

Does Cannabis use cause Psychosis? A Study of Trends in Cannabis use and Psychosis in England, 1995-2003

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Abstrakt:

Background. Recent literature reviews have concluded that the concept of cannabis psychosis lacks theoretical and empirical validity. This paper focuses on ‘true’ cannabis psychosis (CP) - a unique mental disorder arising from intoxication by cannabinoids, persisting beyond their metabolisation, and occurring without predisposition to psychosis.

Methods. A documentary research study was designed to assess the hypothesis that cannabis use (CU) is a cause of general psychosis (schizophrenia) or the cause of a unique psychosis (CP). The hypothesis generated two testable predictions: (1) trends in CU and CP should be positively correlated; and (2) the demographic and treatment characteristics of CP cases should be different from the profiles of schizophrenics and other cannabis-related mental & behavioural disorders (MBDs), notably acute cannabis intoxication (ACI). National official statistics were examined on (a) diagnosed cases of schizophrenia and cannabis-related MBDs in England from 1998/1999 (1995/1996 for CP) to 2002/2003 (Hospital Episode Statistics); and (b) the prevalence of past-year CU among 16-59s in England & Wales, from 1994 to 2002/2003 (British Crime Survey).

Findings. The annual rate of CP among English CUs was very low, typically about one in 10,000. But although past-year CU climbed from 2.55 million (8.7 %) in 1994 to 3.36 million (10.9 %) in 2002/2003, there were no clear trends in either schizophrenia or CP cases (280-380 annually). Both predictions were disconfirmed. First, the correlation between annual numbers of CUs and CP cases over six comparison years was non-significant. Second, although CP cases were clearly different from schizophrenia cases on key characteristics, their profile was very similar to that of ACI cases. Lastly, there were no significant changes in cannabis consumption variables over the study period.

Conclusions. There was no support for the claim that cannabis use can cause psychosis, either general or unique. Instead, CP cases were arguably misdiagnosed cases of ACI, and/or MBDs arising from other/multiple drug use. Urgent research is also needed into which ingredients of cannabis may cause MBDs, since cannabis resin has become the most adulterated drug in Britain.