



2024

---

# Socially integrated cannabis involvement in Finland: A poststructural perspective to problematization and control

Eve Orhanli  
Ms.Soc.Sc, PhD Candidate, University Teacher  
Uni. Lapland  
[eve.orhanli@ulapland.fi](mailto:eve.orhanli@ulapland.fi)



**LAPIN YLIOPISTO**  
**UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND**

# Drug use as a societal topic

---

- Drug use is a taboo – raises thoughts, emotions and requires reflection.
- Discourses of risk and worry often dominate drug policy discussions (Bacchi & Goodwin 2016).
- Deterministic thoughts about drug use are stigmatizing and form a basis for stereotypes (e.g. Forssén et al. 2022, 97).
- Drug use is a general term: all drug use cannot be approached in a similar way.
- Drugs are used by people in various life situations
  - Dichotomy: Marginalized / Socially integrated



# Cannabis involvement as a global phenomenon

- Cannabis sativa is a plant
  - Hemp or cannabis? -> THC or not.
- Cannabis is globally the most commonly used drug (EMCCDA 2022; Karjalainen ym. 2023).
- Effects depend on the product
  - Relaxing: joyful or flegmatic
  - High amounts of THC with low CBD can cause anxiety
  - Starting cannabis use at a young age and using big amounts increase the risk for psychotic symptoms



Photo: Unsplash.com

# Cannabis involvement in Finland

---

- Two 'drug waves': the 2nd drug wave started in 1990's and has never ceased
  - Lifetime prevalence of cannabis use among citizens continues to increase
  - Increase from 6% in 1992 to 29% in 2022 (THL 2022)
- Cannabis classified as an illegal drug.
  - The National Drug Strategy is from 1997 and hasn't been revisited.
  - Repressive drug policy, 'dual-track' approach: criminal control and harm-reduction (Tammi 2007).
- Herbalization trend (EMCCD 2022;2023)
  - Dried flower rather than hashish (cannabis resin)
  - Home cultivation becoming more common in Europe (EMCDDA 2022; 2023; Hakkarainen et al. 2013)

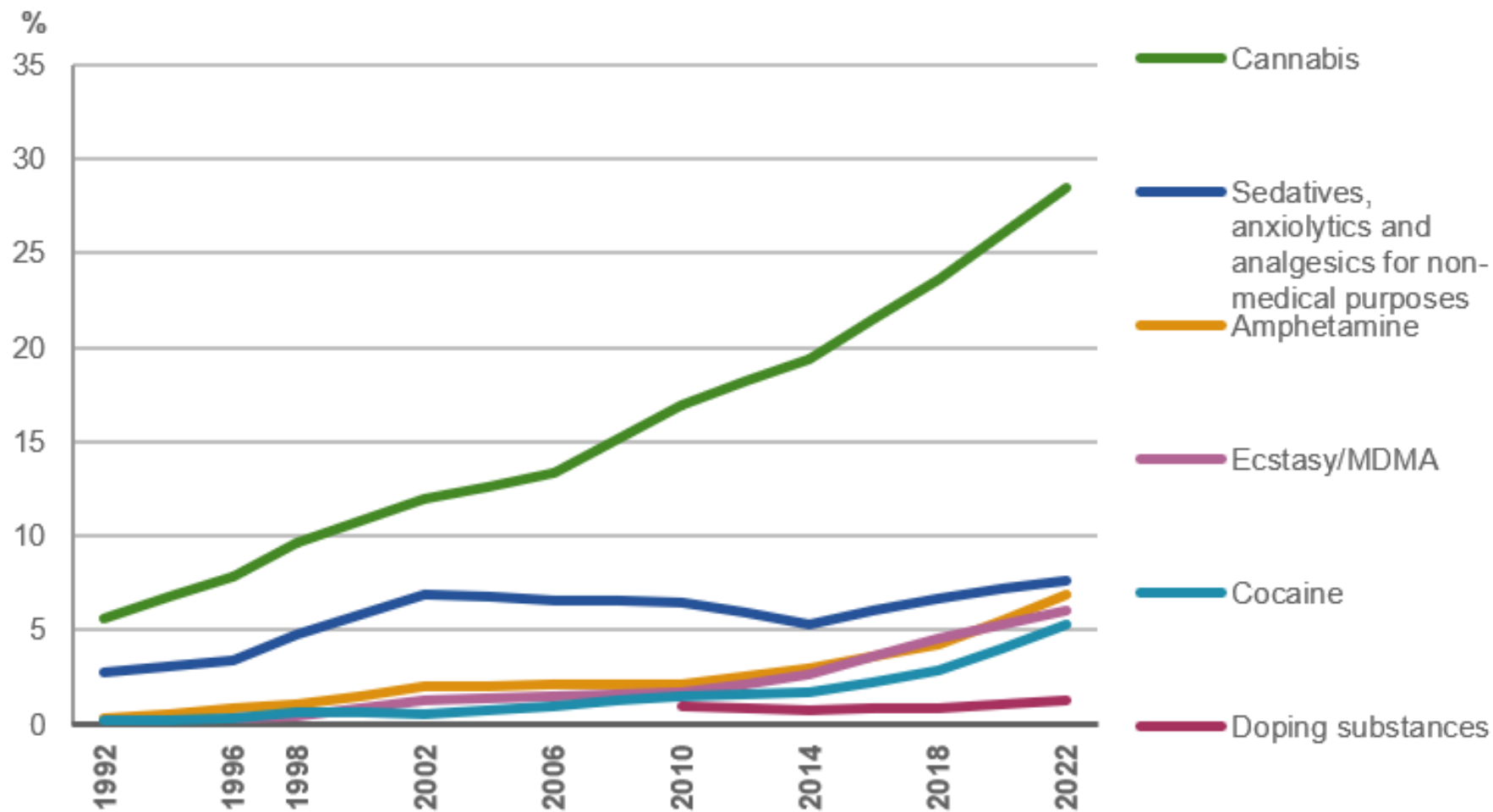


Figure. The proportion of those in the Finnish population aged 15–69 who have experimented with or used cannabis or other substances at some time in their lives in 1992–2022, %.



# Cannabis activism

- The Finnish Cannabis Association
- The Cannabis Association of Turku
- The annual Hemp March in Turku
- Citizens initiative to decriminalize cannabis use and cultivation of small amounts (2020)
  - Was turned down in the Legal Committee's expert hearings because the experts supported legalizing not only cannabis use but all drug use.
- Citizen initiative to legalize cannabis use (2022)



---

'Social problems are the starting force of social work'

(Eskola 2003, 109)



# My approach

---

- Poststructural lense: Why and how is cannabis involvement problematized and governed? (e.g. Foucault 1972, 1991; vrt. Bacchi & Goodwin 2016 )
- Social workers are in positions of power.
  - Supporting people in their life situations are in the core of social work
    - What is my idea of a good life? What is socially just? Based on what rationale do I justify my professional interventions?
    - In positions of authority: assessment of the entire life situation, reflecting your own ideas of knowledge and truth and recognizing the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon
- We as social workers should be able to discuss also about experienced benefits of drug use while acknowledging that there may be harmful effects in using a drug.
- The drug-experienced (Frank ym. 2021; Moskalewicz ym 2021) voice is often not included in decision-making or policy discussions.

# Research setting

---

RQs:

1. What kind of **rationalities and epistemes** is socially integrated cannabis involvement based on?
2. How are cannabis-related **governmentality and policy practices experienced** by the people who are involved with cannabis?
3. What factors contribute to **the subjectification** of people who use cannabis in socially integrated life situations?

Data:

18 semi-structured interviews

Theoretical framework:

Poststructuralism

Foucauldian governmentality

Methodology:

Narrative positioning analysis

# Rationalities and epistemes of cannabis involvement

**Episteme** = Understandings of truth and knowledge.

-> The ideas of cannabis-related truth and knowledge

**Rationale** = The sense, reasoning and justifications behind something

-> The reasoning and justifications of cannabis involvement

Rationale	Increase in quality of life	Self-determination	Highlighting autonomy and rights	Aiming to balance all the existing perspectives
Episteme	Experienced benefits on wellbeing and increase in quality of life	It is natural and humane to enjoy the high	Cannabis involvement should be understood as a part of bodily autonomy and individual freedom	Acknowledging that the truth constructs from different perspectives
Reasoning and justifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced relief from anxiety and depression</li> <li>Cannabis perceived as a factor of a healthy lifestyle</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People should be able to choose the substances they want to use for intoxication</li> <li>Self-control is important for self-determined use</li> <li>Other substances were not used or the informants reported having bad experiences using them</li> <li>The cannabis high was experienced as relaxing amidst the busy everyday life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A victimless crime</li> <li>Bodily autonomy, The right to privacy, domestic privacy</li> <li>People consume cannabis despite it is illegal: the social sanctions are considered more hurtful than the legal ones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All experiences should be discussed to avoid biased or one-sided thinking</li> <li>Cannabis involvement has been a part of different phases of life and has had various roles in one's life course</li> <li>The public debate is seen as prohibitionist and including an unnecessary dichotomy</li> </ul>

# Rationale 1: Increase in quality of life

---

- Experienced benefits on wellbeing and increase in quality of life
- Cannabis perceived as a factor of a healthy lifestyle
- Counter-narratives compared to the existing ideas of good life and healthy way of living



---

*"I don't really need anything else than healthy living and cannabis, which I actually include within the healthy lifestyle because especially after quitting to smoke it I have not experienced any harms from it." (Henrik)*

# Rationale 2: Self-determination

---

- Episteme: It is natural and humane to enjoy the high
- People should be able to choose the substances they want to use for intoxication
- Self-control is important for self-determined use
- Other substances were not used or the informants reported having bad experiences using them
- The cannabis high was experienced as relaxing amidst the busy everyday life

---

*"I feel super annoyed by the idea that people would be able to define for others whether someone's motivation for using cannabis is medicinal or recreational and how is it even anyone else's business? And in my opinion, if someone smokes [cannabis] every now and then I think it is silly that they should be afraid [of sanctions] because of it" (Kimmo)*

# Rationale 3:

## Highlighting autonomy and rights

---

- Episteme: Cannabis involvement should be understood as a part of bodily autonomy and individual freedom
- A victimless crime
- Bodily autonomy, The right to privacy, domestic privacy
- People consume cannabis despite it is illegal: the social sanctions are considered more hurtful than the legal ones



---

*”- - I mean whatever I am doing inside my own apartment behind closed curtains... So if I do it alone and I do not hurt myself or anyone else while doing it... I don't really understand how someone can justify interfering that in any way.” (Eki)*

# Rationale 4:

## Aiming to balance all the existing perspectives

---

- Episteme: Acknowledging that the truth constructs from different perspectives
- All experiences should be discussed to avoid biased or one-sided thinking
- Cannabis involvement has been a part of different phases of life and has had various roles in one's life course
- The public debate is seen as prohibitionist and including an unnecessary dichotomy

---

*“Well, it [cannabis] gives you a feeling of contentment just by itself. So it may lead to a situation where the person kind of just wants to stay in that feeling and they don’t get the urge that people usually may get when they have been passive for a while, that they want to get up and do something.” (Justus)*

*“Yeah, I don’t mind. I know that if I use cannabis, then there sometimes comes situations where you have to communicate with police officers and then I just try to make it as nice and smoothy process as possible for both me and the police” (Arvo)*

# Experienced cannabis-related control and governance

**Technologies of power** = The ways and forms of discipline, control and governance

Aleksi Hupli 2022: 'Politogenic effects' = Drug effects related to politics and policy

Forms of governance	Subjects	Technologies
Law enforcement	Police, Tariff	Interrogation, questioning, documentation, deterrent of punishment, apprehension and arrest, home search, frisk, drug screening, fine, incarceration, physical restraint and guidance.
Caring power	Health care services, Social services, The Finnish Social Insurance Institution (Kela)	Documentation, patient's cooperation as a condition for helping, professional autonomy related to specialized expertise and ownership of knowledge, diagnosing, medical procedures, denying assistance or help
Self-discipline, self-governance	The person who is involved with cannabis	Careful consideration of appropriate locations and situations of using, keeping home cultivation a secret, pauses if necessary in both home cultivation and use, avoiding criminal drug markets, maintaining a balanced life situation and an active lifestyle, social activism.



# Law enforcement: On the streets

---

- The police has an institutionalized legitimacy to use power for punishment. Control measures produce deviance because being punished is stigmatizing.
- Usual locations for police encounters were in the streets or in someone's home.
- Streets are a public space and primarily open for all people.
  - However, public and half-public spaces are seen as areas of possible risks and threats which make public spaces also controlled and limited by safety concerns.
  - Controlling the streets is about cleaning the public spaces from unwanted behavior or unwanted groups.
- As cannabis use has become more popular after 1990's, control has become more relaxed than before

# Law enforcement: Home investigations

---

- Authority power is also used in private home environments.
- In socially integrated life situations home investigations show as exaggerated use of power that sends the message that their lifestyle is a threat to the society.

---

*"I was coming home from a walk when the police officers stopped me and said that I have no business coming in there, because they are going through my apartment - - My partner was inside and he told me that they had just barged in, by just opening the door ... They had got the landlords key and they just shouted "It's the police" and they were even wearing bulletproof vests - - So he was made to sit on a chair and he told that he needed clothes because he was feeling cold but the police didn't let him to grab a hoodie or anything"*

# Caring power


---

- Concept originally from Drenth & Haan (1999).
- Takes place in social and health care services
- Professionals may set conditions for giving help: agreeing to do drug screening, show regret of using, express a willingness to change, commit to rehabilitation, willingness to adopt the institutions moral ideas
- Governance of drug using bodies through biomedical and health management (Szott 2015)

---

*E: "So you have not wanted to tell anywhere (to a service provider) that you use cannabis?"*

*Otso: "No, because you won't get help if you tell. I have many friends who have been turned away at the door if they tell that they use cannabis. Or the doctor says that it's my fault that I have depression, so get out. Or they make you go through drug tests for a long time and they set a certain time for how long your tests must be negative".*



What can we learn from people with deviant behavior  
and marginalized knowledges?

---

What kind of cannabis policy do you have in your  
country?

# Literature

---

Eskola, Marjatta (2003) Aina voi tehdä toisin. Teoksessa Merja Laitinen & Anneli Pohjola (toim.) Sosiaalisen vaihtuvat vastuut. 108-127. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Forssén, Katja & Laine, Kaarina & Tähtinen, Juhani 2002. Hyvinvoinnin tekijät ja uhat lapsuudessa. Teoksessa Kirsi Juhila, Hannele Forsberg & Irene Roivainen (toim.) 2002. Marginaalit ja sosiaalityö. 81-104. Jyväskylä: SoPhi.

Foucault, Michel (1972) The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse in Language. Translated from the French by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel (1978) History of sexuality. New York, Pantheon.

Foucault, Michel (1980) Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-79, New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, Michel (1991) Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison. New York, Pantheon.

Karjalainen, Karoliina & Hakkarainen, Pekka & Salasuo, Mikko (2023) Suomalaisten huumeiden käyttö ja huumeasenteet 2022: suomalaisten huumeekokeilut yleistyvät, asenteissa ja mielipiteissä isoja muutoksia, Tutkimuksesta tiiviisti, Vuosikerta. 2023, Nro 15, s. 1-16.

Kinnunen, Aarne (2008). Kriminaalipolitiikan paradoksi. Tutkimuksia huumausainerikollisuudesta ja sen kontrollista Suomessa. Helsinki: Oikeuspoliittisen tutkimuslaitoksen julkaisuja 233.

Measham, Fiona & Brain, Kevin (2016). 'Binge' drinking, British alcohol policy and the new culture of intoxication. Crime, Media, Culture, 3(1), 262 – 283.

Measham, Fiona (2004) The decline of ecstasy, the rise of 'binge' drinking and the persistence of pleasure. The Journal of Community and Criminal Justice, 51(4): 309-326.

Measham, Fiona, Newcombe, Russell & Parker, Howard (1994). The normalization of recreational drug use amongst young people in north-west England. The British Journal of Sociology, 45(2). 287–312.

Miller, Peter & Rose, Nikolas (2008) Governing the Present. Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life. Cornwall: Polity Press.

Milstein SL & MacCannell K & Karr G & Clark S (1975) Marijuana-produced changes in pain tolerance. Experienced and non-experienced subjects. Int Pharmacopsychiatry. 10(3):177-82. doi: 10.1159/000468188.

Tammi, Tuukka (2007). Medicalising Prohibition. Harm Reduction in Finnish and International Drug Policy. Vaajakoski: Gummerrus Printing.

Pösö, Tarja (2009) Sosiaaliset ongelmat ja hyvän olon tunne. Teoksessa Merja Laitinen & Anneli Pohjola (toim.) Tabujen kahleet. 153–16. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Rose, Nikolas (2000) Government And Control. Julkaisussa The British Journal of Criminology vol. 40:2. pp. 321-339. Oxford University Press.

Rose, Nikolas (2001) The Politics of Life Itself. *Theory, Culture and Society* 18 (6):1-30. DOI: 10.1177/02632760122052020.

Szott, Kelly 2015. Governing through health: The biomedical and public health management of drug using bodies. Syracuse University, Dissertations - ALL. 240.

Søgaard, Thomas Friis & Lerkkanen, Tuulia (2021). Overview: Exploring the onto-politics of cannabis. Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs. 38(4) 321–328.