The epidemiology of cannabis use and related harms in Australia 1993-2010

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Australia by state and territory
Outline

• Measurement of problematic cannabis use in the Australian population

• Trends over time in problematic cannabis use

• Indicators of harms related to cannabis use

• Conclusions and Implications from findings
Measurement of problematic cannabis use in Australian population

• 1) National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS)
  
  • Conducted every 3 years – since 1985

  • Multi-stage stratified sampling methodology

  • 2010 sample size = 26,648 (response rate – 50%)
Measurement of problematic cannabis use in Australian population cont’d

• 1) National Drug Strategy Household Survey
  • Cannabis measures
    • Prevalence – lifetime, 12 month, past month, past week
    • Frequency of use – daily, once a week or more, about once a month, every few months, once or twice a year
    • Quantity of use per occasion
    • Severity of Dependence Scale item – Difficulty controlling use
Measurement of problematic cannabis use in Australian population cont’d

• 2) National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing
  • Conducted twice—1997 and 2007
  • 2007 sample size= 8,800 (60% response rate)
  • Multi-stage stratified sampling methodology
Measurement of problematic cannabis use in Australian population cont’d

• 2) National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing
  • Cannabis measures
    • Diagnostic criteria (WMH-CIDI) for substance use disorders – abuse and dependence

    – Lifetime Cannabis Use Disorder = 6.2% (among users 32.2%)
    – 12 month CUD = 1% (among users 14%) (Teesson et al, in press).

• Lifetime prevalence of use

• Frequency of use – Similar to the NDSHS
Key findings 2010 NDSHS – illicit drug use

Per cent

- - - - Used an illicit in last 12 months (2004)  
- - - - Used an illicit in last 12 months (2007)  
- - - - Used an illicit in last 12 months (2010)  

Age group (years)

Past 12 month cannabis use 1993 to 2010 - NDSHS

- Ever Used
- Used Last 12 Months

1993: 34.7%
1995: 31.1%
1998: 39.1%
2001: 33.1%
2004: 33.6%
2007: 33.5%
2010: 35.4%
Past 12 month cannabis use by 10 year age group NDSHS
Indicators of problematic cannabis use

- Daily use
- Difficulty controlling use
- Heavy cannabis use on each occasion of use
Daily cannabis use by 10 year age group
Heavy cannabis use by 10 year age group (more than 10 cones/joints per day)

% Daily Cannabis Users

- 14-19
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49

Year:
- 2001
- 2004
- 2007
- 2010

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Indicators of harm related to cannabis use

• Cannabis-related hospital presentations

• Cannabis arrests
Cannabis-induced psychosis hospital presentations
Cannabis hospital presentations by principal diagnosis

- Mental disorders: 45%
- Other drug & alcohol problems: 22%
- Injury: 10%
- Other: 3%

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, National Hospital Morbidity Database 2008/09
Cannabis arrests in Australia

Source: Illicit Drug Data Reports, Australian Crime Commission
Conclusions

Cannabis use

– in gen pop. declined however in 2010 there was a significant increase in use among older Australians

– Daily use
  • stable over time across age groups – slight ↓ trend among 14 to 19 year olds
  • Sig more prevalent among 40 to 49 compared to 14 to 19

– Difficulty controlling use and heavy use
  • most apparent among 20 to 29 year olds
Conclusions cont’d

Cannabis harms

– Use trends reflected in higher prevalence of hospital presentations for 20 to 29 year olds – dependence and cannabis-induced psychosis

– Treatment seeking driven primarily by other mental health issues rather than cannabis use

– Arrests for cannabis remain high and stable in Australia
Implications

- Younger and occasional users have declined while daily users remain in market

- ↓ trend in use and harms among Australians under 20

- Recent research suggests this might reflect that Australians under 20 are initiating cannabis use later (Lenton et al, 2011)

- Preventative/early intervention work a priority

- Potential public health benefits
Implications cont’d

• Development of strategies for those at risk – young people, those with mental health and cannabis problems

• The 20 to 29 year age group is most at risk for problems with their use – reflected in population survey and treatment data
  • Fits with research showing age 20 is time of greatest risk

• Earlier engagement and for cannabis problems

• Strategies to engage older Australians also important

• The NDSHS trends mirror trends occurring in treatment data which may provide validation for cannabis measures included in the NDSHS

• A short screener for dependence would be a good addition
Thank You

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