

Young People's Views on the Use of Cannabis



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Contents

Foreword	2
Introduction	3
Methodology	3
Overview	3
Interpretation of Results and Discussion	4
Stand on Cannabis	5
Perceptions on the use of Cannabis	7
Handling of Cannabis	9
Information on Cannabis	18
Consequences of Legalisation	19
Patterns of use of Cannabis	20
Annex 1- Questionnaire	22

Foreword

Throughout the years, the National Youth Council (KNŻ) has always strived to advocate and discuss youth-related issues, despite their somewhat controversial nature. The Council has recently managed to successfully lobby with Maltese Authorities for the introduction of Vote 16; put Mental Health issues at the forefront of the Maltese political agenda, and push for the Declaration of a Climate Emergency in Malta.

In recent years, especially following the General Election of 2017, the two major political parties showed their intention to start debating the issue of recreational use of Cannabis in Malta. Whilst several stakeholders have shown their intention to back or oppose such proposal, the debate never reflected the perception of Maltese Youth.

Whilst some might argue that this issue was added to the political agenda to “buy” younger voters, KNŻ believes that this issue is of such a high priority that it merits an apolitical debate.

The aim of this publication is to provide exactly that – an apolitical, research based and balanced view of what the KNŻ believes should be the best course of action on the legalisation of cannabis consumption on a recreational basis.

Adrian Domnic Ellul
Vice President



1. INTRODUCTION

The National Youth Council and Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ commissioned MISCO to carry out research among young people with the objective to:

- Provide an insight into the opinions of young people regarding the use of cannabis for recreational use;
- Understand the perceptions and attitudes of young people with regard to how cannabis should be handled if legalised;
- Gauge the perceived impacts young people believe legalisation would have on the use of cannabis.

The report contains six sections covering different aspects. These relate to the opinions as to whether the use of cannabis for recreational use should be legalised, perceptions on the use of cannabis, handling of cannabis, information on cannabis, consequences of legalisation on the use of cannabis.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out by means of a Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) method, with a total of 350 young people, aged 16 to 35 years old, across Malta and Gozo, according to a quota representative of the population in Malta and Gozo for this age group.

Young people were randomly selected from the Maltese population. Telephone numbers were randomly selected using a random digit dialling system.

The questionnaire adopted for this research project was designed by MISCO International based on a detailed client brief and approved by clients. The questionnaires were available in both Maltese and English and the approximate length was of 10 minutes. A copy is reproduced in Annex I.

Interviewers involved in the project were selected from MISCO's pool of interviewers, who are all experienced and have been trained to carry out market research interviews. All interviewers were briefed on the purpose and method of the research before initiating fieldwork.

The interviews were carried out between 10th July and 12th July 2019. Fieldwork hours for household surveys

take place between 16:00 and 20:30 on Monday to Friday, and between 09:00 to 13:00 on Saturdays.

Once fieldwork was completed the questionnaires were checked, coded and passed on for data analysis.

3. OVERVIEW

Young people have expressed mixed opinions on the use of cannabis for recreational use. Age and gender are likely to contribute to one's opinion.

Most young people claimed that should they need information on cannabis they would opt for the internet; however it was then noted that the majority of young people expect the educational institution they attend to provide such information.

The majority of young people agreed that should cannabis be legalised for recreational use, restrictions similar to those applied for the consumption of both tobacco and alcohol, should also be applied. These include the way consumption is regulated, where smoking cannabis should be allowed and also in the way it is sold.

The study concluded that should cannabis be used for recreational purposes, the majority of young people expect it to be controlled, limited and overseen.

The results indicate that the majority of young people believe that certain phases in life make individuals more prone to start using cannabis, mainly teenage years.

4. Interpretation of Results and Discussion

4.1 Stand on Cannabis

Results show that there was only a slight difference between those in favour of using cannabis for recreational purposes (47%) and those against (49%). 4% did not express an opinion. However, certain age bands were more likely to take a particular stance.

Those ages 16 and 17 years are in their majority against the use of cannabis. Those aged 18 to 29 seem more likely to be in favour of using cannabis for recreational use. However, the biggest difference in responses is noted in individuals aged 30 to 35. The majority of females (57%) claimed to be against the notion of recreational cannabis. Respondents living in the southern part of the island are more likely to be against the use of cannabis for recreational use.

Chart 1: Stance on cannabis for recreational use

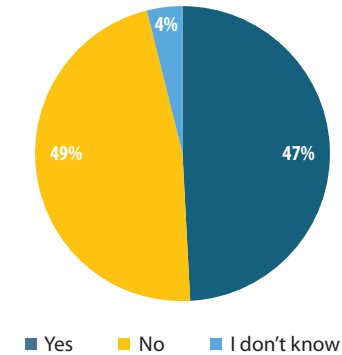


Chart 2: Stance based on age

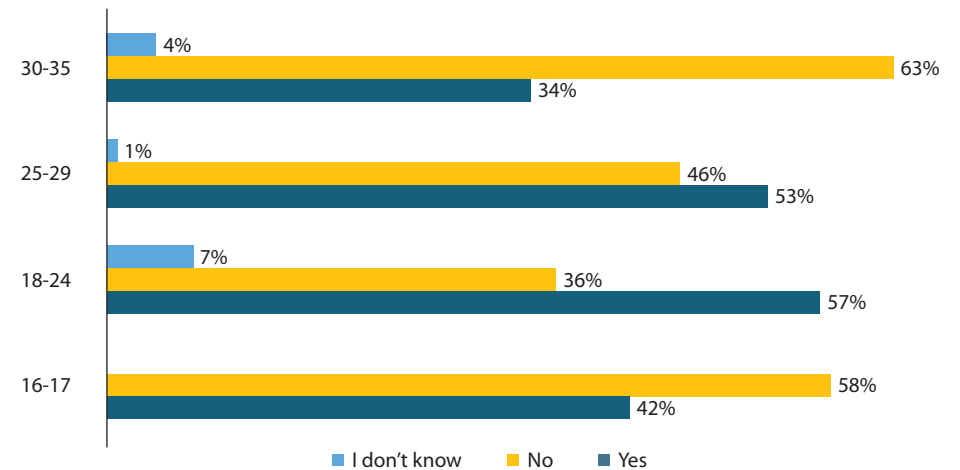
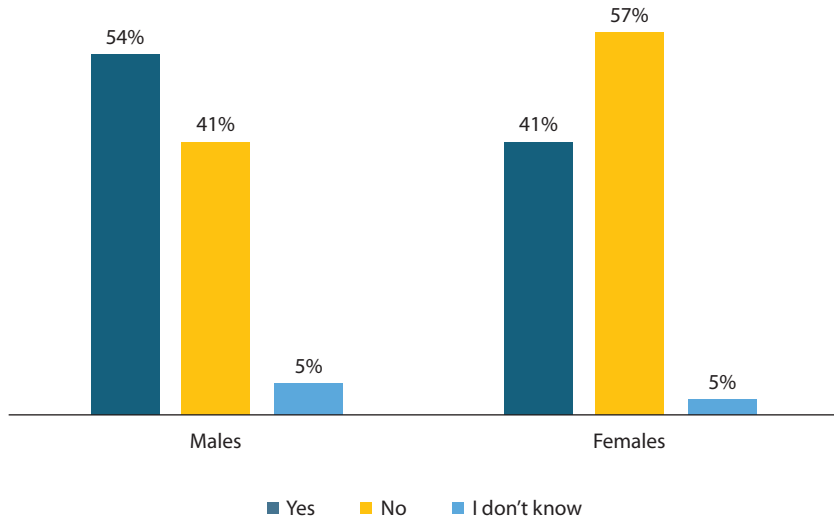
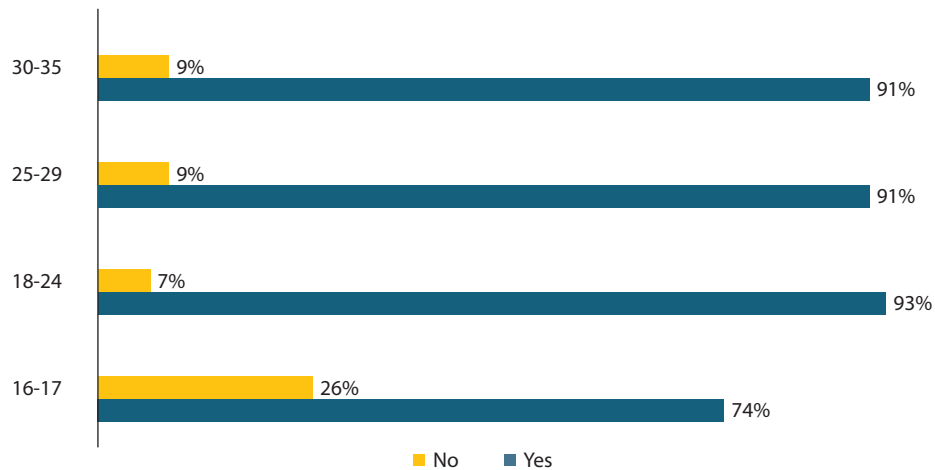


Chart 3: Stance based on gender



The vast majority (90%) of those individuals who claimed to be either in favour or uncertain of their position on recreational cannabis, agreed that cannabis should have restrictions similar to those on alcohol and tobacco. The highest percentage of those individuals who do not believe such restrictions should be enforced were aged 16 to 17. These results indicate that there is a group of around 5% of persons aged 16 to 35 years who have a very liberal view on the use of cannabis for recreational purposes and its use should be unregulated.

Chart 4: Opinions on regulated use based on age



4.2 Perceptions on the use of cannabis

The majority of the young people (66%) claimed that, when required, they obtain information about cannabis through the internet. The next most common response given was a doctor (35%). Although they did not have a high level of incidence, among the answers given, some young people claimed that they obtain information from Caritas and Sedqa. Age and gender seem to have slight to no influence on the source of information.

Chart 5: Source of Information

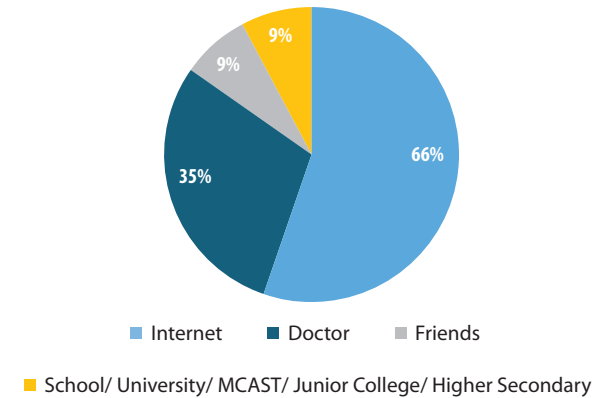
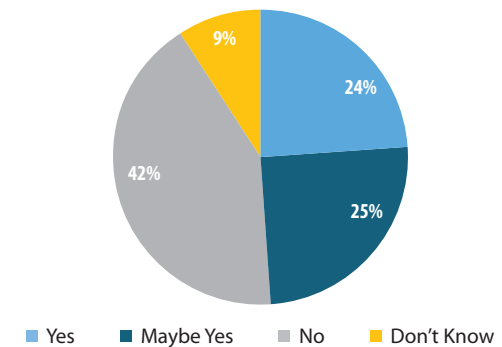


Chart 6: Perceptions on Cannabis as a gateway drug



49% of young people consider cannabis as a possible gateway drug that could potentially lead to hard drugs. 42% are against this view while 9% did not express an opinion. Those aged between 25 and 29 had the highest rate of young people who do not perceive cannabis as a gateway drug. Those aged between 16 and 17 were more likely to consider cannabis as maybe leading to harder drugs.

The majority of those individuals against the use of cannabis for recreational use claimed that either yes, cannabis acts as a gateway drug (39%) or maybe yes (29%). Those in favour of using cannabis recreationally were more likely (61%) to not consider cannabis as a gateway drug.

Those individuals in favour of an unregulated use of cannabis were more likely (36%) to consider cannabis as a gateway drug to harder drugs than those individuals in favour of a regulated use (31%).

Chart 7: Perceptions based on age

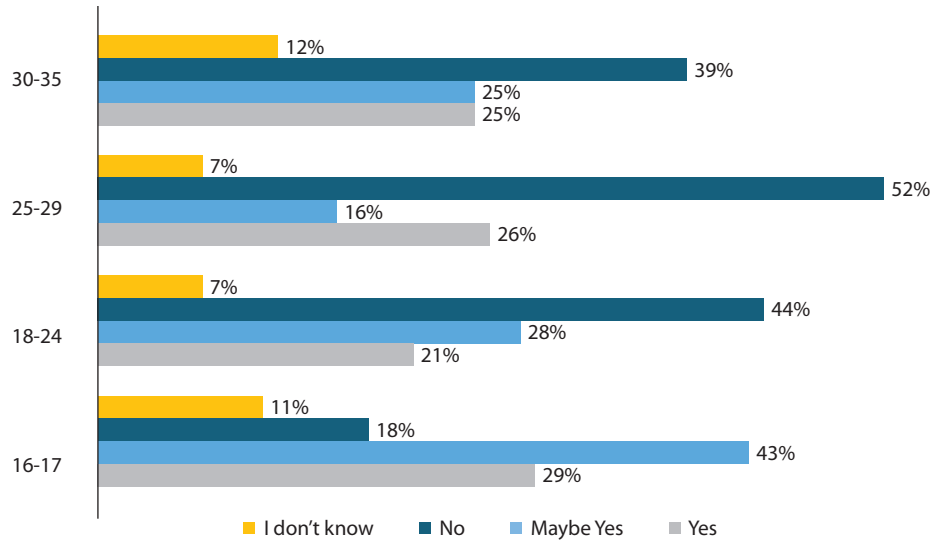


Chart 8: Perceptions on cannabis as a gateway drug based on their stance on the use of recreational cannabis

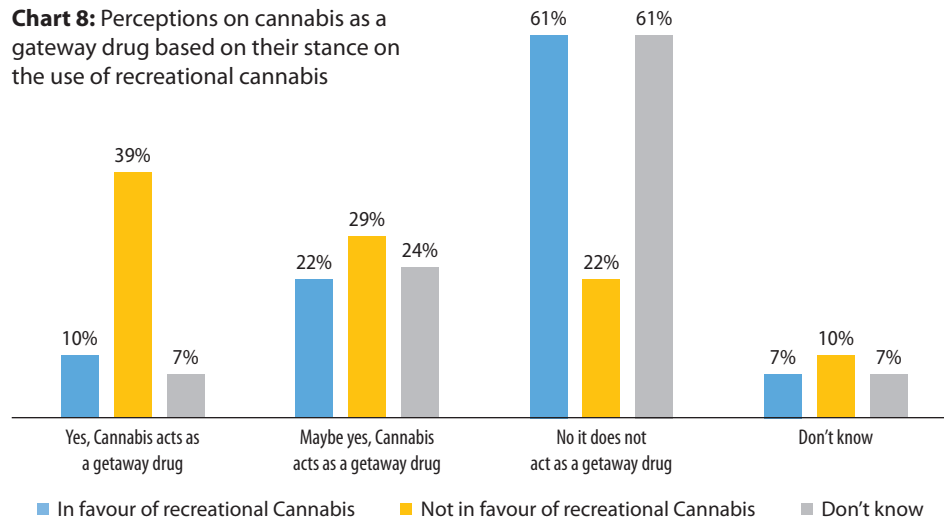
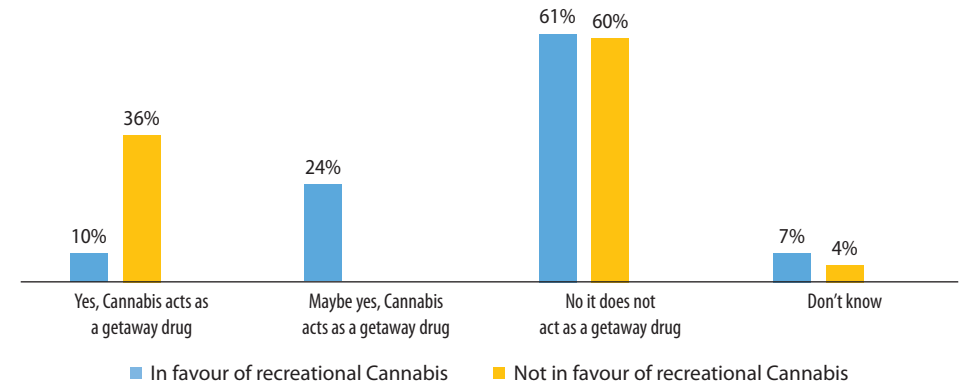


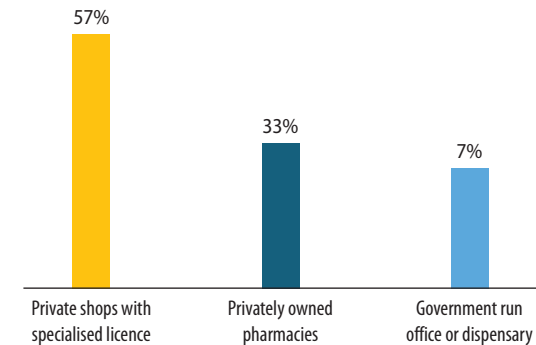
Chart 9: Perceptions on Cannabis as a gateway drug based on their stance on regulating the use of recreational cannabis



4.3 Handling of Cannabis

57% of young people think that cannabis should be available and supplied through the use of private shops with a specialised license. Other common responses included privately owned pharmacies (33%) and government run office or dispensary (27%). All age groups except 16-17, were more likely to choose private shops with a specialised license to supply cannabis. The majority of young people aged between 16 and 17 were more likely to choose privately owned pharmacies as a source to supply recreational cannabis.

Chart 10: Means of supplying and making Cannabis available



The majority of young people (70%) agreed that prospective users should be declared medically fit in order to be able to use cannabis for recreational purposes. All different age groups had significantly high rates of young people who agree with testing prospective users. The age group with the lowest rate of young people in favour of such tests (63%) were those aged between 30 and 35.

Regardless of one's stance on using cannabis for recreational purposes, the majority agreed that a medical test should be carried out on prospective users. No significant difference was noted on the issue of testing based on the individual's stand on the regulated use of cannabis.

Chart 11: Stand on should prospective users be tested prior to using cannabis

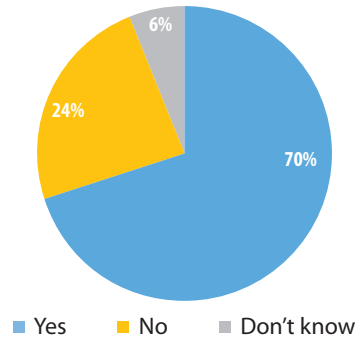
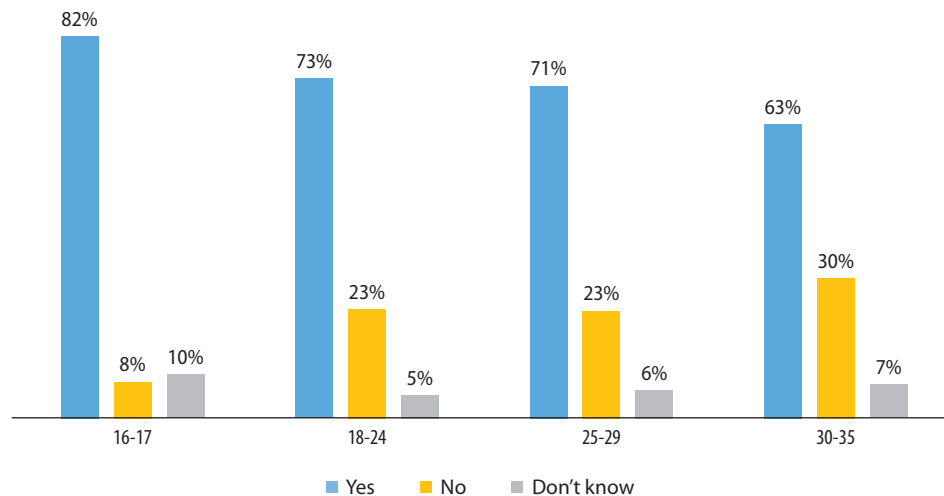


Chart 12: Age based perspectives on testing prospective cannabis users

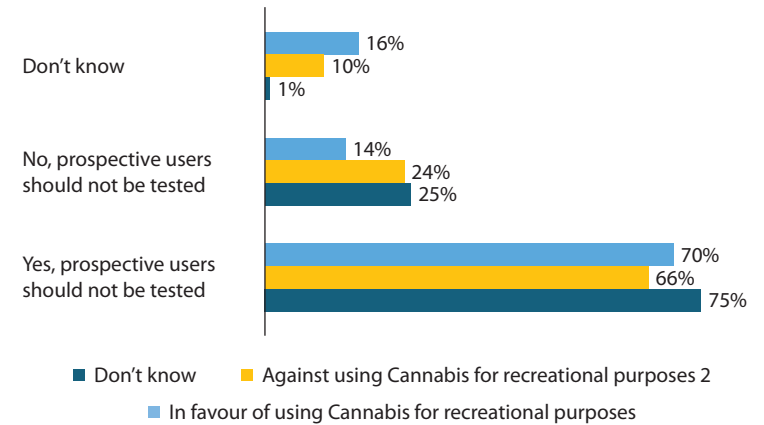


51% claimed that the government should keep a register of recreational users. There was only a slight difference between those who agreed and disagreed. In fact 44% disagree with this opinion and 5% did not express an opinion.

The biggest difference in responses is found among individuals aged between 16 and 17. 72% agreed that a register should be kept, whereas only 18% did not agree. Those aged between 25

and 29 were more likely to disagree with the concept of maintaining a register of recreational users, with 48% agreeing and 50% disagreeing.

Chart 13: Stand on testing prospective users based on one's stand on the use of recreational use



The study shows that females are more in favour than men of the government having a register of recreational users, standing at 54% and 49% respectively. The southern and western parts of the country had the highest rate of individuals in favour of maintaining a register (60%), whereas Gozo had the lowest (35%).

Those individuals against the use of cannabis for recreational purposes were mostly in favour of the government keeping a register (61%), whereas, the majority of those in favour of recreational cannabis (54%) were against the notion of having a register. Noticeably, the majority of individuals in favour of a regulated use of cannabis (57%) were against the maintaining of a register of recreational users and those in favour of an unregulated use of cannabis were mostly (59%) in favour of such a notion.

Chart 14: Perception on the government keeping a register of recreational users

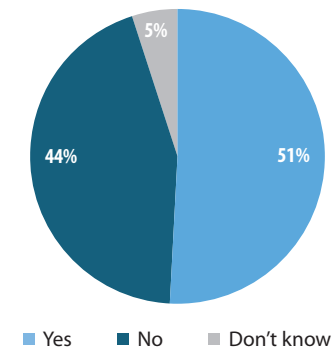


Chart 15: Age based perceptions on a government register for users

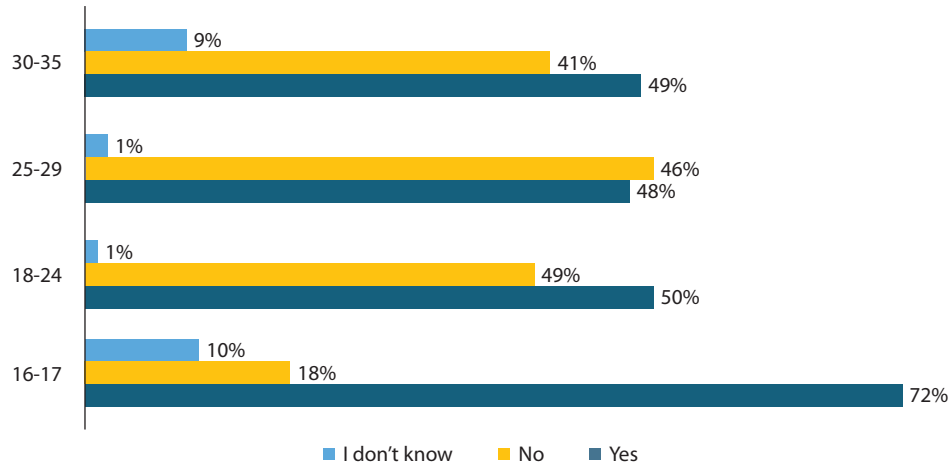
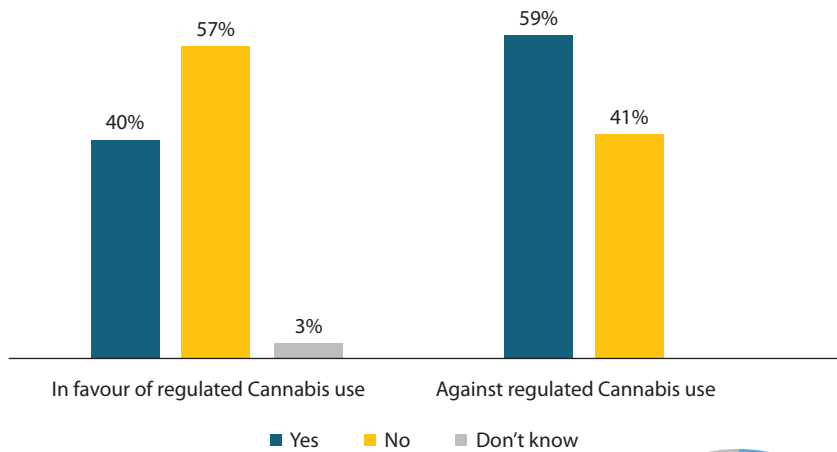


Chart 16: Opinion on a government register against their stand on regulated cannabis use



74% of the young people stated that cannabis users should not be able to grow their own plants. Females were more likely than males to be against this notion, with having 68% of males disagreeing and 79% of females. The majority (64%) of those in favour of using cannabis for recreational purposes were still against the notion of having users grow their own plants.

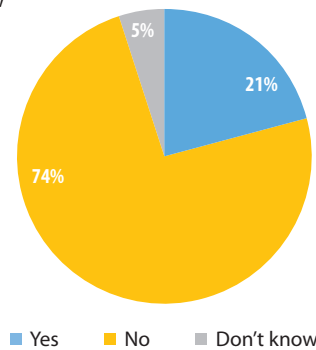


Chart 17: Perceptions on users being able to grow cannabis

Chart 18: Gender based differences on the notion of home growers

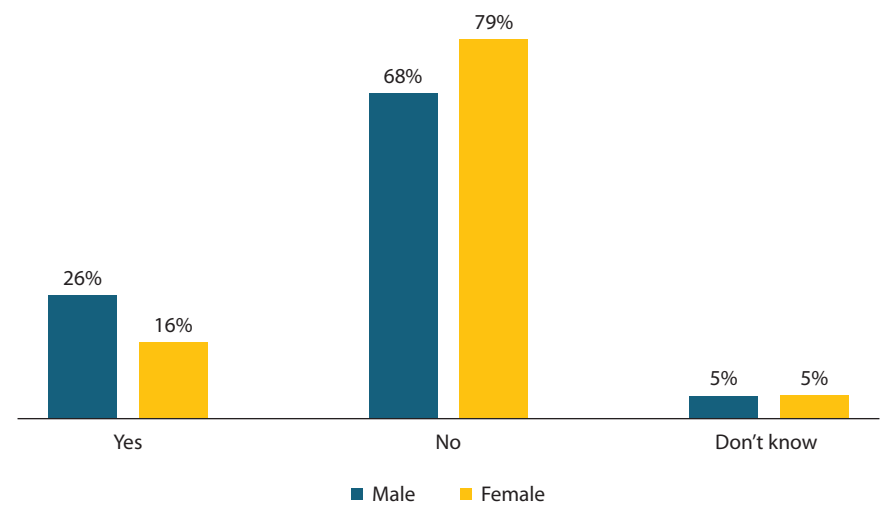
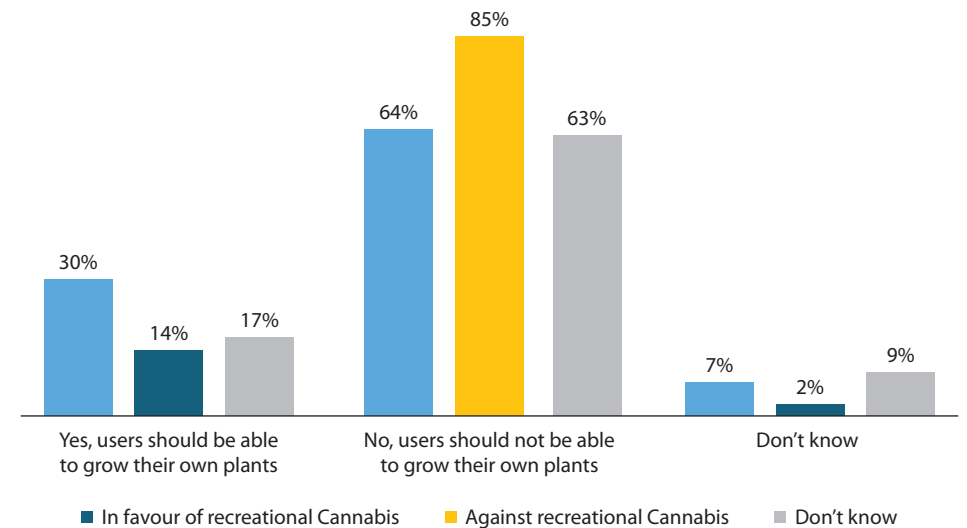


Chart 19: Opinion of home growing based on their stand on use of cannabis for recreational purposes



73% of those individuals not against home growing cannabis for personal use, still claimed that there should be restrictions on such a practice. In all regions there was a significantly large amount of individuals who agreed that there should be some form of restriction, with the exception of the Western region. Noticeably, the majority of individuals in favour of unregulated use of cannabis were still in favour of having restrictions on home growers.

Chart 20: Opinion on restricting home growers based on one's stand on recreational use

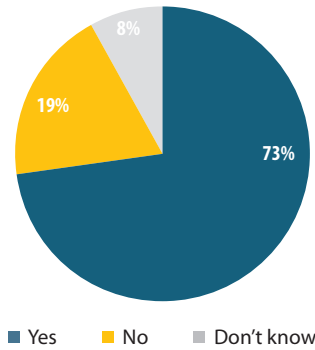


Chart 22: Type of restrictions that should be enforced on home growers

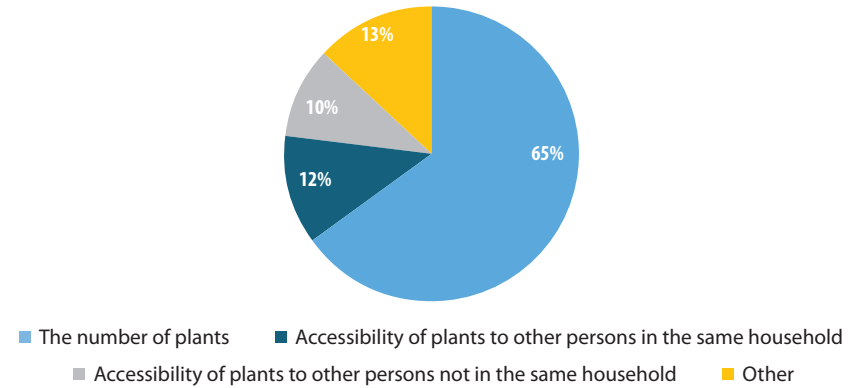
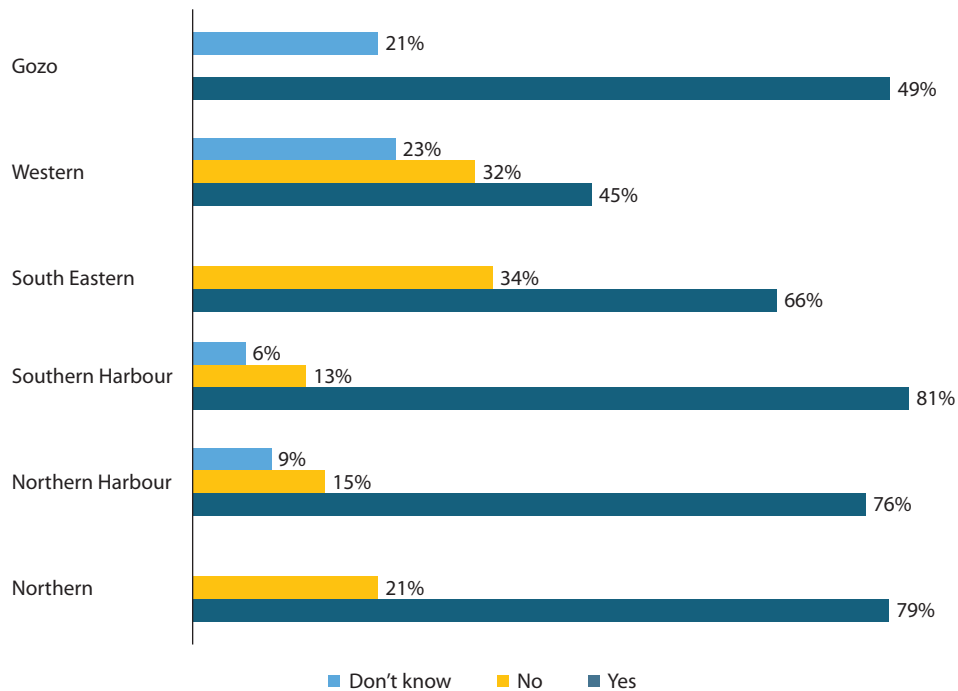


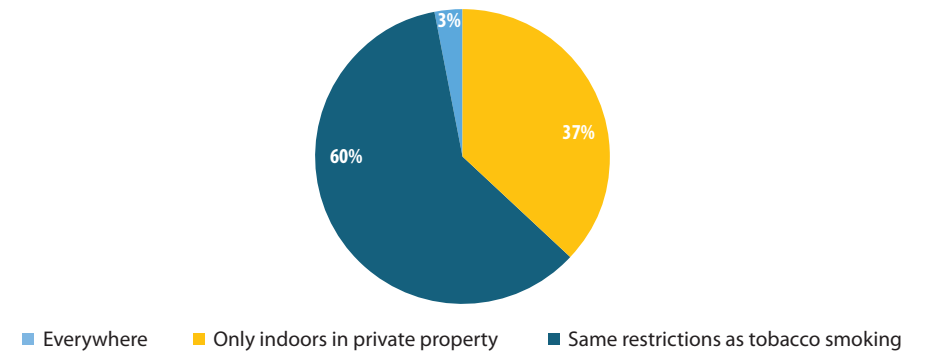
Chart 21: Opinion on restricting home growers based on region



Those individuals who are not against home growers while agreeing that some restrictions should apply, were asked to specify the type of restrictions that should be imposed. The most common restriction mentioned (65%) was that on the number of plants. The other most common restriction mentioned was reducing the accessibility to plants.

60% of the young people agreed that smoking cannabis should have similar restrictions to that of smoking tobacco. Another 37% stated that smoking cannabis for recreational use should only be allowed indoors in private property. Only 3% stated that there should be no restrictions.

Chart 23: The place where smoking cannabis should be allowed



51% of young people disagree with the idea that the use of cannabis for recreational purposes could be promoted or marketed, 44% agree with the notion, while 5% did not express an opinion. The majority of all age groups, except for individuals aged 18 to 24 years, were against the promotion and marketing of cannabis. The majority of females (59%) claimed to be against the marketing of cannabis, whereas among males the indication is not as definite.

54% of those individuals in favour of a regulated use of cannabis agree that the use of cannabis for recreational use should be promoted and marketed, while only 31% of those in favour of unregulated use of cannabis agree that cannabis may be marketed and promoted. (Chart 25)

83% of young people agree that when it comes to selling cannabis, should cannabis be legalised, regulations similar to those in force for tobacco and alcohol, should apply. 92% of young people also agree that there should be a minimum stipulated age for the consumption of cannabis. 84% of those individuals in favour of unregulated use of cannabis, still agree that there should be a minimum stipulated age restricting cannabis use. (Chart 26)

Chart 24: Opinions on where smoking cannabis should be allowed by age

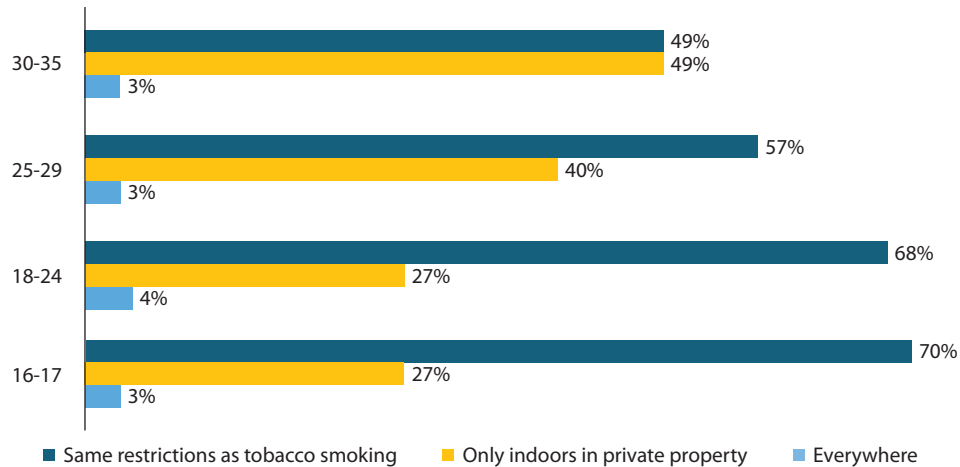
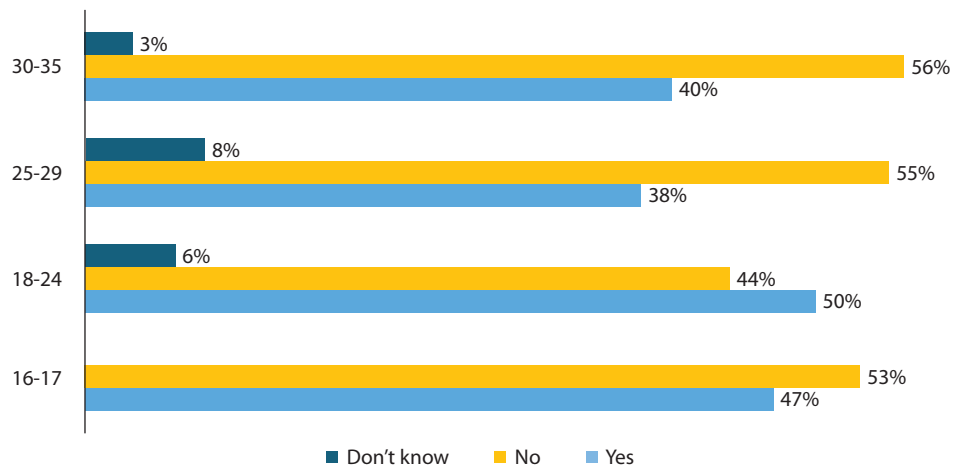


Chart 25: Opinion on the promotion and marketing of cannabis by age



Those individuals who agree that there should be a minimum stipulated age of consumption, were asked to specify what this age should be. 96% agreed that it should be 18 or over. None of

those individuals aged between 16 and 17 claimed that 16 should be the minimum stipulated age of consumption.

Chart 26: Opinion on stipulating a minimum age of consumption based on individuals' stand on regulating cannabis

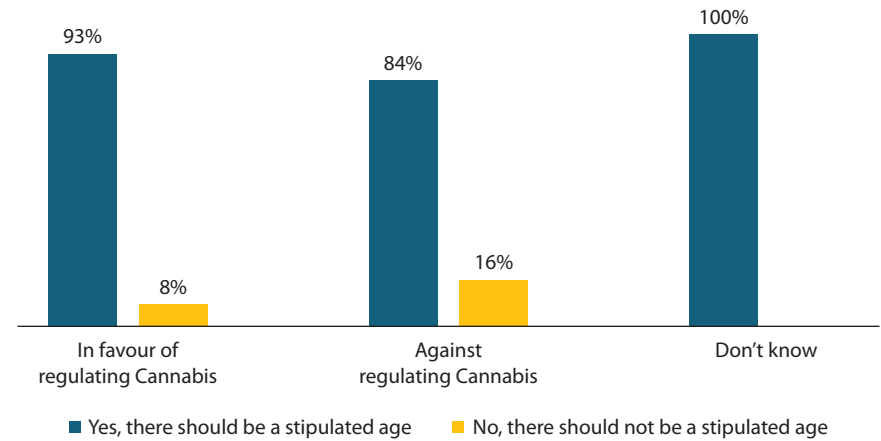
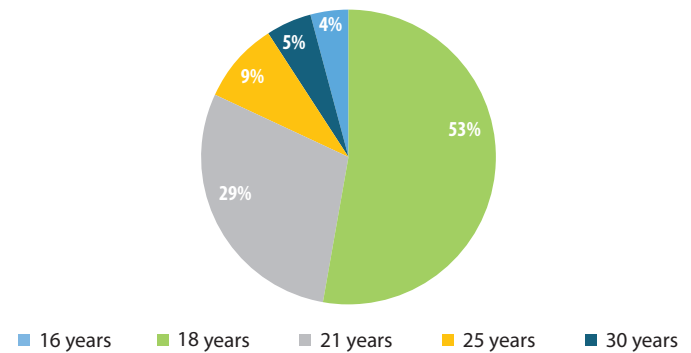


Chart 27: The minimum stipulated age for the consumption of cannabis



73% of young people agreed that there should be a limit on the amount of cannabis consumed for recreational use. Those aged between 16 and 17 years had the highest percentage who claimed that there should be such a limit. Females were more likely (76%) to agree that the amount of cannabis use should be limited.

Chart 28: Opinions on limiting the amount of cannabis consumed for recreational use by age

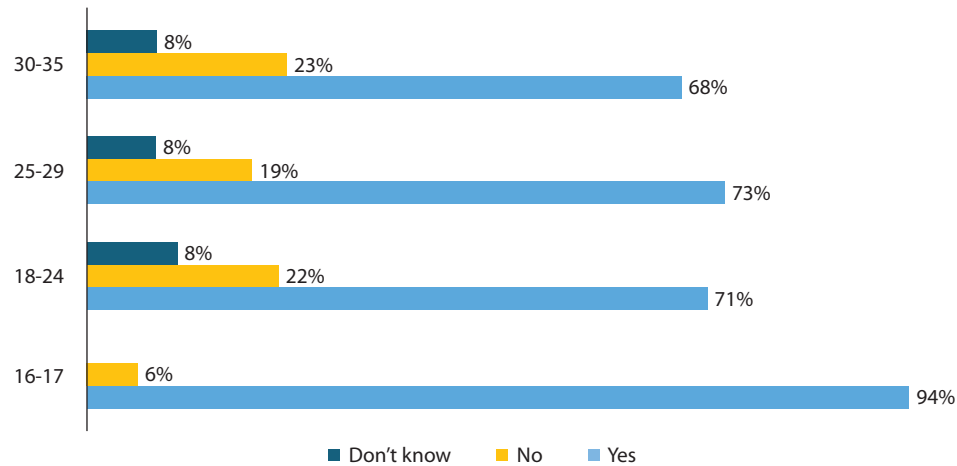
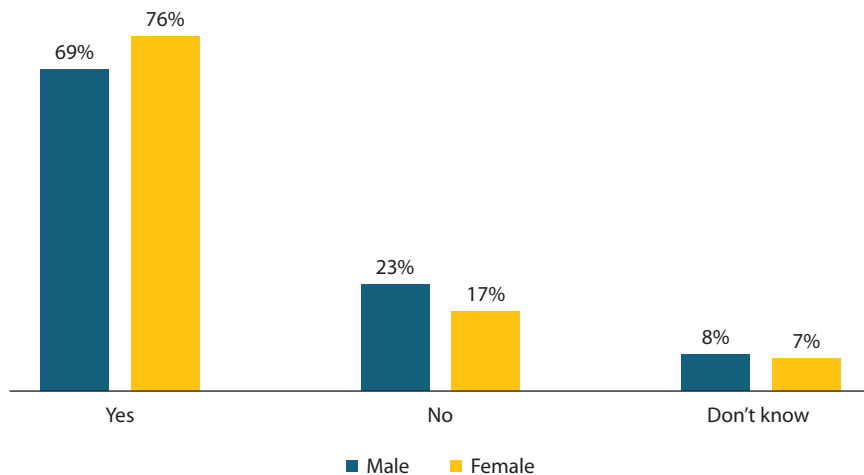


Chart 29: Opinions on limiting the amount of cannabis consumed for recreational use by gender



4.4 Information on Cannabis

The majority (83%) of young people agreed that young people should have access to information on the responsible recreational use of cannabis. Those aged between 16 and 17 years were most likely to disagree with such a notion. The majority of young people who were in favour of the idea of the dissemination of information on responsible recreational use of

cannabis among young people, claimed that such information should be acquired from the educational institution they attend (55%). Other prominent responses included health care centres or hospitals (52%), internet (47%) and social media (44%). Individuals aged between 16 and 17 years mostly claimed that such information should be provided from either the internet or social media.

Chart 30: Opinion on the accessibility of information to young people by age

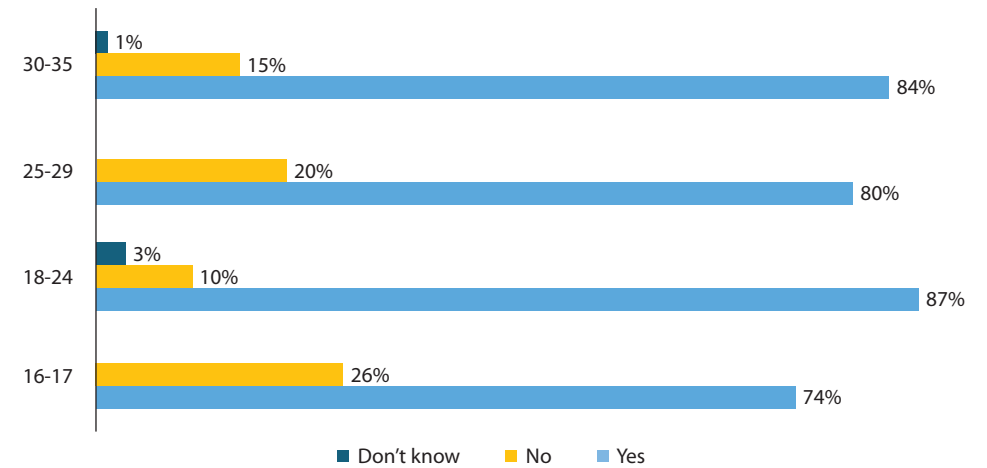
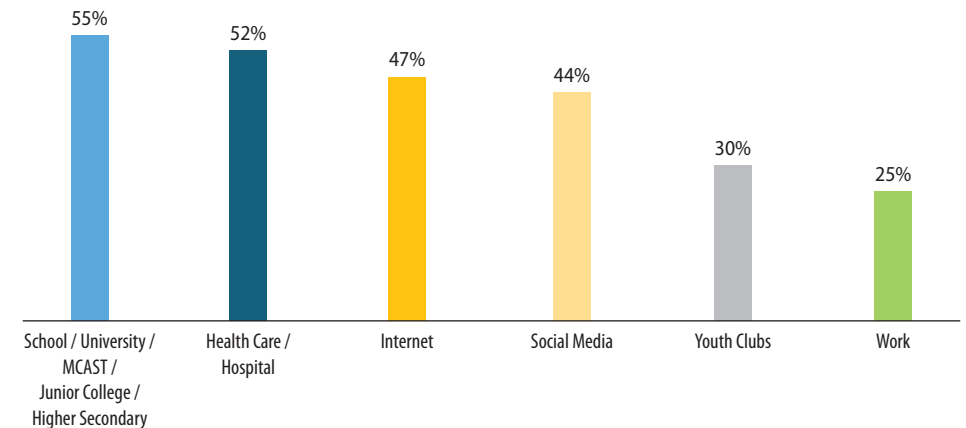


Chart 31: Opinions on where information should be accessed by young people



4.5 Consequences of Legalisation

The majority of young people (65%) claimed that should cannabis be legalised, consumption would increase either by a great deal or by a little deal. Similar opinions are reflected across

all age groups. Only 8% believe that the consumption would decrease. 24% believe that consumption would remain the same, while 3% did not express an opinion.

Young people were then asked whether, should consumption increase, would it continue to increase or would it increase temporarily and then stabilise. 54% claimed that it would eventually stabilise. The majority of those individuals (63%) in favour of the use of cannabis for recreational use believe that consumption increase temporarily and then stabilise.

Chart 32: The effect of legalisation of cannabis for recreational use on consumption

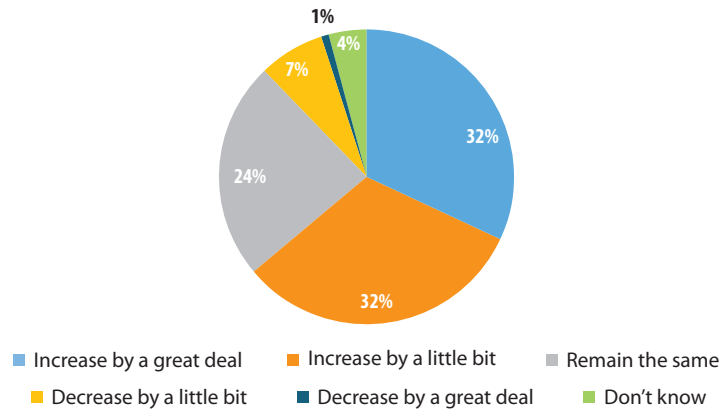
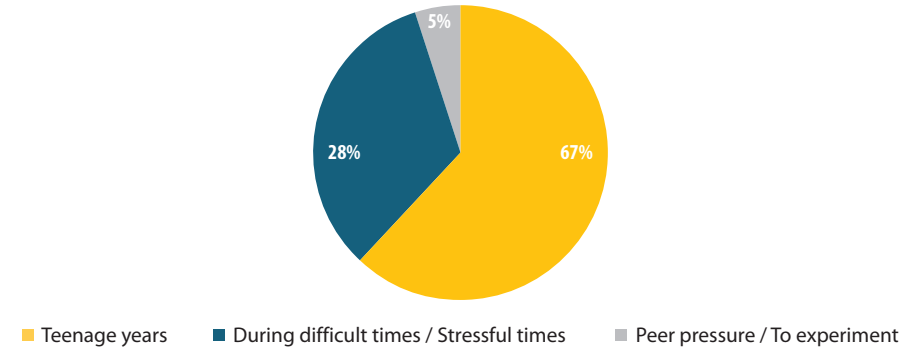


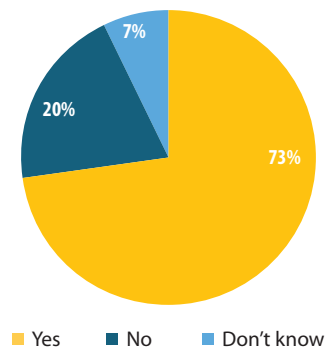
Chart 34: The phase in life during which individuals become more prone to start using cannabis



4.6 Patterns of use of Cannabis

73% of young people agree that people reach a phase where they are more prone to start using cannabis. 76% of females agreed with this view, whereas 71% of males agree with such a view. 62% of young people who believe that individuals pass from such a phase believe that this would happen through the teenage years.

Chart 33: Opinions on passing through a phase which makes individuals more prone to start using cannabis



I am _____ from MISCO International, a marketing and opinion research company. We are conducting research regarding the use of cannabis for recreational use.

101. Can you please tell me how old you are?

- 16 – 17 years
- 18 – 24 years
- 25 – 29 years
- 30 – 34 years

- Gender
- Female
- Male
- Other

In which locality do you live?

Write in: _____

- Region
- Northern Harbour
 - Southern Harbour
 - South Eastern
 - Western
 - Northern
 - Gozo

201. Are you in favour of the use of cannabis for recreational use?

- No – GO TO Q 203
- Yes – GO TO Q 202
- Don't know – GO TO Q 202

202. Do you think that recreational use of cannabis should be regulated with the same restrictions as tobacco and alcohol, including age limits and consumption location?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

203. If you needed information on cannabis, where would you go for such information?

- School / University / MCAST / junior College / Higher Secondary
- Family
- Friends
- Internet
- Work
- A doctor
- Other. Write in: _____
- Not interested in having information about cannabis

204. Do you think that cannabis acts as a gateway drug, that can lead to hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine, or ecstasy?

- Yes
- Maybe yes
- No
- Don't know

205. How do you think that cannabis should be available and supplied?

- Government run office or dispensary
- Privately owned pharmacies
- Private shops with specialised licenses
- Other places. Write in: _____

206. Do you think that prospective users should be tested to be medically fit to use cannabis for recreational purposes?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

207. Do you think the Government should keep a register of recreational users?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

208. Do you think users should be able to grow their own plants?

- Yes – GO TO Q 209
- No – GO TO Q 210
- Don't know – GO TO Q 209

209. Should there be any restrictions on home growers?

- No
- Yes. ASK: What type of restrictions?
 - 2a The number of plants
 - 2b Accessibility of plants to other persons in the same household.
 - 2c Accessibility of plants to other persons not in the same household.
 - 2d Other. Write In: _____
- Don't know

ASK ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

210. Should the smoking of cannabis be allowed everywhere, only indoors in private property, or with the same restrictions as for tobacco products?

- Everywhere
- Only indoors in private property
- Same restrictions as tobacco smoking should apply

211. If the use of cannabis for recreational use is legalised, who sells it...
(Read out each statement)

Be allowed to promote and market their products	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know
There should be the same restrictions as tobacco and alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
	<input type="checkbox"/> No
	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't know

212. Should there be a stipulated age for the consumption of cannabis?

- No
- Yes. Ask: What should that age be?
 - 2a 16 years
 - 2b 18 years
 - 2c 21 years
 - 2d 25 years
 - 2e 30 years

213. Should there be a limit on the amount of cannabis consumed for recreational use?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

214. Do you think that information on responsible recreational use should be available for young people?

- Yes – GO TO Q 215
- No – GO TO Q 216
- Don't know– GO TO Q 215

215. From where should this information be accessed?

- School / University / MCAST / junior College / Higher Secondary
- Work
- Social media
- Youth clubs
- Internet
- Health centres or hospital
- Other write in: _____

216. If the use of recreational cannabis was to be legalised, do you think consumption would increase by a great deal, by a little bit, remain the same, decrease by a little bit, or increase by a great deal?

- Increase by a great deal– GO TO Q 217
- Increase by a little bit– GO TO Q 217
- Remain the same– GO TO Q 218
- Decrease by a little bit– GO TO Q 218
- Decrease by a great deal– GO TO Q 218
- Don't know– GO TO Q 218

217. And if it increases, do you think it will continue to increase or increase temporarily and then stabilise?

- Continue to increase
- Increase temporarily and then stabilise
- Don't know

218. Do you think that people hit a phase where they are more prone to start using cannabis?

- Yes – GO TO Q 219
- No – GO TO Q 220
- Don't know – GO TO Q 220

219. And when is this period in their life? Write in: _____

220. The last question. What do you do in life?

- Study
- Work
- Neither study nor work



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