

Substance Use and Mental Health in Young Adults: Literature Review

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The use of alcohol and marijuana can have various effects on a person's mental and physical health. While users enjoy some of the effects, there are numerous harmful effects, with some unknown effects. One fact known is that alcohol and cannabis use disorders correlate at a high rate with other mental health conditions (Thompson et al., 2021). Substance use has a current rate of 81% of adults in the United States between 18 and 24 years using alcohol, cannabis, or a combination of the two (Thompson et al., 2021). This rate is much higher than any other age group, so it is essential to discover the outcomes of using these substances as a young adult. When doing a mental health examination, a nurse must address a patient's substance use, as it may play a significant role in the state of their mental health. This literature review intends to explore the current findings of the possible physical and mental health impacts of alcohol and cannabis use and abuse in young adults.

Co-Use of Alcohol and Cannabis: Longitudinal Associations with Mental Health Outcomes in Young Adulthood

This article evaluates rates and consequences of the use of alcohol and cannabis in young adults to promote education and policy reform on these substances. The study has three different research questions it intends to answer regarding differences in co-users versus single users, consequences related to the frequency of use, and usage differences between the genders. The emphasis of the research aimed to evaluate the mental health effects associated with alcohol use, cannabis use, concurrent alcohol and cannabis use, and simultaneous alcohol and cannabis use.

Simultaneous use was associated with heavier use and had the most adverse effects of the four types of use (Thompson et al., 2021).

Key Points

The repeated findings from the article indicated that using both cannabis and alcohol together is most commonly related to instances of mental health problems in young adults. Co-use also relates to heavier use of the substances, amplifying comorbid health conditions (Thompson et al., 2021). For example, 25% of alcohol-only participants have alcohol use disorder, but 57% of co-users have alcohol use disorder (Thompson et al., 2021). Some of the issues associated with co-use more frequently and more severely than single-use are behavioral problems, psychosis, and substance-related harms (Thompson et al., 2021). Moreover, 21% of alcohol-only users experience social harm, while 41% of co-users do (Thompson et al., 2021). Based on their findings, the authors advocate for the education of the effects of using alcohol and cannabis together. The authors are also promoting selling cannabis in separate stores from alcohol only to limit the consumption together. Their main priority is to prevent the harmful effects of co-using alcohol and cannabis by advocating for these changes and influencing potential legalizations of cannabis.

Assumptions

The authors hypothesized that the effects of co-use would be more harmful than those from only using alcohol or cannabis individually. In this case, harmful is indicating the presence of mental health conditions. They also assumed that the co-users would demonstrate a much heavier use pattern than single-users. Another assumption of the study is that more males will partake in co-use compared to females. These were some of the main focuses of their three

studies. Many of these hypotheses and assumptions were proven upon examination (Thompson et al., 2021).

Deficit/Conclusion

The completion of the three studies determined that the occurrence of behavioral and other cognitive problems increased with the co-use of cannabis and alcohol (Thompson et al., 2021). Furthermore, the heavier the use, the more harmful the effects are. The study led the authors to determine that the use of cannabis alone is uncommon. This determination led to the authors proclaiming that the availability and legalization of cannabis should include in-depth education for consumers on the effects of combining cannabis with alcohol. The authors also advocate for the routine questioning of co-use during health assessments (Thompson et al., 2021). Based on the findings of this study, it is necessary to begin exploring the idea of providing consumer education regarding the use of alcohol and cannabis at the same time. The nurse's role in this change is to advocate for in-depth educational programs to be required in public schools. The direct impact nurses can make regarding this concern is to encourage patients to be open with their mental health and substance use through therapeutic communication. This communication allows the nurse to develop a plan of care for a patient to correct their harmful habits and control their mental health.

Co-occurrence across time and space of drug- and cannabinoid- exposure and adverse mental health outcomes in the National Survey of Drug Use and Health: combined geotemporospatial and causal inference analysis

This study focuses on the possible harmful impact drugs like cannabis can have on mental health in specific areas of the United States. One of the variables for this study was the

legalization of cannabis by state, which helped determine the effects on the mental health of those with legal access to cannabis. The authors mention that many studies have linked cannabis to adverse mental health outcomes, but what makes this study different from others is the inclusion of geographic location and the legal status of cannabis in the sample data (Reece & Hulse, 2020). The evidence shared in the literature demonstrates a significant correlation between the use of cannabis and adverse mental health outcomes (Reece & Hulse, 2020). There were 410,138 responses for this study, making the information collected credible (Reece & Hulse, 2020).

Key Points

Reece and Hulse emphasize the link between cannabis and adverse mental health outcomes. They claim that cannabis is associated with occurrences of mental illness, major depressive episodes, serious mental illness, and suicidal ideation (Reece & Hulse, 2020). Although the study also included the use of alcohol, cigarettes, and cocaine, the most significant findings came from data associated with the use of cannabis. Throughout the literature, each p-value suggests that all findings regarding the use and effects of cannabis are significant. An example of a significant cannabis finding is that cannabis is related to all four illness syndromes with a p-value of $P \leq 3.0 \times 10^{-11}$ (Reece & Hulse, 2020). Other than the types of drugs used and the mental health statuses of participants, the study also analyzed the frequency of use, the ethnicity and median household income of participants, and the region of participants. Each of these variables contributes to the determination of the impact of cannabis use on mental health..

Assumptions

Before conducting this study, Reece and Hulse already understood the rapidly increasing number of mental health issues in young adults between 2008 and 2017 (Reece & Hulse, 2020). Notably, cannabis use has increased during this time frame, while alcohol, tobacco, opioid, and cocaine use have decreased (Reece & Hulse, 2020). This evidence is what led the authors to conduct this study. The general assumption here is that the increased use of cannabis is causing an increase in mental health problems in young adults between 18 and 25 (Reece & Hulse, 2020).

Deficit/Conclusion

The findings suggest that cannabis use is trending with the increasing mental health issues in young adults. Moreover, the authors back this up with the general claim that all addictive substances increase mental health issues. The central angle of this study was to evaluate these occurrences based on geographic location. The study demonstrates that these mental health issues related to cannabis use are more prevalent in the states where cannabis has become legalized (Reece & Hulse, 2020). They conclude with support of these claims, and they mention that socioeconomic status and racial profiling were insignificant to the findings. The findings here make sense and require further evaluation in the future. Mental health is a focal aspect of overall well-being, so the use of drugs like cannabis should be assessed by medical professionals more often. Suppose nurses begin to take on the role of assessing drug use and mental health status routinely, especially in young adults. In that case, mental health issues will be eliminated or treated more effectively.

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

— United States, June 24–30, 2020

Many abrupt changes occurred in the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health across the United States took a sizable blow during the year 2020 for this reason. Between June 24-30 of 2020, there were 5,412 adults surveyed regarding their mental health. A whopping 40.9% of these adults reported having a minimum of one mental health issue (Czeisler et al., 2020). Astonishingly, 74.9% of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 reported mental health issues (Czeisler et al., 2020). This study examines these high numbers of mental health issues and investigates the increasing number of substance use associated with these mental health symptoms.

Key Points

This article from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention highlights many effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health. The survey explicitly addresses how the pandemic has affected the participants. Two categories are directly addressing if the participant has experienced any pandemic-induced trauma or stress-related disorder or if the participant has begun using substances with the intent to cope with pandemic-related emotions (Czeisler et al., 2020). The result for the pandemic-induced trauma or stress of 46% of young adults is statistically significant (Czeisler et al., 2020). The result of those who started to use a substance to cope of 24.7% is statistically significant (Czeisler et al., 2020). Another specific segment of the survey questions suicidal ideations among respondents 30 days before completing the survey. These direct questions intend to discover how the pandemic has increased stress and mental health issues and how substance use may affect mental health status.

Assumptions

This study assumes that the pandemic's circumstances have declined mental health and increased the use of substances. The authors address many possible factors that can contribute to the changes in mental health. Some of these causes relate to contracting the virus or not, missing work, or losing a job. However, the aim of this study was not to identify the causes of the mental health problems. The meaning was to get a feel for the impact of the pandemic. The findings allowed the authors to assume causes to plan for proper forms of care and prevent mental health issues related to the pandemic. Some of their theorized solutions include education on healthy coping mechanisms and the increased use of telehealth to limit the harmful mental effects of the situation (Czeisler et al., 2020).

Deficit/Conclusion

The authors of this article thoroughly conducted the study and evaluation. The credibility of this article stands strong, as the limitations are listed clearly in the discussion. Even with listing the limitations, the findings of the article are significant. The authors suggest completing future studies to evaluate further the roots and specifics of the mental health complications from the COVID-19 pandemic. The implications that telehealth should be utilized more can be highly beneficial to many patients as long as their circumstances allow it. Telehealth would open the door for possibly quicker and more efficient visits. Nurses could benefit from this expansion of telehealth as they would spend more time caring for patients who cannot communicate with their providers electronically. Moreover, nurses should become more well-versed in communicating with patients about general mental health and healthy coping mechanisms, as the authors suggest. This study shows how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected mental health and how substance use is a typical attempt patients use to resolve their problems.

Conclusion

Throughout this literature review, it has become apparent that mental health and substance use correlate closely within the young adult population of the United States. As the findings of each study suggest, the number and severity of mental health issues and syndromes increase with the use of substances. The time has come for nurses and other health care professionals to advocate for more thorough education healthy coping for mental health. With 74.9% of young adults between 18 and 24 having at least one adverse mental health symptom, it is evident that nurses need these issues to be routinely addressed by nurses during each visit (Czeisler et al., 2020). With proper training, nurses can use therapeutic communication to uncover any mental health concerns and guide patients toward improvement, limiting the number and effect of poor mental health outcomes. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have already begun to affect many young adults, and the use of substances has increased because of it (Ceisler et al., 2020). Another way to help combat this increase is to expand the use of telehealth. Telehealth can benefit patients as they have easier access to health care and help nurses spend more time with patients that need in-person care. Young adults face challenging circumstances, so it is time to advocate for better care for and education on mental health and substance use.

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