



SRI LANKA COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

"WIJERAMA HOUSE", 6, WIJERAMA MAWATHA, COLOMBO 7, SRI LANKA.

Tel: +94 11 2056493; E-mail: contactslcpsych@gmail.com

Web: www.slcpsych.lk

Council 2023/24

President

Dr Sajeewana Amarasinghe

President Elect

Dr.DasanthiAkmeemena

Past President (ex-officio)

Dr.Kapila Ranasinghe

Vice President

Dr.Prabath Wickrama

Secretary

Dr. Malsha De Silva

Assistant Secretary

Dr. Malsha Gunathilake

Treasurer

Dr.Nimali Wanniarachchi

Assistant Treasurer

Dr.Luckshika Amarakoon

Editor

Dr.Dulshika Amarasinghe Waas

Dr.Chamara Wijesinghe

Committee Members

Dr.Jayan Mendis

Prof.Shehan Williams

Dr.Chathurie Suraweera

Dr.Roshan Moneragala

Dr.T. Gadambanathan

Public Relations Officer

Dr. Nisansala Liyanage

16.11.2023

PSYCHOSOCIAL ADVERSE EFFECTS OF LEGALIZING CANNABIS (MARIJUANA) IN SRI LANKA

Summary

Cannabis is a drug of abuse linked with multiple adverse effects on physical, psychological, social dimensions. Scientific evidence clearly shows cannabis use is a risk factor to develop psychosis, depression, cognitive impairment and increased rates of crimes in the community. Legalization of cannabis will result in de-stigmatizing and normalizing the use of cannabis, leading to increased prevalence of cannabis use. Hence, decision about the legalization of cannabis should be made following meticulous analysis about the costs and the perceived benefits of its use among the population

Background

In 2020, The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs decided to remove cannabis and cannabis resins from schedule IV of narcotic drugs and decided that cannabis and its resins should remain in schedule I and therefore, remain subject to all levels of control of the 1961 Convention of narcotic drugs. According to the Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, a schedule 1 narcotic is a substance that is highly addictive and highly liable to abuse, or one that is convertible into drugs that are similarly addictive and liable to be abused.

At present, in most countries, the production, manufacture, export, import, trade in, possession or use of cannabis except for amounts necessary for medical and scientific research is prohibited. Sri Lanka is a signatory to all three of the United Nations Conventions on drug abuse and trafficking, namely the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, Convention on Psychotropic Substances 1971 and the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988.

The Ayurveda Act (Act No. 31 of 1961 as amended by Act No. 5 of 1962) of Sri Lanka entitles only the ayurvedic physicians to obtain cannabis for manufacture of their medicinal preparations.

The American Psychiatric Association, the Royal College of Psychiatrists of the United Kingdom, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of psychiatrists as well as other international medical organizations have issued positional statements expressing their concerns regarding the legalization of cannabis including its use for medicinal purposes.



SRI LANKA COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

“WIJERAMA HOUSE”, 6, WIJERAMA MAWATHA, COLOMBO 7, SRI LANKA.

Tel: +94 11 2056493; E-mail: contactslcpsych@gmail.com

Web: www.slpsych.lk

Council 2023/24

President

Dr Sajeewana Amarasinghe

President Elect

Dr.DasanthiAkmeemena

Past President (ex-officio)

Dr.Kapila Ranasinghe

Vice President

Dr.PrabathWickrama

Secretary

Dr. Malsha De Silva

Assistant Secretary

Dr. Malsha Gunathilake

Treasurer

Dr.Nimali Wanniarachchi

Assistant Treasurer

Dr.LuckshikaAmarakoon

Editor

Dr.DulshikaAmarasinghe Waas

Dr.Chamara Wijesinghe

Committee Members

Dr.Jayan Mendis

Prof.Shehan Williams

Dr.Chathurie Suraweera

Dr.Roshan Moneragala

Dr.T. Gadambanathan

Public Relations Officer

Dr. Nisansala Liyanage

The Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists recognizes the following evidence-based implications if cannabis is legalized in Sri Lanka

- Legalization would lead to de-stigmatisation and normalizing of the use of cannabis among the population.
- Early age of use of cannabis increases the potential for adult dependence to cannabis.
- Cannabis use in youth may adversely affect their cognitive functions, including attention, memory, processing speed, visuospatial functioning and overall intelligence
- Use of cannabis increases the risk of development of mental illnesses in vulnerable individuals
- Cannabis use worsens the symptom of mental illnesses and functional outcomes of those with mental illnesses
- Cannabis identified as a gateway substance to many other psychoactive substances such as cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin.
- Cannabis use in young women of reproductive age can result in adverse effects on cognitive development, behavior and academic achievement in the offspring due to the effects of cannabis on the neurodevelopment of the foetus
- Mental health services in Sri Lanka are facing huge challenges due to the lack of resources which at present is worsened by the rapid brain drain of clinicians to more developed countries. The treatment gap for mental illness in some parts of the country currently is around 67%. As such, the mental health services of the country would not be able to cope with the increase in the disease burden which is likely to occur with any form of legalization of cannabis in Sri Lanka.

In addition, the Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists wishes to state that:

- There is lack of scientific evidence to suggest that cannabis is in any way beneficial for the treatment of any psychiatric disorder.
- However, the available evidence supports that there is a strong association between cannabis use with the onset of severe psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia.
- Cannabis use is also associated with the causation and maintenance of symptoms of a range of psychiatric illnesses.



SRI LANKA COLLEGE OF PSYCHIATRISTS

"WIJERAMA HOUSE", 6, WIJERAMA MAWATHA, COLOMBO 7, SRI LANKA.

Tel: +94 11 2056493; E-mail: contactslcpsych@gmail.com

Web: www.slpsych.lk

Council 2023/24

President

Dr.Sajeewana Amarasinghe

President Elect

Dr.DasanthiAkmeemena

Past President (ex-officio)

Dr.Kapila Ranasinghe

Vice President

Dr.Prabath Wickrama

Secretary

Dr. Malsha De Silva

Assistant Secretary

Dr. Malsha Gunathilake

Treasurer

Dr.Nimali Wanniarachchi

Assistant Treasurer

Dr.Luckshika Amarakoon

Editor

Dr.Dulshika Amarasinghe Waas

Dr.Chamara Wijesinghe

Committee Members

Dr.Jayan Mendis

Prof.Shehan Williams

Dr.Chathurie Suraweera

Dr.Roshan Moneragala

Dr.T. Gadambanathan

Public Relations Officer

Dr. Nisansala Liyanage

- As mentioned above adolescents are especially vulnerable to the harm caused by cannabis due to its effects on the neurological development.
- In addition, there is scientific evidence to suggest that individuals who use cannabis regularly, or who begin using cannabis early in their lives, are at increased risk of a range of adverse psycho- social outcomes such as lower levels of educational attainment, poverty, unemployment, increased dependence on the state for welfare, and also to be using other illicit drugs.
- Considering the evidence for increase in disease morbidity and economic burden, the cost effectiveness of any form of legalization of cannabis should be meticulously researched.

Therefore, the Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists wish to state that it does not endorse the attempts of legalization of cannabis in any form and that meticulous research should be undertaken by experts in the field before undertaking such legalization.

Dr.Sajeewana Amarasinghe
President,
Sri lanka Collage of Psychiatrist

Dr.Malsha De Silva
Secretary
Sri lanka Collage of Psychiatrist