



Short Communication

Cannabis use motives and personality risk factors

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Study findings suggest that motives for cannabis use vary according to personality risk factors.
- Anxiety sensitivity was associated with cannabis use for conformity motives.
- Introversion/Hopelessness was associated with cannabis use for coping motives.
- Sensation seeking was associated with cannabis use for expansion motives.
- IMP was associated with using cannabis because it was readily available.

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ABSTRACT

According to the model of substance abuse of Conrod, Pihl, Stewart, and Dongier (2000), four personality factors (i.e., anxiety sensitivity [AS], introversion/hopelessness [I/H], sensation seeking [SS], and impulsivity [IMP]) are associated with elevated risk for substance use/misuse, with each personality factor being related to preference for particular drugs of abuse (e.g., AS with anxiolytics). However, cannabis use has not been consistently linked to any one of these personality factors. This may be due to the heterogeneity in cannabis use motives. The present study explored the association between these four personality risk factors and different cannabis use motives. Cannabis users completed an interview about their motives for cannabis use as well as the self-report Substance Use Risk Profile Scale (SURPS; Woicik, Conrod, Stewart, & Pihl, 2009), which measures the four personality risk factors. Results showed that AS was associated with conformity motives and I/H was associated with coping motives for cannabis use. SS was positively associated with expansion motives and IMP was associated with drug availability motives. Thus, personality risk factors in the model of Conrod et al. (2000) are associated with distinct cannabis use motives in a pattern consistent with theory.

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Cannabis is the most widely used illicit substance in Canada, with 39.4% of those aged 15 years or older reporting lifetime use (Health Canada, 2011). Despite this prevalence, relatively little is known about cannabis use risk factors. Recently, research has linked different forms of drug use to different personality characteristics (e.g., Adams et al., 2003; Sher, Bartholow, & Wood, 2000). One example is the model of Conrod, Pihl, Stewart, and Dongier (2000), which attributes substance use/misuse to four distinct personality risk profiles: anxiety sensitivity (AS), introversion/hopelessness (I/H), sensation seeking (SS), and impulsivity (IMP).

Each of these traits has been linked with preference for a specific type of drug of abuse and with distinct substance use motivations using both cross-sectional (e.g., Woicik, Stewart, Pihl, & Conrod, 2009) and longitudinal research designs (e.g., Krank et al., 2011). These associations have been observed in both adult (e.g., Conrod et al., 2000;

Woicik et al., 2009) and adolescent (e.g., Krank et al., 2011; Woicik et al., 2009) samples. Two of these personality traits, AS and I/H, have been associated with substance use as a way of dealing with negative affect (Woicik et al., 2009). For example, elevations in AS have been linked with anxiolytics use to manage anxiety, while elevations in I/H have been associated with the use of analgesics to escape depressed affect (Conrod et al., 2000). Moreover, in both adolescent and adult populations, high levels of AS and I/H have been linked to alcohol use as a means of coping (Comeau, Stewart, & Loba, 2001; Conrod et al., 2000; Woicik et al., 2009). A third personality dimension, SS, has been linked with higher rates of alcohol use to increase positive emotions and experiences (Conrod et al., 2000; Woicik et al., 2009). Finally, IMP is characterized by disinhibited behavior when presented with positive reinforcement. Field, Christiansen, Cole, and Goudie (2007) found that adolescents who are heavy drinkers exhibit impulsive behaviors, and Woicik et al. (2009) reported similar findings in an adult population, with high IMP being associated with a non-specific pattern of motives for heavy alcohol use. Moreover, IMP has been linked with the use of cocaine and other psychostimulants—drugs that deliver immediate reward (Conrod et al., 2000; Woicik et al., 2009).

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To date, cannabis use has not been consistently linked to any specific personality dimension in the model of Conrod et al. (2000). For example, findings on the association between SS and cannabis use have been mixed. Arnett (1994) found cannabis use to be positively correlated with SS. Similarly, Woicik et al. (2009) found SS to be positively correlated with the use of drugs related to stimulating, mood-enhancing effects, including cannabis and other hallucinogens. In contrast, Comeau et al. (2001) found no correlation between SS and cannabis use in an adolescent sample. While some studies have shown no relation between anxious or depressive personalities and cannabis use (Chabrol, Ducongé, Casas, Roura, & Carey, 2005), others have found AS to be negatively correlated with cannabis use (Stewart, Karp, Pihl, & Peterson, 1997; Woicik et al., 2009). Finally, Conrod et al. (2000) reported that the risk for cannabis abuse was equal across the four personality types in a sample of adult female substance abusers.

One possible explanation for the lack of consistent findings is the considerable heterogeneity in cannabis use motives (Simons, Correia, Carey, & Borsari, 1998). In fact, distinct personality risk factors may be associated with different cannabis use motives. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to begin to explore whether I/H, AS, SS, and IMP are associated with different motives for using cannabis.

1. Method

1.1. Participants

One hundred seventy seven (105 male) adult cannabis users were recruited from the Halifax, Nova Scotia community, through internet advertisements as part of a larger study (Olthuis, Darredeau, & Barrett, 2013). The only inclusion criterion was a history of cannabis use. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 years (mean = 27.4 years; SD = 9.5 years).

1.2. Procedure

After giving consent, participants were interviewed privately by a trained research assistant. They were asked to report their age of first cannabis use, use in the past 30 days, total number of days used, and whether they had ever co-administered cannabis with another substance. One portion of the interview investigated participants' motives for cannabis use. Participants received a motives card that listed 29 potential reasons for cannabis use. These reasons were author-compiled based on a review of the literature as well as pilot interviews with several cannabis users. Participants were asked to recall all instances of cannabis use in their lifetime and to indicate whether they had ever used cannabis for each of the 29 motives in turn. Participants followed along using the motives card and responded either "yes" or "no" to each motive. A list of the motives along with rates of endorsement in the sample is presented in Table 1. At the end of the interview, participants completed the Substance Use Risk Profile Scale (SURPS; Woicik et al., 2009), a 23-item scale that measures the four distinct personality risk factors in the model of substance use risk of Conrod et al. (2000): I/H, AS, SS, and IMP. The SURPS has been shown to possess excellent psychometric properties (Krunk et al., 2011; Woicik et al., 2009). The alphas for the SURPS scales ranged from acceptable (.70 for AS) to very good (.88 for I/H) in the present sample.

2. Results

As shown in Table 2, there was a high degree of variability in the number of lifetime uses of cannabis reported by participants. The mean age participants began using cannabis was 15.2 (SD = 3.6) years, and 176 (99.4%) participants reported using other drugs or alcohol while under the influence of cannabis at least once in their lifetime.

In order to identify the core cannabis use motive dimensions, we conducted a principal components analysis with Varimax rotation on

Table 1

Motives for cannabis use and number of participants who responded 'yes' to having used cannabis for each motive in order from most to least commonly endorsed.

Item number/Item content	n/177	%
2. To get high/stoned/drunk/buzzed	176	99
24. To have fun	172	97
25. To relax	172	97
1. Out of curiosity	170	96
19. To celebrate	170	96
15. To enjoy the feeling	169	95
10. To help with sleep	142	80
22. To see things differently/expand awareness	131	74
11. To reduce anxiety	131	74
20. To be more creative	128	72
18. To help with feeling down	126	71
16. To heighten senses	125	71
12. To reduce pain	122	69
23. To forget about problems/as an escape	117	66
28. Because it was safer than other drugs	116	66
26. To be more open to experiences	110	62
4. To increase the effects of another drug	107	60
21. To help socialize	104	59
6. To study or concentrate	93	53
3. To fit in with peers	93	53
29. Because it was easier to get than other drugs	87	49
27. For sexual reasons	75	42
5. To decrease the effects of another drug	70	40
13. To avoid withdrawal from cannabis	54	31
17. To feel more confident	48	27
14. To help with withdrawal from another drug	45	25
8. To give you more energy	42	24
7. To stay awake	28	16
9. To reduce appetite/manage weight	18	10

the 29 cannabis use motive items. The number of factors to retain was determined using parallel analysis, a more stringent method than the Kaiser's (1961) eigenvalues > 1.00 criterion (O'Connor, 2000). We used orthogonal rotation in order to identify uncorrelated, distinct cannabis use motives. Four components were retained as indicated by both mean and 95th percentile eigenvalues criteria in the parallel analysis; the four components explained 37.6% of the item score variance. Examination of salient factor loadings suggested that the first component pertained to enhancement motives (i.e., strong loadings from "to have fun", "to enjoy the feeling"), the second to expansion motives (i.e., strong loadings from "to see things differently/expand awareness", "to be more creative"), the third to conformity motives (i.e., strong loadings from "to fit in with peers", "to help socialize"), and the fourth to coping motives (i.e., strong loadings from "to help when feeling down", "to forget about problems/as an escape"). The rotated component matrix is available from the corresponding author upon request. We then correlated factor scores from the principal components analysis with SURPS personality scales. To account for multiple testing, we used a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of $p = .01$ (.05/4 motive factors) for determining statistical significance; correlations at the unadjusted alpha level of $p = .05$ were interpreted as trends. SS was significantly positively associated with expansion motives ($r = .259$, $p = .001$), AS was significantly positively associated with conformity motives ($r = .226$, $p = .003$) and significantly negatively associated with expansion motives ($r = -.188$, $p = .01$), and I/H was significantly

Table 2

Number of days cannabis was used by participants in their lifetime.

Number of days	n/177	%
1–5	3	1.7
6–10	6	3.4
11–20	3	1.7
21–50	5	2.8
51–100	12	6.8
101–500	28	15.8
>500	120	67.8

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