



Recent Findings from Cannabis Research

In the past 12 months there have been a number of new research articles published which have examined cannabis use. These are significant pieces of research. The aim of this special edition newsletter is to provide in lay terms what each of these pieces of research found, and how this might be of use when working with young people or adults around cannabis use.

Study 1

Article Title: *Young Adult Sequelae of adolescent cannabis use: an integrative analysis*

Examined: This research looked at how cannabis use impacted on young people's development in 7 key areas; including high-school completion, use of other illicit drugs and suicide attempt, among others. The study included young people with different frequencies of cannabis use, from none to daily use.

Funded by: Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council

Method of Data Collection: Quantitative

Method: This was a long-running longitudinal study done in Australia & New Zealand. Data was collected using a number of different assessment types from people between the ages of 13-30 years. The number of research participants varied between 2537 to 3765 depending on the assessment type.

Findings: This study found clear and consistent associations between the amount of cannabis that young people smoked and adverse outcomes. Young people that regularly smoked cannabis were less likely to complete high school, more likely to use other illicit drugs, more likely to become dependent on cannabis and 7 times more likely to make a suicide attempt.

Relevance: This study strongly shows that there are negative consequences for young people that use cannabis. The prevention or delay of cannabis use among young people would have broad social and health benefits. This research **challenges the myth** that cannabis users do not experience and negative consequences because of their drug use.

Citation: Salins, E. et al (2014) 'Young Adult Sequelae of Adolescent Cannabis Use: an integrative analysis', *Lancet Psychiatry*, Vol. 1, (Sept. 2014), pp. 286-93.

Study 2

Article Title: *Proportion of patients in South London with first episode psychosis attributable to use of high potency cannabis: a case control study*

Examined: This research looked at how frequent use of skunk-like cannabis (weed) was linked to psychotic disorders.

Funded by: UK National Institute of Health Research, SLaM and the Institute of Psychiatry at Kings College London, among other funding bodies.

Method of Data Collection: Quantitative—Case Control Study

Method: Data collected from 410 patients in South London, with first-episode psychosis (their first incident of psychosis). These patients were between the ages of 18-65 years. Data was also collected from a control group of 370 people. The research was carried out between May 2005—May 2011.

Findings: This study found that users of high potency cannabis (weed / skunk-type cannabis) were 3 times more likely to have a psychotic disorder, than those who did not use cannabis. Using skunk-like cannabis every day comes with greatest risk of developing psychotic disorders.

Relevance: This study shows the higher the potency of cannabis used and the more frequent the use, the greater the risk of developing a psychotic disorders. High potency cannabis (skunk-type cannabis / weed) brings more risk of psychosis than low potency cannabis (hash). This study **challenges the myth** that cannabis is good for your mental health.

Citation: Di Forti, M. et al (2015) 'Proportion of patients in south London with first episode psychosis attributable to use of high potency cannabis: a case control study', *Lancet Psychiatry*, (Online February 2015) - Url: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(14\)00117-5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(14)00117-5)

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Study 3

Article Title: *What has research over the past two decades revealed about the adverse health effects of recreational cannabis use?*

Examined: This research compared evidence published on adverse / negative health effects of cannabis use since 1993.

Funded by: NHMRC Australia Fellowship 569738.

Method of Data Collection: Systematic Evidence Review

Method: This research involved a broad review of research over a 20 year period. The author gathered evidence on health impacts of cannabis use and systematically reviewed it under a number of specific headings; including, acute health effects, adverse health effects of chronic use, and cannabis use and mental health.

Findings: This review found that being under the influence of cannabis doubled the risk of car crash for stoned drivers. One in ten regular cannabis users become dependent on cannabis. Cannabis use in adolescence doubles the risk of early school leaving, cognitive impairment and the risk of psychosis in adulthood. Young cannabis users are more likely to use other illicit drugs. A probable link was found between cannabis use and cardiovascular disease. Effects on respiration remains unclear because cannabis users often smoke tobacco along side cannabis.

Relevance: This study provides clear evidence of a range of harmful effects from cannabis use. It **challenges the myth** that you cannot become addicted to cannabis and that cannabis is relatively harmless.

Citation: Hall, W. (2015) 'What has research over the past two decades revealed about the adverse health effects of recreational cannabis use?', *Addiction*, Vol. 110, (1), pp. 19-35.

Study 4

Article Title: *Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife*

Examined: This research looked at how frequent cannabis use from adolescence affected the nervous system and mental functioning in later life

Funded by: UK Medical Research Council Grants G0100527 and MR/K00381X/1, US National Institute on Aging Grant AG032282, US National Institute of Mental Health Grant MH077874, and US National Institute on Drug Abuse Grant P30 DA023026. Additional support was provided by the Jacobs Foundation.

Method of Data Collection: Longitudinal Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study (Brain Imaging Study)

Method: Data was collected from 1037 individuals from birth (1972/1973) to the age of 38 years. Participants took part in neuropsychological testing (nervous system and mental functioning) before the onset of cannabis use and then again in 2010-2012. The research also included other forms of assessment / data collection; such as interviews and postal surveys.

Findings: This study found that participants who smoked cannabis from adolescence and continued this drug use past the age of 20, experienced decline in their nervous system and mental functioning as a result of their drug use. This decline was greatest in persistent cannabis users.

Relevance: This study shows that cannabis has a harmful effect on brain development and can bring about a decline in healthy brain functioning. **This clearly shows that regular cannabis use impairs normal brain development.**

Citation: Meier M.H. et al (2014) 'Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, Vol. 109, (40) E2657-E2664.

This material has been prepared on behalf of the *Bray Drugs Awareness Forum*.

For more information on cannabis go to—
<http://www.drugs.ie/drugtypes/drug/cannabis>
<http://www.talktofrank.com/drug/cannabis>
<http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/>



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