

LADIS bulletin

APRIL, 2004

Treatment demand of cannabis clients in outpatient addiction care in the Netherlands (1994-2002)

In brief

- From 1994 to 2002 treatment demand of cannabis clients increased with 33% to about 9,500 clients.
- There is a growing group of clients (about 2,100) who only report cannabis problems.
- About 2% of the current cannabis users seeks outpatient addiction treatment.
- In 2002, 29% of the cannabis clients registered was new.

The organisation for Information Systems in Care (SIVZ)¹ has been mandated by the Dutch government to collect, manage and report the information of the Dutch National Alcohol and Drugs Database (LADIS).

LADIS was established in 1986. In LADIS, clients can be uniquely identified. By matching individual records client careers can be described and analysed.

LADIS covers the whole of the addiction outpatient services in the Netherlands. Annually the LADIS Key figures² and additional client profiles are published. Besides the LADIS database is used for research, policy evaluation and benchmarking.

Treatment demand of cannabis clients

In 2002, 9,466 clients applied for help or advice at outpatient addiction services.³ This group includes clients with primary, secondary or tertiary cannabis problems. This is 7.2 clients / 10,000 inhabitants of 15 years and older (in 1994: 5.4 clients per 10,000 inhabitants). This is a relative increase of 33%. In 2002, 27% of these clients are new in outpatient addiction care. With opiate clients this is 6% and with cocaine clients this is 25%.

Treatment demand for cannabis clients outside the outpatient treatment domain, is relatively small. About 300 persons were admitted with cannabis related diagnoses as inpatients (NDM, 2002)⁴.

Figure 1

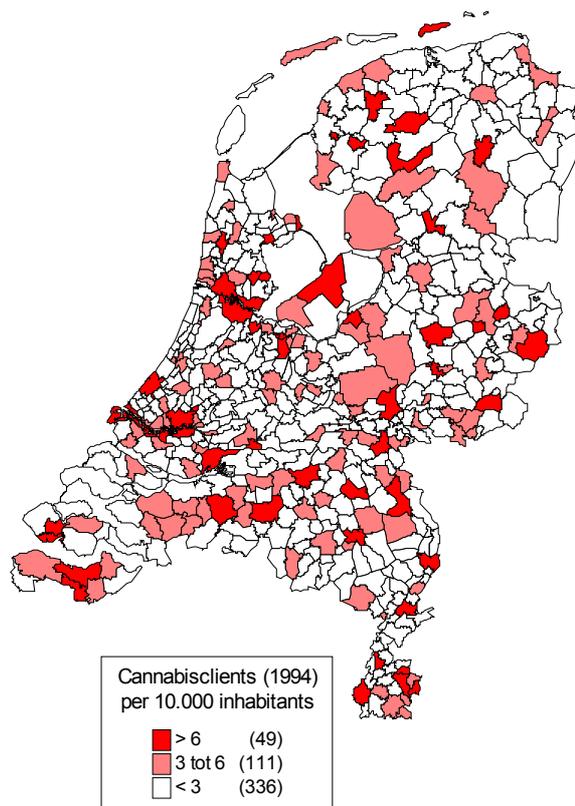


Figure 2

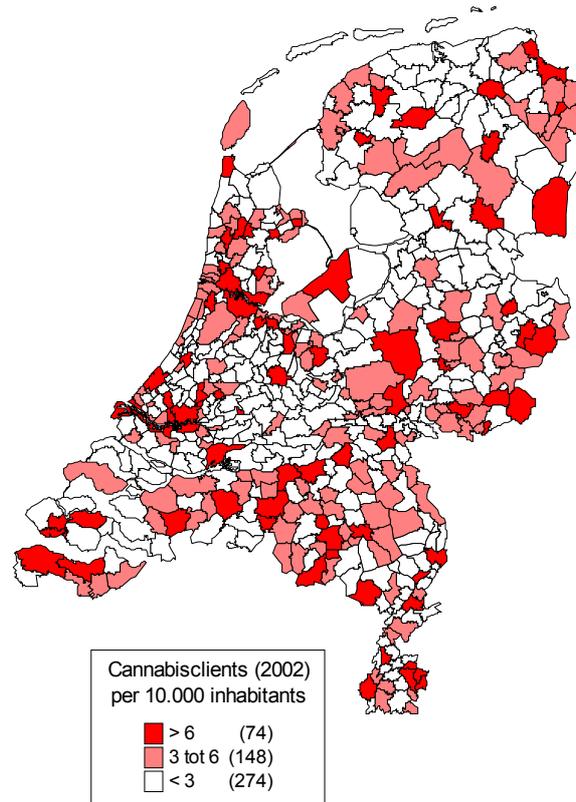


Figure 1 and 2 give an overview of the relative number of clients / 10,000 inhabitants in the Netherlands in 1994 and in 2002.

From the figures 1 and 2 it turns out that in 2002, 15% of the municipalities (74) had 6 or more clients per 10,000 inhabitants. In 1994 this was the case for 10% of the municipalities.

Cannabis clients and current cannabis users

Currently there are about 408,000 current cannabis users in the Netherlands (NDM, 2002)⁵. This is about 290 current users / 10,000 inhabitants.

Since 1997 the relative number of current users increased with 25% (2001: 290 / 10,000 inhabitants).

In the same period the relative number of clients increased with 7% (from 6.4 / 10,000 to 6.9 / 10,000 inhabitants).

About 2% of the number of current cannabis users (408,000) seeks outpatient addiction care.

In 2002 the average age of all cannabis clients was 31 years (the average age of current users was 28 years).

15% of the cannabis clients is female and approx. 17% belongs to migrant groups.

Cannabis as primary or secondary problem

Within the group of clients with cannabis problems three main subgroups can be distinguished:

1. Clients with cannabis as secondary (or tertiary) problem drug.
2. Clients with cannabis as main (most important) problem drug.
3. Clients who only report cannabis problems (a subgroup of group 2).

Clients who report secondary (or tertiary) cannabis problems are the largest group of problem users; in 2002 there are 5,697 cannabis users. Since 1994 this group of clients increased with 14%.

An increasing number of clients reports cannabis as main problem drug; in 2002 this group counts 3,769 persons. This category of clients increased with 79% since 1994.

Clients only reporting problems with cannabis use are the smallest group (2002: 2,144 persons). Since 1994 the number of persons rose with 78% to 2,144 clients in 2002.

The proportion main problem versus secondary problem drug changed in the period 1994-2002 in favour of cannabis as a main drug. In 1994 the proportion main versus secondary was 30% and 70% respectively. In 2002 the proportion was 40% (cannabis as main problem drug) and 60% for cannabis as secondary problem drug.

Also the share of clients exclusively reporting a cannabis problem increased. In 1994 this was 17%, in 2002 this was 23%.

Profiles

Given the debate about the risks of cannabis use we also looked at a subgroup of cannabis clients e.g. those clients seeking help exclusively because of their cannabis use (i.e. clients who only use cannabis).

This group is in contrast with those clients with multiple problems e.g. a cannabis problem plus another (drug) problem, either primary or secondary.

Table I gives an overview of the two groups. Each group is subdivided (there are 4 groups in total). Clients using only cannabis by age; multiple cannabis clients by type of substance.

The average age of the groups is respectively 28 years for clients only using cannabis and 32 years for multiple using cannabis clients. Cannabis clients are among the youngest clients in outpatient addiction care.

Table I Client profiles of cannabis clients

	# 2002 (%)	# clients/10.000 inh. (% change since 1994)
Only cannabis		
1. young cannabis clients (15-20 years)	330 (3%)	3.5 (21%)
2. older cannabis clients (> 20 year)	1,815 (19%)	1.5 (96%)
Multiple problem		
3. cannabis + alcohol	2,168 (23%)	1.7 (65%)
4. cannabis + hard drug	3,834 (41%)	2.9 (%)

- The absolute number of the group ranging from 15-20 years (1) is small and has been fairly stable since 1994.
- The share of the two groups of clients who only use cannabis (groups 1 and 2 accounting for 23%) is relatively small.
- Since 1994 the relative growth of the number of older single using clients (2) and the increase in the relative number of the group cannabis clients co-using alcohol (3) is 96% and 65% respectively.

Clients who only use cannabis

Although cannabis is generally reported as a secondary problem drug, there are indications that (clients with only) cannabis problems could be regarded as an independent phenomenon:

- Older clients (> 20 years) using only cannabis specifically distinguish themselves on three "severity" indicators:
 - a) duration of drug problem (68% of the clients struggle 5 years or more with their cannabis problem).
 - b) frequency of use (88% is daily user).
 - c) percentage ever psychiatrically admitted (39%)⁶.

- Previous outpatient contacts (in the period 1994 -2002) of older clients (> 20 years) using only cannabis are mainly related to cannabis problems.
- Finally it is noticeable that in the small group young clients (15-20 years), clients are more often living with their parents and are more often referred by family or friends.

Coffee shops and outpatient treatment demand

Since 1997 the number of coffee shops decreased with 32%; currently there are 805 coffee shops in the Netherlands (Bieleman, et al., 2003)⁷.

In the period 1997-2001 the number of current cannabis users increased with 7% and the relative number of clients (per 10,000 inhabitants) increased with 39%.

¹ www.sivz.nl

² www.sivz.nl

³ Figure includes all clients with primary, secondary and tertiary cannabis problems.

⁴ Nationale DrugMonitor (NDM) (2002). Jaarbericht 2002. Utrecht.

⁵ Nationale DrugMonitor (NDM) (2002). Jaarbericht 2002. Utrecht.

⁶ Number is extrapolated

⁷ Bieleman, B., Goeree P., Naayer, H. (2003). Coffeeshops in Nederland 2002. IntraVal, Groningen

Summary

- Given the scale of current cannabis use in the Netherlands, the proportion of clients seeking treatment remains small.
- Not only in an absolute, but also in a relative sense there is an increasing demand of clients experiencing problems with cannabis.
- There are indications that the impact of cannabis clients is growing; these are:
 - The increase in the number of primary problem cannabis clients.
 - A small, yet annually increasing number of single using cannabis clients (about 2000 clients in 2002).
 - There is a substantial group of new clients (29%) entering the treatment system in 2002. This might indicate that cannabis still is a “growth market” for the treatment community.

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