

CANNABIS SUBSTITUTION FOR OPIOID USE AMONG PEOPLE WHO USE UNREGULATED DRUGS IN VANCOUVER, CANADA

Category: Poster Presentation (in person)

Abstract Body

Objective: To investigate the association between cannabis substitution for opioids and the frequency of opioid use among structurally marginalized people who use unregulated drugs (PWUD).

Methods: The data for this analysis was collected from three prospective cohorts of PWUD in Vancouver, Canada. Logistic regression was used to analyze the association between socio-demographic variables and cannabis use behaviours with unregulated opioid use.

Results: A total of 205 people who use opioids were enrolled in the present study from December 2019 to November 2021, 88 (43.1%) reported daily cannabis use and 118 (57.6%) reported cannabis substitution for unregulated opioid use. In the multivariable analysis, female sex (adjusted Odds Ratio [aOR] = 2.55, 95% confidence interval [CI]: 1.22, 5.35), daily cannabis use (aOR = 2.11, 95%CI: 1.11, 4.02), use of high THC cannabis (aOR = 2.06, 95%CI: 1.04, 4.08) and using cannabis to reduce opioid cravings (aOR = 2.59, 95%CI: 1.34, 5.02) were associated with decreased opioid use during periods of cannabis use.

Conclusions: These findings indicate that substitution for opioid use is a prevalent motivation for cannabis use among people who use unregulated drugs. With accumulating evidence indicating that cannabis substitution is often used as a harm reduction strategy among PWUD, increasing the accessibility of cannabis products for therapeutic use may be a useful supplementary strategy to mitigate exposure to unregulated opioids and associated harm during the ongoing overdose crisis.

Key Words

- Cannabis/Synthetic Cannabinoids
- Epidemiology
- Opioids/Opiates
- Prevention/Harm Reduction
- Substance Use Disorder (general)

Learning Objective # 1

Acquire an appreciation for the morbidity and mortality associated with the opioid overdose crisis in Canada

Learning Objective # 2

Understand the potential mechanisms of cannabis substitution for opioid use

Reference # 1

Lucas P. Rationale for cannabis-based interventions in the opioid overdose crisis. Harm reduction journal. 2017;14(1):58

Reference # 2

Lake S, Walsh Z, Kerr T, Cooper ZD, Buxton J, Wood E, et al. Frequency of cannabis and illicit opioid use among people who use drugs and report chronic pain: A longitudinal analysis. PLoS medicine. 2019;16(11):e1002967.

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