescent cannabis use in Malta and how the recent change in cannabis's legal status affected them. It also aimed to understand new challenges faced by parents after cannabis decriminalization in Malta. The study thus aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the introduction of the new cannabis legislation?
2. What are the current parenting practices and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the new cannabis legislation?
3. (How) is the new cannabis legislation posing new challenges for parents?

Rationale

Analysing how parents communicate about cannabis use and their parenting styles can provide valuable insights for developing effective prevention strategies. This study used both surveys and semi-structured interviews (mixed methodology). Most research in this area is either purely quantitative or qualitative. As there is a lack of research on parental communication and practices related to adolescent cannabis use in Malta, this study may be a valuable contribution to our understanding of cannabis use in this country.

Methodological Approach

The study utilized a mixed methods approach of quantitative surveys and qualitative semi-structured interviews (explanatory sequential design). This allowed for the benefits of each method to be leveraged while compensating for their respective limitations, and the

qualitative methods were used to expand on the quantitative results. The integration of both methodologies is a hallmark of mixed methods research. (McCrudden et al., 2021).

Literature Review

In 2019, the ESPAD reported that 2% of Maltese students aged 13 or younger used cannabis, which is slightly lower than the European average of 2.4%. The report also found that 12% of Maltese students had used cannabis at some point in their life, 4.7% had used it in the past 30 days, and 11% had used it in the past 12 months. The prevalence of high-risk cannabis users was 3.4% of Maltese students (EMCDDA, 2020).

Adolescence is a vital stage of development that is linked to a range of risk factors, including drug abuse and misuse (Hawkins et al., 1992). Adolescent cannabis use has been linked to impairment in cognitive functioning (Tapert et al., 2008), dependence to cannabis (Chen et al., 2009), school dropouts (Lynskey et al., 2003), psychotic illness (Stockman, 2009, Arseneault, 2002), depression (Schoeler et al., 2018), risky behaviours (Guo et al., 2002), and self-harm (Denissoff et al., 2021). However, Tapert et al. (2008) state that it is “unknown whether marijuana use caused or contributed to these effects”.

Policy makers worldwide are looking for alternatives to criminalizing drug possession (Stevens et al., 2019). This may have been spurred by the United Nations, which called for alternatives to criminalization and conviction, including decriminalization of drug possession for personal use (UNCEBC, 2019). Malta's new cannabis laws, implemented in December 2021, allow individuals 18 years and older to possess up to 7 grams of cannabis for personal use, cultivate up to 4 plants, and possess up to 50 grams of dried cannabis for personal use in their residence (Drug Dependence Act., 2015). Convictions related to decriminalized or depenalized cannabis have been deregistered (Conduct Certificates Ordinance, 1934).

According to Kerr et al. (2018), the legalization of recreational marijuana (RML) is associated with an increase in use among college students, but the evidence for its effect on

different age groups is inconsistent (Cerdá et al., 2017). Although the perception among both adults and adolescents that cannabis use is risky has reduced since the early 2000s, the prevalence of cannabis use among adolescents has remained relatively unchanged over the same period with only minimal changes (Carliner et al., 2017).

Parents are concerned that changes in cannabis policy may cause adults to overlook its potential harm on adolescents around them, and they feel limited in controlling children's exposure to cannabis use in public spaces and by neighbour (Jones et al., 2020). This relates to the normalization thesis (Duff et al., 2011). Normalization can be described as “the movement of what had previously been a deviant and minority activity towards the mainstream” (Williams, 2016) and is characterized by more tolerant attitudes towards the activity (Asbridge et al., 2016). Cannabis use amongst adolescents is becoming increasingly normalized (Zuckermann et al., 2021, Hathaway et al., 2015) which may create new challenges for parents.

Parental-Adolescent Relationship, Communication and Practices

Prevention researchers have stated parent-adolescent communication is among the most effective approaches to preventing drug use (Pettigrew et al., 2017) and relationships act as “communication conduits” that allow connections to form between family members (Lander et al., 2013).

Baumrind (1991) developed a classification of parenting styles based on two dimensions: parental responsiveness and parental control. These dimensions produce four parenting styles: authoritative, permissive, authoritarian, and rejecting-neglecting. (Estlein, 2021, Baumrind 1966). Napper et al. (2016) identified three types of communication when parents discuss cannabis use with college aged children: risk, permissive, and cannabis use communication. Risk communication is effective in reducing cannabis use in college students, but may not work for those who have already initiated cannabis use (Napper et al.,

2016). Parental monitoring is more effective for such students (Napper et al., 2014). Permissive communication is associated with higher cannabis use, approval, and negative consequences (Napper et al., 2016). Excessive emphasis on rules and discipline without addressing other areas can increase substance use in adolescents who have already initiated use (Ennett et al., 2001). Setting clear rules is strongly linked with lower likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours (Vermeulen-Smit et al., 2015). Adolescents who report never talking to their parents about substance use have a higher risk of engaging in substance use (Pettigrew et al., 2017)

One of the most commonly observed types of permissive communication is when parents disclose their past cannabis use and the negative consequences they experienced as a result (Napper., 2016). Parents might believe that disclosing their own history of cannabis use during discussions with their children could enhance their credibility (Skinner et al., 2016). Parents' disclosure of past cannabis use is linked to an increased probability of their children using cannabis (Kerr et al., 2015). There is also a strong link between parental substance use and their children's use of substances (Knight et al., 2013). Children of parents who use cannabis are at a greater risk of initiating cannabis use themselves (Kerr et al., 2015). Friese (2017) states that adolescents may interpret their parents' current or past use of cannabis as an indication that cannabis use is not harmful.

Methodology

Philosophical Assumptions

This study used a critical realist ontology, which acknowledges there is a “real world” that is independent of our perceptions, theoretical assumptions and constructions i.e. objective reality, and a constructivist epistemology which views our understanding of this “real world” as constructed by our own perceptions i.e. subjective knowledge of this reality (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The study used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model to understand the influence of the macro system (changes in policy and normalization of cannabis) on the microsystem (parenting practices and communication about cannabis use with adolescents). The model includes four levels; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Explanatory Sequential Design

A mixed methods explanatory sequential design was used in this study. The first phase was quantitative and results were expanded upon during the qualitative interviews to help explain the quantitative results. This design was used as it shed light on why the quantitative results were obtained and how they could be explained using qualitative data (Creswell, 2018).

Data collection

The population that was studied were parents of adolescents who are in Form 5. Parents of any type (biological etc.) age, gender and ethnicity were included. The schools selected were two public schools, one private school and two church school. 100 responses were gained in the quantitative study, which included all submissions i.e. convenience sampling was used. A note was added at the end of the questionnaire asking if any participants would like to take part in an interview, so participants were chosen from the same sample as the questionnaire (parallel sampling (Collins et al., 2007)).

A Google Forms survey with 27 questions was created, covering cannabis use, parental communication, and challenges for parents. Eisenberg's (2019) questions and themes were partly used to design the survey. Qualitative data was collected by identifying areas needing further exploration through quantitative data analysis, designing follow-up questions, and interviewing volunteers whose responses were audio recorded.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of quantitative data, the raw data gathered from the questionnaire was converted into a form that was useful for data analysis. For the qualitative data, steps laid out by Castleberry & Nolen (2018) for conducting thematic analysis were followed, which include 1) compiling, 2) disassembling, 3) reassembling, 4) interpreting, and 5) concluding. The first step was compiling the qualitative data. The audio recordings were transcribed using MAXQDA.

Chi-squared tests were utilized to identify and demonstrate significant associations between variables. The analysis of the quantitative data was carried out with the use of SPSS and moved from descriptive analysis to inferential analysis. The next steps for the thematic analysis were disassembling, reassembling and interpreting the data, and concluding.

Mixed methods Analysis and Interpretation – Integration

Integration happened on multiple levels, including the interpretation and reporting level (Fetters et al., 2013). Quantitative and qualitative data sets were analysed to determine the best “fit” of data integration. This analysis was carried out by determining if there was confirmation (both sets of data confirm one another), expansion (if qualitative data expanded on data gathered for the survey) and discordance (if the two data sets are inconsistent and contradict one another) (Fetters et al., 2013).

Reflexivity

This study followed two of Finlay’s (2002) variants of reflexivity, which include introspection and intersubjective reflection. Introspection involved examining my own experience, personal meanings and reactions during the study, as well as examining the experiences, personal meanings and reactions of the participants. Reflexivity as intersubjective reflection (Finlay, 2002) was adopted in order to view the self in relation to the participants i.e. how was I viewed by the participants.

Ethical considerations

The study ensured respect towards all participants, obtaining informed consent, avoiding potentially harmful topics, ensuring confidentiality, and allowing voluntary participation and withdrawal, using appropriate research methods and data analysis techniques to honour their time and effort (Vanclay et al., 2013).

Results

A total of 100 individuals (79% female) participated in the study. The mean age of the sample was 48 years ($M = 47.36$, $SD = 4.89$) (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Age of Participants

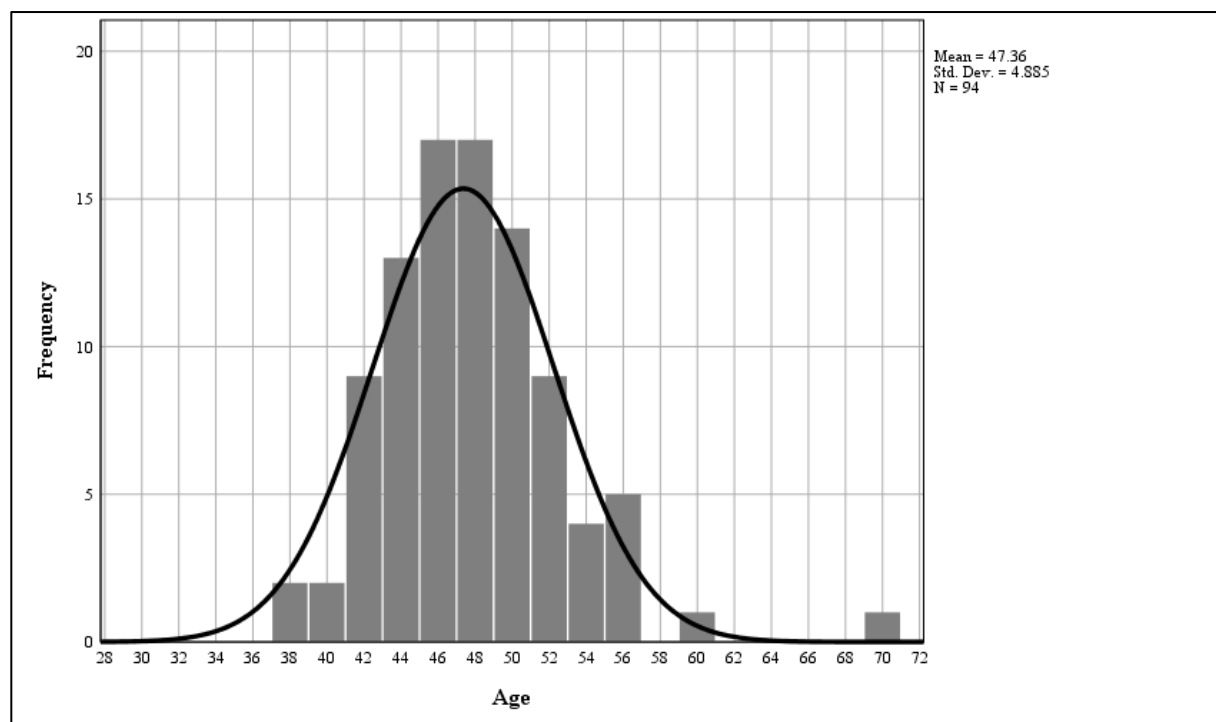


Table 1*Sociodemographic characteristics of participants*

		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean
School Type	Private	62	62%	
	Church	30	30%	
	Government	8	8%	
Gender	Male	20	20%	
	Female	79	79%	
	Prefer not to answer	1	1%	
Age				47
Marital Status	Married	89	89%	
	Separated	9	9%	
	Never married	2	2%	
Parent Type	Biological	98	98%	
	Adopted	2	2%	
Household composition	2 parents with child/children at home	92	92%	
	1 parent with child/children at home	8	8%	
Employment Status	Full-time employment	51	51%	
	Part-time employment	22	22%	
	Unemployed	2	2%	
	Self-employed	16	16%	
	Home-maker	5	5%	
	Student	3	3%	
	Retired	1	1%	
Level of Education	Tertiary education	58	58%	
	Post-secondary education	26	26%	
	Secondary education	13	13%	
	Presently reading for a Masters	1	1%	
	Currently at UOM	1	1%	
	Diploma	1	1%	

Table 2*Survey Results*

9) I am fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis use in Malta	Agree	%	70
	Disagree	%	17
	Don't know	%	13
10) New legislation regarding cannabis has led me to having a more favourable view of teenage cannabis use	Agree	%	8
	Disagree	%	81
	Don't know	%	11
11) My child will have more favourable views regarding cannabis use following the new legislation	Agree	%	34
	Disagree	%	44
	Don't know	%	22
12) It would be easier for my child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation	Agree	%	84
	Disagree	%	8
	Don't know	%	8
13) My child is more likely to use cannabis following the new legislation	Agree	%	49
	Disagree	%	25
	Don't know	%	26
14) I am more likely to talk about cannabis use with my child after the change in legislation	Agree	%	66
	Disagree	%	23
	Don't know	%	11
15) Talking about cannabis use with my child will lead to my child using cannabis	Agree	%	3
	Disagree	%	82
	Don't know	%	15
16) If my child and I were talking about cannabis and my child asked me about my past cannabis use, I would be honest and tell them the truth	Agree	%	89
	Disagree	%	6
	Don't know	%	5
17) I have a zero-tolerance approach to cannabis use	Agree	%	47
	Disagree	%	40
	Don't know	%	13
18) I set concrete rules with regards	Agree	%	72

to cannabis use	Disagree	%	15
	Don't know	%	13
19) I have warned my child about the health consequences of using cannabis	Agree	%	91
	Disagree	%	4
	Don't know	%	5
20) My child is old enough to make their own choices regarding cannabis use	Agree	%	17
	Disagree	%	78
	Don't know	%	5
21) I monitor what my child does, where they go and who their friends are	Agree	%	96
	Disagree	%	4
	Don't know	%	0
22) My communication with my child about cannabis use is ongoing	Agree	%	55
	Disagree	%	37
	Don't know	%	8
23) My communication with my child about cannabis use is specific to certain situations	Agree	%	50
	Disagree	%	42
	Don't know	%	8
26) I find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to my child about cannabis use ever since its legal status has changed	Agree	%	11
	Disagree	%	86
	Don't know	%	3
27) I feel I have very little influence over my child's decision to smoke cannabis	Agree	%	31
	Disagree	%	57
	Don't know	%	12

Table 3
Significant Associations

Significant Associations	Chi-square (X^2)
90% of parents (n= 63) that are fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis use in Malta agree that it would be easier for their child to obtain cannabis following the new legislation	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 11.16, p < .05$
99% of parents (n=65) who are more likely to talk about cannabis use with their child after the change in legislation also monitor what their child does, where they go and who their friends are.	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 6.42, p < .05$
92% of parents (n=61) who are more likely to	$X^2 (4, N=100) = 12.31, p < .05$

discuss cannabis use with their children following the change in the law are also likely to be truthful about their own past use of cannabis when asked by their adolescent child.	
92% of parents (n=82) who would be honest about past use agreed that they would warn their child about the health consequences of using cannabis.	$X^2(4, N=100) = 18.43, p < .05$
85% of parents (n=73) who do not find it more difficult and/or uncomfortable to talk to their child about cannabis use ever since its change in legal status also do not think that talking about cannabis use with their child will lead their child to using cannabis.	$X^2(4, N=100) = 6.42, p < .05$

Thematic Analysis

THEME 1	THEME 2	THEME 3
Uncertainty	Normalization	Openness to Communication
SUBTHEME 1.1	SUBTHEME 2.1	SUBTHEME 3.1
Uncertainty about the new law	Concern of outside influences	Levels of self-disclosure about past use
SUBTHEME 1.2		SUBTHEME 3.2
Uncertainty about the effects and content of cannabis		Role of the adolescent
		SUBTHEME 3.3
		Situated conversations

Uncertainty

Participants were uncertain about what the new law entails. A participant who has a medical prescription for cannabis was also unsure about the new laws involving cannabis:

“so the law — even I don't know the law — and I've got this prescription. I mean, as I understand it, boy uh kids at 15/16 or not, can't and go get a prescription I'm imagining, I don't even know, I'm going to be honest” (P6).

One parent shared uncertainty about the different strains of cannabis, and the different effects they might have.

“you don't really know what's in it.” I mean these are 100 — I don't know how many different species of whatever. If—what you're smoking in India you're not smoking in Malta” (P1).

They compare cannabis use with other substances as a reference point, and state that adolescents might have a positive view of cannabis because of a lack of awareness of the health consequences of using cannabis.

“like the cigarettes, you know, you buy a pack of cigarettes you see a dying person, what is— what does cannabis do —they think it's natural. Unfortunately it's given the — it's a natural thing, but there are consequences, you know” (P1).

The developing brain

Parents were concerned about the effect cannabis has on the adolescent brain, and the effect it can have on their potential:

“he shouldn't mess around with his m—mind, his mind is developing. It's one thing seeing, a friend who's 50 60 plus smoking dope or my — his brain is fully developed, “but yours is developing you don't know what it's gonna do to you, so don't mess around... that is what we tell them” (P1)

Normalization

Parents were also concerned about the normalization of cannabis use, and how it has become pervasive around our society since a more lenient approach to cannabis use has brought about a reduction in stigma.

“First of all there’s no more stigma, around cannabis, before [pause] if somebody was smoking cannabis they wouldn’t walk into my house and roll a joint, today they feel they can. Even when you rent out a property today, I mean I have to actually now put in a contract to not grow cannabis because it’s not legal to do it the way you think you’re doing it, and no smoking of cannabis, not just smoking, smoking of cannabis so, it’s there it’s around us it’s everywhere so, that’s why it’s foreground I think” (P1).

They are also concerned that “it’s just *everywhere*, everything’s acceptable, they’ve opened every single door, there doesn’t seem to be any form of discipline related to it, and if you’re contrary to it, you’re seen as negative” (P1).

Concern of outside influences

For some parents, the decriminalization of cannabis has led to concerns about individuals around the adolescent smoking and having an influence on them.

“we are very non-smoking family, we don’t smoke cigarettes, we don’t uh, smoke at all, there’s no exposure in my family um, so if there would be they’d be outside influences and maybe one or two mothers or fathers who might smoke [pause] and they do, we have friends, my friends who smoke so my kid’s exposure I would say is to that” (P1).

Unchanged openness

Overall parents do not feel influenced by the new law in their openness to talk about cannabis use with their adolescent child.

“I think your relationship with your child is your relationship with your child. Things didn’t change in my house because it was legislated for or against or this and that. I mean, we would have had this conversation because a friend went to India so I don’t—I don’t believe that cos my government has decided to do this *stupid* banal legalization, all of a sudden I’m more open with my kids. I have to be more aware. But not necessarily no my relationship is what it is.” (P1)

Levels of self-disclosure about past use

Although parents expressed general openness to talk about cannabis use and this openness was unaffected by the new legislation, some parents were not so sure about the topic of past use. Parents expressed that they feel their child will take it as an incentive i.e. if you did it at that age, then I can do it. They state that “the moment you tell your child you’ve done this at this age, then all of a sudden it’s—it’s alright” (P1). P6 feels that “he will take it down “My mom does it. So it's okay” and that their:

In contrast, Participants also shared that disclosing past use might make you “more approachable as a parent” and that “if you divulge that you've transgressed as well or you've made mistakes or even if it's not a mistake, you've experimented yourself, I think they would come to you with their experiments more” (P7).

Role of the adolescent

Another limitation to the openness mentioned is that the adolescent plays a role in the relationship dynamic, and that adolescent’s traits affect how they talk to them about it, stating that “The conversation is quite open, but it’s not detailed. Um, he’s never—he’s reserved so he’s never one to, ask too much about things he knows we don’t approve of” (P1), also sharing that “we’re dealing also with hormones... and we’re dealing with a very *grumpy* boy” (P1).

Situated conversations

Parents openness to communicate was also partially contingent on specific circumstances:

“So my son, this is why— saw a prescription ...even though I'm very careful because I have no intention of it being— so I explained to him that this is a medical prescription. So I spoke to him in that context, and then I also spoke to him... Okay, so when it came to the

medical, I told him, I said this, you know, this is a prescription like any other. This is for my condition. This is not taken as a drug.” (P6)

Another parent states that they were in another country where cannabis was legal, and used the situation to talk about cannabis use.

“We also recently came back from a trip to the... which was where cannabis was smelt everywhere, so we—we actually spoke about it quite a bit” (P5).

Mixed Methods Analysis and Integration

91% of parents had warned their child about the health consequences of using cannabis

Expansion: he shouldn’t mess around with his mind, his mind is developing. It’s one thing seeing, a friend who’s 50 60 plus smoking dope or my — his brain is fully developed, “but yours is developing you don’t know what it’s gonna do to you, so don’t mess around” P6

Confirmation: the other thing arguments, as I said, I’ve always used is “your brain is not fully formed, you are nowhere near ready, and everything will have a negative impact.” (P6)

Uncertainty about the new law

70% of parents in the survey stated they are fully aware of the new laws regarding cannabis.

Discordance: so the law — even I don’t know the law — and I’ve got this prescription. I mean, as I understand it, boy uh kids at 15/16 or not, can’t and go get a prescription I’m imagining, I don’t even know, I’m going to be honest (P6)

Levels of disclosure

89% of parents shared that they would be honest about past cannabis use if asked by their adolescent child.

Discordance: No, I’ve never been honest I’ve lied through my teeth... I give them what they need to know (P1)

Discordance: at the age of 18, 19 and even younger I never touched a cigarette or cannabis so they needn't know anything about that I give them what they need to know. Issa at 50 I might tell her she's 50 now "yes at your age I did" [laughs] I'm a liar. (P1)

92.1% of parents (n=82) who would be honest about past use agreed that they would warn their child about the health consequences of using cannabis.

Expansion: I think it is important because I mean I — I grew up in a generation where, people are suffering the repercussions of the cannabis and, people got into trouble for it in my day and — so it's easier to be honest about it and to keep in moderation in my view (P4)

Openness to Communicate

The majority of parents (86%) in the survey did not report experiencing increased difficulty or discomfort when discussing cannabis use with their children, despite the change in its legal status.

Confirmation and Expansion: I think nowadays it's quite different the way... parent's relationships are with their children, I think it's based more on... trust, and more on honesty, and ... again it doesn't really matter whether it's before or after the— the change in legislation (P2)

Normalisation

84% of parents felt like cannabis would be easier to obtain for adolescents following a change in legislation.

Confirmation: the new challenge is it's just everywhere, everything's acceptable, they've opened every single door, there doesn't seem to be any form of discipline related to it, and if you're contrary to it, you're seen as negative you know? (P1)

Discussion

Research question one: What are the current parental views on adolescent cannabis use, and have they been affected by a change in legal status?

Parents had generally unfavourable views concerning adolescent cannabis use, despite the shift towards a more permissive legal status. Viewing policies as being more permissive has been associated with parent's lower perceived risk of cannabis use for their children (Wisk et al., 2019). Similar to the available literature, parents in the study did not approve of their adolescent children using cannabis (Jones et al., 2020). Parents were generally not aware of the age limit for adolescent cannabis use. Kosterman et al. (2016) also found that one third of the participants did not know what the legal age limit was after the legalization of cannabis use.

A study by Mason et al. (2015) found that legalization of cannabis did not significantly affect attitudes and behaviours of adolescents and parents. In the current study, parents did not report having a more favourable view of teenage cannabis use due to new legislation, which could either suggest pre-existing unfavourable views or a need for more time for attitudes to change.

Research question two: What are the current parenting practises and communication styles regarding adolescent cannabis use, and have they changed after the change in legal status?

Overall, parents in the study seemed to take an authoritative approach to cannabis use, with 72% of parents setting concrete rules and only 49% having a zero-tolerance approach regarding cannabis use. Establishing concrete rules is strongly associated with a lower likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours (Vermeulen-Smit et al., 2015), not only for cannabis use but for general risky behaviours as well (de Looze et al. 2012)). Conversely, Ennett et al. (2001) found that conversations focusing excessively on rules and discipline

without taking into account other factors may result in increased substance consumption among adolescents who are starting to use substances.

Authoritative parents balance the imposition of limits with affection and teamwork with their children (Calafat et al., 2014). Although children with authoritarian parents tend to report a higher level of substance use compared to those with authoritative parents, some studies have shown no discernible difference or even an opposite association (Becoña et al., 2011).

Associating with deviant peers and engaging in deviant behaviour may be more important than parenting style. (Berge et al., 2016). Parents focus on normalisation, not peers, which is surprising since peers are usually considered to be a significant part of an adolescent's microsystem when considering adolescent development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Risk communication

91% of parents stated that they had warned their child about the health consequences of cannabis use. They mainly focused on the developing adolescent brain, and expressed concern about how cannabis use could impact it. Risk communication is associated with abstinence from cannabis use, but not with frequency or negative consequences. Adolescents who have already started using cannabis may also not benefit from this type of communication. In this case, research has indicated that monitoring may be more effective (Napper et al., 2014). 96% of participants in the survey monitored their child. Research shows that high levels of parental monitoring predict significantly less use of a number of substances, including cannabis use (Clark et al., 2012).

Effect of a change in legislation on parenting style and communication practises

The survey showed that 66% of parents felt it is more likely that they will talk about cannabis use with their child after the change in legislation. Contrary to the survey results, however, parents in the qualitative study generally felt unaffected by the legislation in their

likelihood to talk about cannabis use with their child. Parents based their decision to talk to their child about cannabis use on their need to model and educate rather than as a result of external circumstances such as a change in legal status

According to Mallick (2003), discussing drug use can be an extremely challenging task for parents, especially because of the stigma associated with drug use. From both the survey and interviews, however, parents overall seemed open to discuss cannabis use. Pettigrew et al. (2017) encourages communication about drug not as a reactive strategy (e.g. communication resulting from a change in legal status) but rather a proactive one.

Parental Disclosure

Research has shown that parents often struggle with how to disclose their past use without appearing to condone drug use by their children (Napper et al., 2014). Parents in this study believed that disclosing their past cannabis use to their adolescent child could normalize and make it more acceptable, reducing the perceived risks and consequences and potentially increasing the likelihood of their child experimenting with the drug.

Research question three: (How) is a change in legal status of cannabis posing new challenges for parents?

The biggest challenge faced by participants was the normalization of cannabis use following the new legislation. Participants in the survey felt that it is now easier for their child to obtain cannabis (84%) following the new legislation. Research has revealed that an increase in availability could result in greater cannabis use among adolescents (Hopfer, 2014). However, research has also shown that although there is a decrease in the degree to which adolescents perceive potential risks associated with its use after the legalization of cannabis (Ghosh et al., 2017, Carliner et al., 2017) legalization may not necessarily lead to a rise in adolescent use (Sarvet et al., 2018, Ghosh et al., 2017). An increase in use may result from broader change in attitudes and behaviours towards cannabis that coincides with

legalization but does not depend on it (Kosterman et al., 2016). The parent's mesosystem, which refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence between microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), showed how parents believed that their friends (the parent's friends) and other family members around the adolescent who use cannabis may have an influence on their own adolescent child.

Conclusion

The impact of Malta's new cannabis law on adolescent cannabis use rates and outcomes is unknown, but parents can have a significant influence on these outcomes. The study identified parental views on adolescent cannabis use, parenting and communication styles, and challenges faced by parents due to the new cannabis law.

Limitations

Only parents with children in private schools participated in the interviews, which may have skewed the results towards their views, parenting practices, and communication styles. Additionally, the majority of survey respondents were female, and all interview participants were female, potentially distorting the results as mothers and fathers may have different views on adolescent cannabis use and parenting. Since the study used convenience sampling due to a low number of participants, the study was prone to volunteer bias (Jordan et al., 2013). This may have led to results not be representative of the population of interest. The study's results may only represent the views and parenting styles of parents who are not currently using cannabis as 96% of the survey participants reported not using cannabis in the past 30 days.

Particularly for the interview, participants may have been uncomfortable divulging information about how they talk to their child about cannabis use and their own views about cannabis use, especially to a stranger (the interviewer), and may therefore have given answers that they deemed to be more socially acceptable and desirable (social desirability)

Future recommendations

A longitudinal study may reveal how communication and parenting styles between a parent and their adolescent child change over the years. It would also be interesting to conduct a national study on the impact of the new cannabis law on the beliefs, attitudes and in adolescents and the general population. The aim of this should be to carefully monitor the impact the new cannabis legislation has had on society in order to have a holistic understanding of how the situation in Malta evolves over time.

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