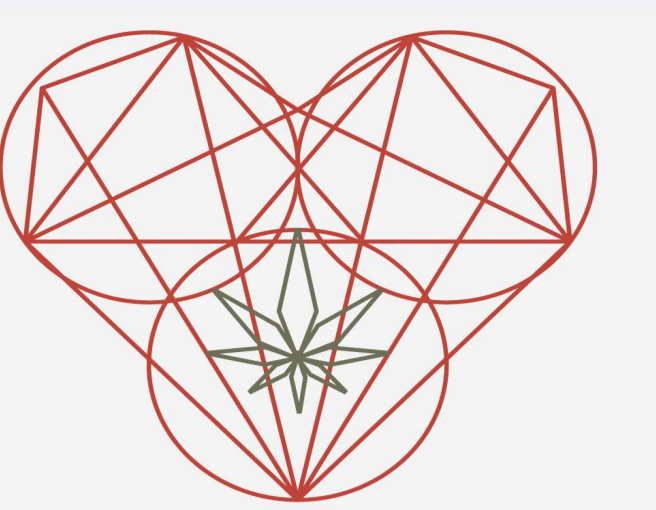




Knowledge, Attitudes, and Perceptions on Cannabis and its Use: A Qualitative Study among Young Adult Cannabis Consumers + Non-Consumers in South Florida

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HERBAL
HEART STUDY

Background

- Quantitative studies have reported an increase in cannabis use but lack understanding of why.
- Qualitative studies help gain insight into highly stigmatized topics, such as cannabis.
- This study aims to examine the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of cannabis and its use among young adults in South Florida.

Methods

- We analyzed 1:1 interviews from 45 participants in the Herbal Heart Study (HHS), a cohort study examining the impact of cannabis use on subclinical cardiovascular risk among healthy young adults (18-35 years old) in South Florida.
- A qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews was performed using a deductive approach driven by the Health Belief Model (HBM) theory.
- The interview transcripts were coded and organized using Dedoose, a computer-assisted qualitative analysis software.
- To establish consensus definitions for the codes, five team members coded a sample of five transcripts. Codes were then used by individual team members to code the remaining transcripts.

Themes

Perceived Health Benefits of Cannabis Use

- Cannabis has a range of benefits on both physical and mental health
- Useful for pain management and as an adjunct for treating side effects of chemotherapy in cancer patients
- Common health benefits: relieving stress/anxiety, treating insomnia, antidepressant, managing symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Perceived Health Risks of Cannabis Use

- Effects on individual's behavioral and decision skills, cognitive impairment
- Decreases productivity, causes distraction, forgetfulness and leads to addiction
- Effects on lungs and cardiovascular health such as rapid heart rate
- Smoking cannabis can be the reason for atherosclerosis

Motivations for Cannabis Use

- Consume for medicinal and recreational purposes
- Improve creativity and formulate ideas
- Bring peace of mind, decrease anxiety and relax

Knowledge of Cannabis and its Use

- Different strains of cannabis where three are main ones and have different effects (i.e., Indica, Sativa and Hybrids)
- Different compounds of cannabis i.e., Cannabidiol (CBD) and Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)
- Various routes of consumption such as smoking, inhalation, and edibles
- Receptors and endocannabinoid system

Perceived Barriers to Cannabis Use

- Psychoactive nature of the plant
- Non-legalization of cannabis use
- Stigma surrounding the use of cannabis
- Drug tests and involvement in sports
- Lack of information or understanding of health effects of cannabis

Participant Perspectives

Participant Quotes

"I am aware of the medical working for the second place in recent years specifically related to treating the side effects from chemotherapy"
- NON-USER

"Cause I have I'm hyper with ADHD, so I was like I'm very hyper so it's just like weed calms me down so it's like I'm chilling when I'm high"
- USER

"I know it relieves my PTSD. Symptoms that are not as severe. I know it stops my panic attacks"
- USER

"I know smoking is not as good for you really, for your lungs. Anything that's inhaling combustible smoke is not, you know, good for you. So, I've been trying to use inhalation more, and I just don't live in a place where I can do combustion, I guess or whatever."
- USER

"Right now, I think to help me relax. Sometimes when I'm anxious and also to just kind of like help channel my thoughts and kind of like slow things down a bit."
- USER

"Perceived risks, I guess it can impair the way you act or what you do, so you probably shouldn't drive if you had smoking and stuff like that."
- NON-USER

"Sativa typically gives you energy, boost, creativity, concentration. And because they're more of a sedating feeling, they're going to give you more feelings of relaxation, of wellness, and usually they're going to make you more sleepy."
- USER

"So first is, I don't know where to find it. But it is illegal, so I also have a fear of like if I were to seek it out that I could get into legal trouble, and I don't want to like put my like academic life at risk and things like that, so I don't even try to seek it out."
- NON-USER

"There are different forms like edibles or like smoking or you know things like that, so I don't know."
- NON-USER

"For medicinal use, I guess that if there's not enough real research done."
- NON-USER

Participant Characteristics

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Herbal Heart Study Participants

Characteristics	Cannabis Use Status		
	All Participants (n=45, 100%)	Users (n=19, 58%)	Non-users (n=26, 42%)
Age in Years			
Mean Age (Range)	24.3 (18-35)	25.3 (18-35)	23.5 (19-34)
Sex, n (%)			
Male	15 (33.3%)	7 (36.8%)	8 (30.8%)
Female	28 (62.3%)	11 (57.9%)	17 (65.4%)
Transgender	1 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.8%)
Non-Binary	1 (2.2%)	1 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Race/Ethnicity			
Hispanic	20 (44.5%)	7 (36.8%)	13 (50.0%)
Non-Hispanic Black	12 (26.7%)	6 (31.6%)	6 (23.1%)
Non-Hispanic White	10 (22.2%)	5 (26.3%)	5 (19.2%)
Non-Hispanic Asian	2 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (7.7%)
Other	1 (2.2%)	1 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Education			
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	20 (44.4%)	7 (36.8%)	13 (50.0%)
Technical Degree/Some College	17 (37.8%)	9 (47.4%)	8 (30.8%)
High School Diploma or Less	8 (17.8%)	3 (15.8%)	5 (19.2%)

Discussion

- Participants expressed positive views on cannabis, using it for medical conditions, despite insufficient scientific evidence for its use as a monotherapy or first-line pain management.^{1,2,3}
- Both groups agree that cannabis can help manage mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, sleep problems, depression, mood stabilization, PTSD, and ADHD.
- Most users acknowledged using cannabis for recreational purposes, which aligns findings from U.S. surveys.⁴
- Non-users were concerned about driving or operating machinery after cannabis use. Cannabis has been linked to workplace accidents and motor vehicle crashes, but further research is needed.⁵
- Cannabis users were equally motivated for adult and medicinal use, despite it only being legal for medical purposes in Florida.
- Non-users were accepting of recreational cannabis use.
- Users exhibited more knowledge about various strains of cannabis i.e., sativa, indica and hybrids as well as compounds THC and CBD.
- The semi-structured interview guide used as the primary data collection tool in this study had limitations in scope
- Due to self-report data, a limitation is potential social desirability bias

Conclusion

- Young adults have varied opinions about cannabis, influenced by personal experience and other sources.
- Need of evidence-based cannabis education for young adults, considering changing policies.
- This also has implications for public health messaging and policy-making.
- Further research is needed to understand the effects of cannabis on human health and its therapeutic potential.
- Generalizability of the findings to contexts where cannabis is legal for both medicinal and recreational purposes is limited

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