

Reflections on the use of Cannabidiol for Medicinal Purposes and the views of Healthcare Professionals

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Introduction

The cannabis plant has more than one hundred cannabinoids. The two most researched cannabinoids are tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and cannabidiol (CBD). Demand for CBD products grew with healthcare professionals recommending CBD for potential therapeutic effects.^{1,2}

Aims

To assess the knowledge and perception of healthcare professionals (HCPs) about CBD.

Method

A questionnaire, consisting of 4 sections (Figure 1), was developed, electronically and in paper format. It targeted the knowledge and perception of HCPs about CBD.

- Validation was carried out through discussion with a panel of 5 experts consisting of 3 pharmacists, 1 general practitioner and 1 physiotherapist
- Ethics approval was sought prior to dissemination
- Recruitment of participants was carried out by means of convenience sampling
- Dissemination was carried out online through social media and through all the available professional associations. HCPs attending pharmacies were asked if they would like to participate voluntarily
- Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS software version 28

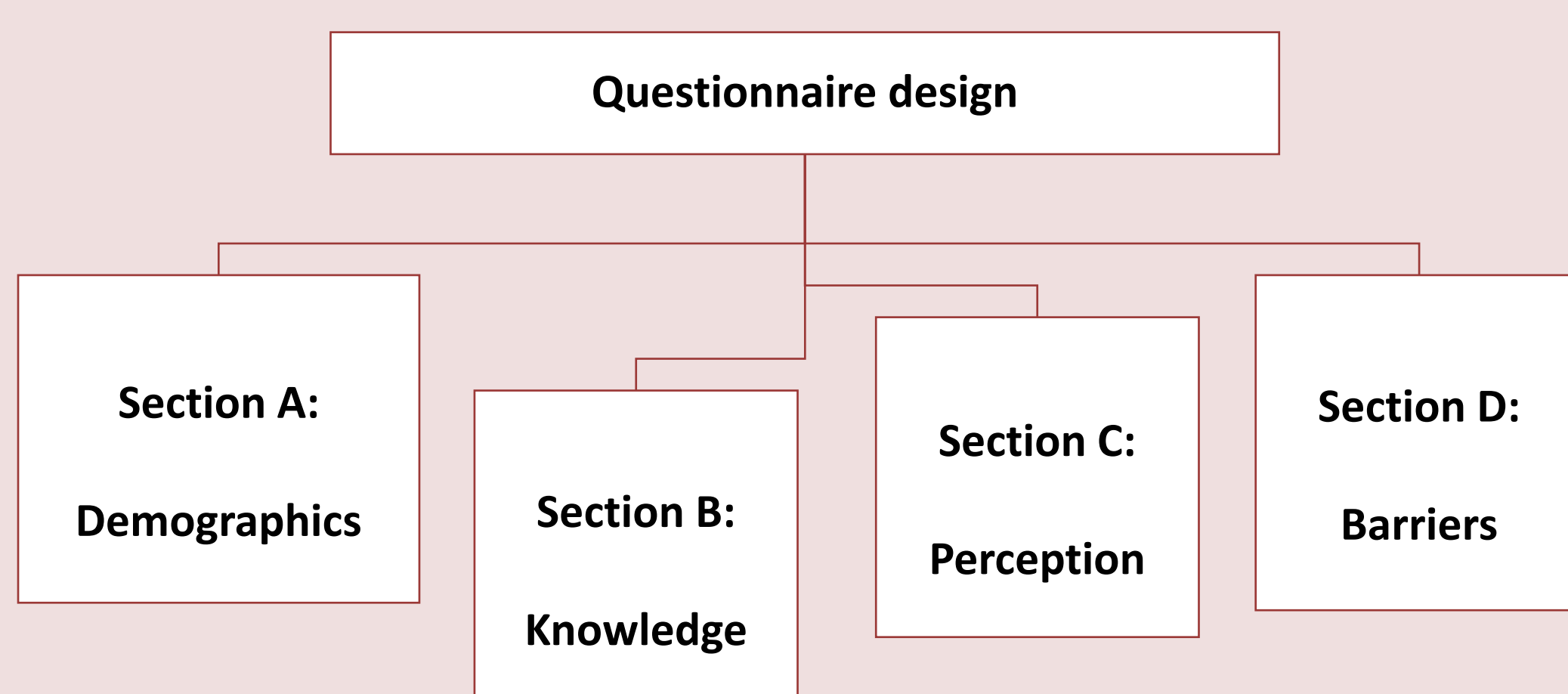


Figure 1 Questionnaire design

Results

- One hundred and fifty HCPs (58% female, 53% aged 26-40 years, 49% pharmacists, 23% doctors, 8% nurses) answered the questionnaire
- HCPs believe that CBD has an analgesic effect with 35% (n=53) and 23% (n=30) believing that the probability of this effect being produced is between 61-80% and 80-100%, respectively
- HCPs feel comfortable in prescribing or recommending CBD in:
 - ❖ Painful conditions (69%, n=104)
 - ❖ Insomnia (50%, n=75)
 - ❖ Cancer (45%, n=68)
- HCPs (n=105) believe that sedation/somnolence are from common to very common side effects caused by CBD while fever (n=90), infections (n=80) and drooling (n=59) were believed to be rare to very rare side effects of CBD
- Sixty percent (n=90) of HCPs believe that Epidyolex®, should be available in Malta while 53% (n=79) believe that CBD products intended for medicinal use without a marketing authorization should not be legally available in Malta
- Sixty-seven percent (n=101) of HCPs believe that CBD products should be prescription-only medicines of which 39% (n=58) are of the opinion that CBD products should be prescribed following the same procedure for controlled and dangerous substances
- Negative personal beliefs of HCPs posed as the highest potential barrier related to CBD use (65%, n=97)

- Sixty-one percent (n=91) of HCPs disagree that CBD is a gateway drug and 45% (n=67) agree that CBD products used for recreational purposes should be decriminalised (Figure 2)

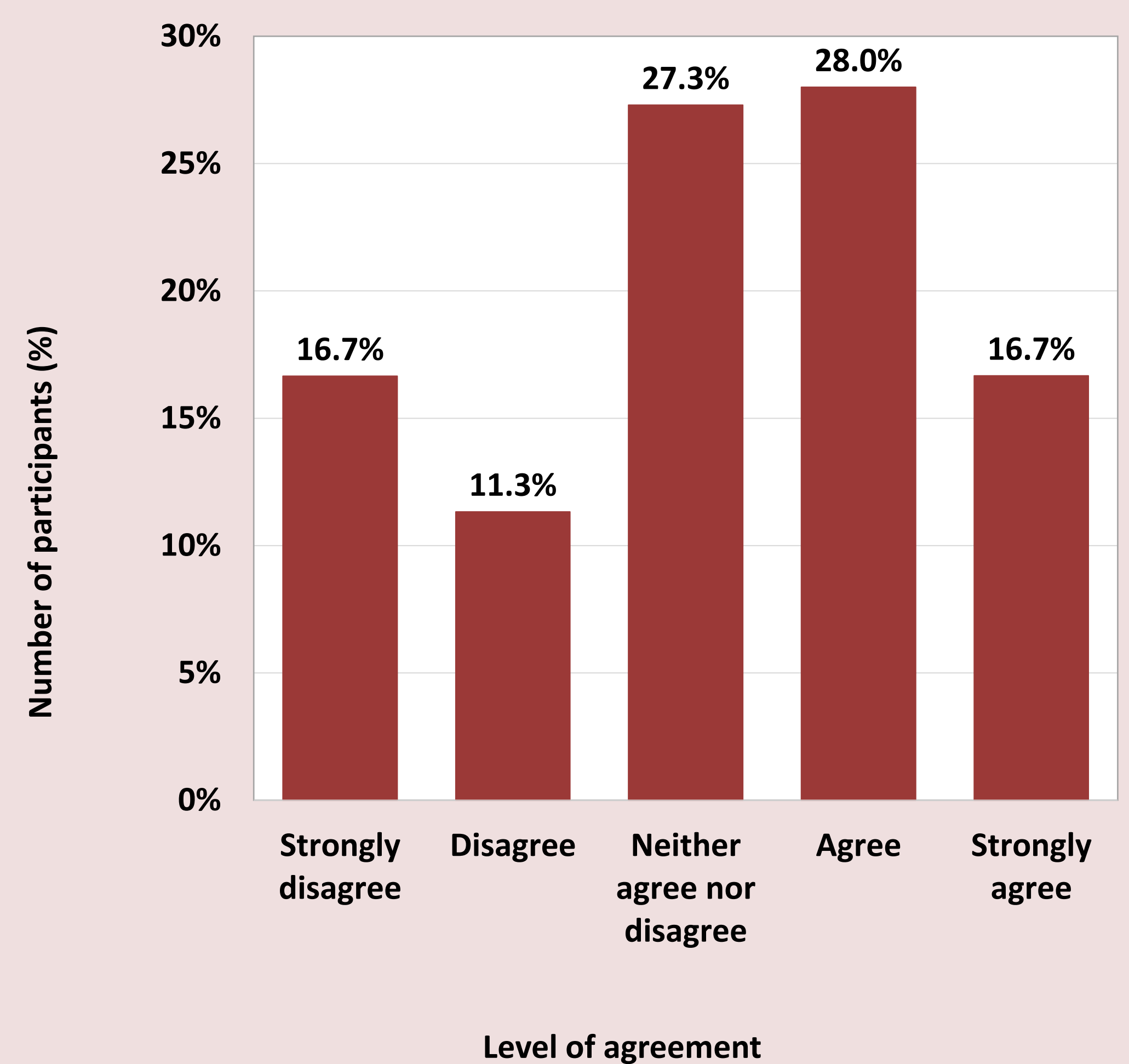


Figure 2 Decriminalisation of recreational use of CBD use (N=150)

Conclusion

HCPs claim that CBD produces an analgesic effect yet there is currently no approved CBD product for the management of pain. Results indicate different levels of knowledge among HCPs regarding side effects of CBD. The side effects mentioned in the questionnaire were listed as common to very common side effects in the SmPC of Epidyolex®. Awareness and education about the potential side effects caused by CBD products is proposed. There are contradictory findings and beliefs of HCPs with regards to classification of CBD products. Although 61% believe that CBD is not a gateway drug, 39% think that CBD products should be classified as narcotics. This highlights the need for further investigation.

References

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