

Abstract

Cannabis use among young people in Berlin has become a pressing public health concern, particularly in Kreuzberg, where exposure to drug use is common. While most studies focus on young adults aged 18–29, this project examined implications for adolescents (13–18), a group at risk of early initiation in environments where cannabis use is normalized.

The study explored cannabis trends, risk factors, and prevention gaps in Kreuzberg. Due to legal and ethical restrictions on direct adolescent participation, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 8–12 key stakeholders, including educators, social workers, and health professionals. The project was guided by Social Learning Theory, the Risk and Protective Factors Model, and the Harm Reduction approach, ensuring a strong theoretical grounding while maintaining ethical integrity.

Findings revealed widespread normalization of cannabis use, with high-THC strains and early onset linked to psychosis risk. Prevention was fragmented: school programs were short-term, parents were often under-informed, and police involvement was seen as counterproductive. Stakeholders emphasized the need for holistic and relationship-based strategies, stressing the importance of harm reduction education, stronger family engagement, therapeutic support addressing stress and trauma, and consistent trust-building by youth workers.

The project achieved its objectives by generating new learnings and conceptualizing a pilot framework for school- and community-based prevention. Importantly, it reinforced a human rights perspective, aligning with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which guarantees adolescents' rights to health, education, and protection. Recommendations call for stronger family education, embedding social learning in schools, expanding harm reduction, investing in community support, and aligning Berlin's legalization policies with robust prevention initiatives.