

An exploration of factors influencing cannabis use among Andalusian adolescents

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An Exploration of Factors Influencing Cannabis Use Among Andalusian Adolescents.

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Summary | English

Cannabis use is becoming one of the most common risk behaviours in adolescents worldwide. Its initiation and experimentation are mostly given during the adolescence. The consequences of cannabis use can be detrimental, leading to physical and mental disorders, strained relationships, family and school problems, or dependence syndrome. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that research on risk and protective factors for recreational cannabis use has been limited to a few high-income countries, where Spain is not included. In Spain, and particularly in Andalusia, little is known about the factors influencing cannabis use behaviour in adolescents, necessitating an examination of its prevalence and related factors. This research requires observational longitudinal studies and reliable registry data.

Based on these arguments, the overall goal of the thesis was to identify factors associated with cannabis use in Andalusian adolescents to prevent its use. More specifically, the thesis has the following objectives: (1) understanding factors associated with cannabis use among Andalusian adolescents, (2) identifying risk profiles for the onset of cannabis use based on usage trajectories, (3) exploring gender differences in beliefs about cannabis use, and (4) summarizing key findings on the influence of peers on cannabis behavior within adolescent friendships. The landscape of adolescent's cannabis use and its consequences, the need of prevention of cannabis use in adolescents, the theoretical framework, and the recapitulation of knowledge gaps are further explained in **chapter 1**.

Chapters 2 and 3 explore factors associated with cannabis use in Andalusian adolescents aged 14 to 18. Chapter 2 presents a cross-sectional study comparing cannabis users with non-users, while Chapter 3 involves a longitudinal study, comparing participants at baseline and follow-up regarding their lifetime cannabis use. Moreover, chapter 3 also examined the risk profiles on the onset of cannabis use according to the trajectories of cannabis use. Results from chapter 2 revealed that non-cannabis users had a few positive beliefs toward cannabis use (e.g., the ability to relax or medical benefits), as well as users. Social influence, especially from peers, played a critical role in cannabis use, as also chapter 3 showed. In chapter 2, specific social situations and moods seemed to be special risk factors for cannabis use, such as being at a celebration or feeling good. Yet, these associations could be not found in chapter 3. Additionally, chapter 3, added to this that having a boyfriend / girlfriend, a lower academic performance, a sensation seeking personality trait were consistently associated with lifetime cannabis use in

adolescents. Regarding the profiles for the different trajectories of cannabis use, at the beginning, non-users differed on perceptions about the sociocognitive factors from consistent users, but not of the new users. When comparing sociocognitive factors at follow-up, the scenario change, and they are the new users who showed more sociocognitive perceptions favoring cannabis than non-users. Therefore, considering the rapid change in perceptions about cannabis use in adolescents in cannabis prevention programs is needed, in order to avoid beliefs in favour of cannabis use from being established.

Chapter 4 aimed to provide a comparison between girls and boys regarding the cognitions related to cannabis use. Results showed that significantly more girls were in higher grades, had higher academic performance, having more often a boyfriend/girlfriend, having religion, having less pocket money. Focus on the beliefs, girls were more convinced of the disadvantages of cannabis use but also more convinced of some of the advantages, having fewer social norms in favour to cannabis use, having more female best friends who used cannabis, feeling pressure to use cannabis from their female friends & their female best friends, and having less intention to use cannabis in the next year than boys.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation presents a systematic review, which summarized the key findings of the peer influence on cannabis use through a social network approach. Findings revealed that friends' cannabis use was the peer influence effect most associated with adolescent's cannabis use. There was also an increase of cannabis use when the adolescent does not feel close to the school's peers, is not nested in a denser neighbourhood network, has a central position, does not belong to any group but had ties to members of two or more groups, has cannabis user friends (especially in early ages), and lives in a neighbourhood where cannabis is used. Nevertheless, more longitudinal research is needed, controlling for relevant selection effects to further knowledge on these network effects on cannabis use.

Chapter 6 discusses the main findings of the thesis in the context of existing literature, highlighting conceptual considerations, strengths, limitations, implications for future research and practice, and concluding remarks.

Keywords: cannabis, adolescents, factors, trajectories, peer influence, prevention.