

## Global Risks of Cannabis Commercialisation – Lessons learned from targeted marketing industries towards women

*65<sup>th</sup> Commission on Narcotic Drugs – Side Event*

---

Hosted by: [WFAD](#), [Movendi International](#), [DFAF](#), [SAM](#), and [WOCAD](#)

Moderated by: Carlton Hall ([Carlton Hall Consulting](#))

---

[Rewatch the Side Event Here](#)

**Carlton Hall:** The global debate cannot merely focus on legalisation but should also include the commercialisation of THC. Currently, there is a trend where media and role models are embracing cannabis and its commercialisation strongly focuses on its market strategies targeting women. Not only in the US but also Europe there is a significant rise in females' interest in cannabis. Women are the fastest-growing consumers in the United States and it has been expressed that the future of cannabis is female. However, the profound risks and harms are not spoken about. Therefore, this event intends to make the invisible visible.

**Britt Fredenman (WOCAD):** It is a violation of the law to target advertising and marketing of addictive substances consciously and systematically to children and young people. Nevertheless, the alcohol and tobacco industry have shown aggressive, intrusive, and targeted marketing of products through not only traditional media outlets but also social media and the internet. In Sweden, for example, around 1 billion SEK has been spent on alcohol advertising. According to their national law, children and young people under the age of 25 are not allowed to be specifically aimed at or portrayed nor is it allowed to use aggressive marketing. Simultaneously, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child includes article 33, highlighting the need for protection from harmful drugs. All these laws constitute protective legislation for children and young people. The protection of health, life, and against exploitation for financial profit. Yet, it is still happening.

To raise awareness on the different targeting strategies, WOCAD published the Pink Monster, a tutorial guidebook with interactive methods for gender-specific prevention tools. It showcases examples of products targeting girls and women, such as pink cigarettes, low calories and low alcohol drinks, [alcohol] bag in [hand]bag, and pills for losing weight. By raising awareness, girls and women can make their own healthy choices and find their own strength. Currently, the industry is still aggressively marketing, especially young people from an age group that often are expecting their first or second child, and policymaking is outdated since it does not protect children and young people from the influences of the industry. The industry should not participate in the policymaking of alcohol and other drugs. Future policymaking also needs to include cyberspace.

**Dr LaTisha Bader (SAM):** There has been a shift from alcohol to cannabis in society and marketing. It is expected that 166 billion dollars will be spent by 2025 for cannabis in the United States alone. Women are playing an important part in the shift as they are controlling the majority of the household income. Whereas before, they were mainly part of the marketing as their bodies were selling the products, they now have become targets and main consumers. Magazines and billboards promote the use of cannabis [infused] products, touching upon the wishes and 'cures' for women of all ages and races. Cannabis is being positioned as a radical way to change the female mind and body, such as it helping to relieving stress and anxiety, maintain weep, support sleep, alleviate pregnancy symptoms, skin care, and overall improve life. Leading to the substance being used through products from morning until night. Science, however, disproves the benefits. Additionally, home goods products, such as infused candles and décor, with the support of and promotion by celebrities are a successful

market. Furthermore, the industry has started to target the parenting culture, replacing the mommy wine culture into dope moms who can manage the stress and pandemic. Besides this, the industry also welcomes women to break the glass (or grass) ceiling and start to run a business to bring citizenship to the country and wealth to themselves.

**Kristina Sperkova (Movendi International):** The alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis industry are intertwined and learning from each other in their marketing strategies. Looking at the alcohol norm in society, which we are not always aware of, its culture brings different myths and beliefs and creates people's identity in society. Something similar can be seen with cannabis as the perception of the drug is creating is an identity. One is considered progressive when supporting the legalisation of cannabis but conservative when being against legalisation. As seen in alcohol marketing strategies, it can change the perception of the past, liking a drink more in hindsight since the commercial portrays it a certain way. The harm is, however, not understood or shown.

The alcohol norm, and the cannabis norm, is not only created through marketing, but also through lobbying (eliminating any policy effort threatening sales), promotion (driving availability), sabotage (avoiding, violating, and undermining laws), manipulation (controlling, protecting, and cultivating its image – being portrayed as a societal actor improving society), and deception (hindering public recognition). The alcohol industry is already investing in the cannabis industry and products. For example, cannabis-infused vodka for Christmas. Similar to cannabis, alcohol shows strong efforts in targeting women. First, they targeted males and women who were used as a tool to sell the product. When emancipation of women was accepted by the critical mass, the industries jumped in and started to hijack the notion of emancipation and used it for the promotion of their products. With a growing income, consumption has increased. However, until now, alcohol industry's exploitation of women's emancipation by making their product a symbol of equality has given women cancer, liver problems, substance use disorders, etc. The normalisation of the product is part of the cause.

**George Ochieng Odalo (Slum Child Foundation):** In Kenya, there are also a lot of challenges. For example, when cannabis was removed from the strict control drugs at the UN vote Kenya celebrated. The NACADA had to then clarify that marijuana had not been legalised. There is currently a lot of effort of those wanting to legalise the drug and they face support from the media. The latter shares incorrect information with the public. Currently, there is a bill being sponsored that is to legalise marijuana. Politicians have only listened to the benefits and not the negative effects of the drug. An open letter was sent to the assembly to oppose the legalisation and the debate has calmed down. Some zones that can not be accessed, not by the civil society or government since the cartels are strong here. Women are also encouraged to smuggle drugs, increasing school dropout and poverty.

**Sumnima Tuladhar (CWIN):** Nepal is positive towards the marijuana bill, which also includes the import and cultivation of the drug. Many companies are already queuing up to start their business growing and importing cannabis. Even though it is considered medical marijuana, civil society is worried. Those in favour are policymakers and the media who do not understand the aggressive marketing and it is being promoted to young people. This has an immense impact on the health and children in poorer areas. There is already a lack of access to treatment, making it very difficult. People in support of legislation are reasoning that it would bring wealth and compare it to the hippy times in the 1970s. With more money from tourists, the economy would flourish. This, however, is naïve and would not include all the consequences and are ignoring the evidence.

#### **Questions:**

What would be the way forward? Is there hope?

**Britt Fredenman:** There is hope. By reaching the staff and people working with young girls around the world, we can raise the girls' awareness. When they know more about it, they will start to question it and not easily accept it. We have the material and will have to be continuing educating grown-ups and young ones.

**Dr LaTisha Bader:** When you wake women, you move mountains. They are powerful and the hope is education.

**Kristina Sperkova:** The norm is indeed changed by education. However, we also need to change environments in what is allowed and what is not. We need policies on products. We can be educated but there will always remain a large number of influences which is difficult to block. Therefore, we need policies that promote health.

**Sumnima Tuladhar:** we need prevention, this is the most viable option available for us. Prevention aided by solidarity by all good people creates a sustainable and fair system.

**George Ochieng Odalo:** We need to protect our children no matter what. The practices that are portrayed here can be used as an example and can be put in place.

Cannabis is a famous drug in the world and the same in my country. Do you have any data about women who use cannabis?

Data on women using cannabis can be found in the [World Drug Report](#)

Please tell us your ideas on how to address the promotion of cannabis through social media.

**Kristina Sperkova:** The idea is to impose a ban on cannabis promotion in social media and elsewhere. Similar to the ban on promotion of tobacco products and in some countries ban on marketing of alcohol products.

### **Other material**

[INCB Report 2021](#) – the problem of influencers using social media for the promotion of the use of cannabis as well as other illegal drugs.

[Christmas Story with Kate Hudson](#) – the example used by Kristina Sperkova on the promotion of cannabis-infused vodka.