

Marijuana and Mental Illness

Research has long implicated cannabis as an exacerbating factor in mental illness where mental illness and/or personality problems are pre-existing or concurrent conditions. Recent research has largely supported these earlier findings, but also implicates a role of marijuana with anxiety disorders, mood disorders and depression.

Troisi et al., found that the severity of depression, anxiety and alexithymic symptoms (cognitive-emotional deficits) increased progressively with the degree of involvement with cannabis, and chronic use of cannabis was associated with a high prevalence of co-morbid psychiatric disorders. Williams et al., demonstrated that cannabis use predicted an increased risk of developing clinical psychosis, and cannabis users showed higher scores on schizotypy, borderline and psychoticism scales than never-users; that the risk of developing schizophrenia among heavy users was six times greater than among non-users; that for highly introspective individuals, marijuana use was associated with self-reports of poorer adult mental health; that greater dependence on alcohol and marijuana was found to be one determining factor predicting worse outcomes for youth in areas of criminality, conduct disorder, depression, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; and that substance dependence (including cannabis) related significantly to suicide attempts and self-injury histories of youth. Other studies, including one by Juarez et al., implicated marijuana use in depression; panic reactions and suicide; and anti-social personality characteristics.

The American Psychiatric Association demonstrates the seriousness and severity of marijuana effects beyond simple cannabis intoxication. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders includes Cannabis Intoxication Delirium (code 292.81), Cannabis Induced Psychotic Disorder with Delusions (code 292.11), Cannabis Induced Psychotic Disorder with Hallucinations (code 292.12), Cannabis Induced Anxiety Disorder (code 292.89), and Cannabis Related Disorders not Otherwise Specified (292.9). The Cannabis related mental disorders are quite serious, and many people find themselves as chronic clients in mental health programs or as mentally ill chemical abusers because of the effects of marijuana.

Early use of marijuana has been shown to double the risk of someone developing schizophrenia and other psychoses - including mania and bipolar disorder - and mood disorders. Also, it can worsen psychotic symptoms for those already ill, and trigger relapse. Several studies back this up (including Matthijs et al., Degenhardt et al., and Moore et al.). Less dramatic, but also troubling, are effects of cannabis on acute or chronic impairment of attention, memory and psychomotor performance. These effects can contribute to reduced functioning and quality of life, as well as accidents and injuries.

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