



The Influence of Thailand's Marijuana Legalisation on Social Acceptance in Malaysia

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Marijuana has always been illegal in Malaysia, both for medical and recreational use. The country enforces strict drug laws under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952, which classifies marijuana as a controlled substance. Individuals caught in possession, distribution, or consumption of marijuana face severe legal consequences, including heavy fines, long prison sentences, and even the death penalty for trafficking offences. Despite this strict stance, regional developments, particularly Thailand's legalisation of marijuana, have raised concerns about its potential influence on Malaysian society.

Thailand, Malaysia's closest neighbour, legalised medical marijuana in 2018 and fully decriminalised its use in 2022, making it the first country in Southeast Asia to do so. With nearly five million Malaysian tourists visiting Thailand in 2023, exposure to legalised marijuana has become widespread. Many Malaysians have witnessed its open sale and consumption firsthand, which may gradually shift perceptions and contribute to the normalisation of marijuana use. This increased exposure could challenge Malaysia's traditional perception of marijuana as a dangerous and illicit substance, leading to a potential desensitisation effect.

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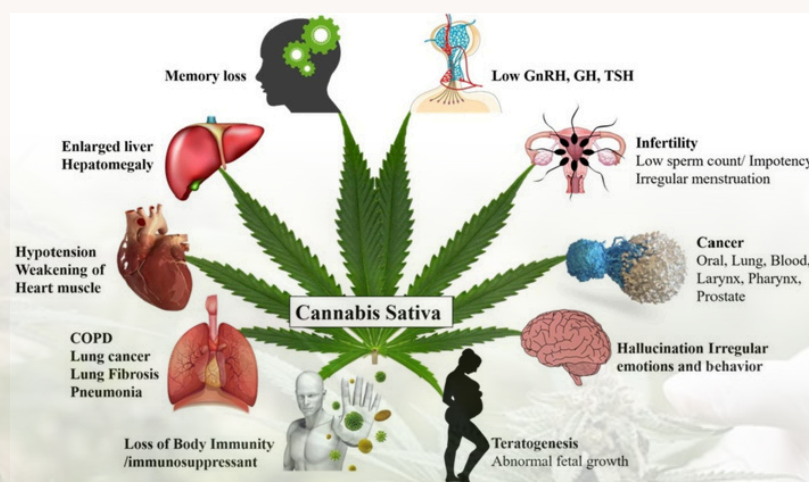


A rise in social acceptance of marijuana in Malaysia could have significant implications. Greater acceptance may lead to increased interest and use despite its illegality, exposing individuals to legal repercussions. Additionally, recent data from the National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK) reported an 85.3% increase in marijuana-related cases, suggesting a possible link between Thailand's policy changes and usage trends in Malaysia. Notably, a higher number of these cases have been reported in Malaysian states bordering Thailand, such as Kelantan, Kedah, and Perlis, where frequent cross-border movement increases exposure to legalised marijuana. This growing exposure, combined with evolving public discourse, may challenge existing perceptions and influence attitudes towards marijuana in Malaysia. As acceptance gradually shifts, law enforcement agencies may struggle to balance public sentiment with strict drug policies, particularly in border regions where the impact is more pronounced.

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Understanding social acceptance is crucial in this context. Social acceptance refers to the extent to which individuals tolerate marijuana within cultural, medical, or social norms rather than simply supporting its legalisation. While available studies indicate that a significant proportion of Malaysians support decriminalisation, there remains a lack of empirical research on how Thailand's marijuana policies are influencing Malaysian attitudes. Factors such as religion, media portrayal, generational differences, and personal experiences play a crucial role in shaping public perception.



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Given the increasing exposure to marijuana in Thailand and the rise in marijuana-related cases in Malaysia, further research is essential to understand how Malaysian society is responding to these changes. A comprehensive study of social acceptance of Thailand's marijuana legalisation among the Malaysian public—through approaches such as online discussions, interviews with community leaders, and public surveys—would provide deeper insights. Such research could help inform future policy decisions, public health strategies, and law enforcement efforts.