



Letter to the Editor

"Gol" as a Commonly Abused Psychoactive Substance in Iran: Clinical and Forensic Consequences

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Dear Editor

Cannabis abuse is a growing public health concern in the world. Globally, 5.3 percent of 15–16 years old (13.5 million people) had used cannabis in the past year, in 2021 [1]. In Iran, a potent form of cannabis locally known as "Gol" (meaning "flower" in Persian) has emerged and become one of the most widely abused psychoactive substances, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Gol is a slang name that typically refers to the dried female flowering tops (buds) of the cannabis plant (*Cannabis sativa* spp.), often illicitly cultivated locally in greenhouses. Unlike traditional hashish (pressed resin), Gol refers specifically to the unprocessed cannabis flowers and is characterized by high Δ^9 -tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content, resulting in stronger psychoactive effects than traditional cannabis products.

Several factors may explain its popularity. Misconceptions regarding cannabis as a "natural" and relatively harmless drug have promoted recreational use. Furthermore, Gol is often marketed as a modern alternative to opium, historically prevalent in Iran. Peer

influence and availability in urban areas have also contributed to its widespread use. Recent studies indicate a significant increase in cannabis use in Iran [2, 3]. A systematic review and trend analysis revealed that the prevalence of cannabis use among Iranian youth has risen substantially from 2000 to 2020, with a notable increase among female university students and youth groups in Tehran province [2]. The pooled prevalence estimates of last 12-month cannabis use were 4.9% among males and 0.3% among females in combined youth groups during the 2016–2020 period. Additionally, the linear trend of the last 12-month cannabis use among males and females of combined youth groups in Tehran province increased significantly from 2000 to 2020 [2].

Clinical and toxicological studies reveal that cannabis abuse is associated with significant health risks. Acute use can lead to euphoria, relaxation, and loss of social inhibition, anxiety, impaired cognition, hallucinations, and psychosis. Long-term abuse is associated with dependence, mood disorders, and exacerbation of psychiatric illnesses [4]. Also, chronic use can result in respiratory and cardiovascular toxicity [4, 5]. From a forensic view, driving under the influence of THC is associated with approximately double the risk of motor

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vehicle accidents. The intensity and duration of symptoms are proportional to the concentration of THC in the blood [4].

Reports show increasing admissions due to cannabis-related psychiatric complications, reflecting the rising burden on healthcare systems [6]. Also, cannabis use increases the risk of violence and aggression in adults associated with hallucination, disinhibition, impaired cognition, and exacerbation of psychiatric illness [7].

Addressing these consequences requires a multifaceted response. Public health campaigns should correct misconceptions and increase awareness of cannabis-related harms. Healthcare professionals must be trained to identify and manage cannabis use disorders. Ultimately, further research tailored to the Iranian context is crucial to inform effective prevention and treatment strategies.

In conclusion, the emergence of Gol highlights the evolving landscape of psychoactive substance abuse in Iran. Coordinated action by clinicians, researchers, and policymakers is crucial to reducing its adverse consequences.

Compliance with Ethical Guidelines

There were no ethical considerations to be considered in this letter.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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