



Research Paper

The role of leisure and delinquency in frequent cannabis use and dependence trajectories among young adults



Nienke Liebrechts^{a,*}, Peggy van der Pol^b, Margriet van Laar^b, Ron de Graaf^b, Wim van den Brink^c, Dirk J. Korff^a

^a Bongers Institute of Criminology, Law Faculty, University of Amsterdam, PO Box 1030, 1000 BA Amsterdam, the Netherlands

^b Trimbos Institute, Netherlands Institute of Mental Health and Addiction, PO Box 725, 3500 AS Utrecht, the Netherlands

^c Department of Psychiatry, Academic Medical Centre, University of Amsterdam, PO Box 22660, 1100 DD Amsterdam, the Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 7 March 2014

Received in revised form 10 June 2014

Accepted 24 July 2014

Keywords:

Cannabis trajectories

Cannabis dependence

Qualitative methods

Longitudinal

Leisure

Normalisation

ABSTRACT

Background: The link between leisure and cannabis use has been widely studied, but less so for young adults, and rarely with a focus on frequent cannabis use. Also, little is known about how changes in leisure develop over time and how they are related to transitions in cannabis use and dependence.

Method: As part of a 3-year longitudinal project, in a qualitative study 47 frequent male and female young adult cannabis users with ($n = 23$) and without ($n = 24$) dependence at baseline were interviewed in-depth after 1.5 and 3 years.

Results: Frequent cannabis users (at baseline ≥ 3 days per week in the past 12 months) are involved in similar leisure activities as the general young adult population and live rather conventional lives, generally away from a delinquent subculture. They mostly regulate their cannabis use to leisure time, to enhance other leisure activities, including socialising and video gaming. While they often give precedence to responsibilities (e.g. work and study), dependent and non-dependent users differed in whether they actively adapted their leisure activities to their cannabis use, or their cannabis use to their leisure time. Both types of and time spent on leisure activities were associated with transitions in use and dependence. **Conclusions:** While our findings generally support the normalisation thesis, it is questionable whether frequent but non-problematic cannabis use is socially accepted in wider society. This study also questions the diagnostic dependence vs. non-dependence dichotomy, and adds finer distinctions to the concept of cannabis dependence. Implications for prevention and treatment include facilitating structured spending of leisure time (e.g. sports), and targeting frequent users who spent much leisure time video gaming at home.

© 2014 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Introduction

It has been argued that cannabis has become normalised, referring to the process of social and cultural accommodation of recreational drug use as becoming part of everyday life for young people, for both users and non-users (Parker, Aldridge, & Measham, 1998; Parker, 2005). Normalisation has been defined by six indicators: higher access and availability; increased drug trying rates; increased regular use rates; a degree of cultural accommodation among adolescents; trying and use extending to the adult population; and more liberal policy shifts (Parker, 2005). Basically, these indicators can be reduced to two dimensions: (1) growth

in drug demand and supply, and (2) increasing levels of social and cultural acceptability. In contrast to normalisation, a subcultural perspective focuses on social formations, where drug users belong to a certain social group not bound to conventional or mainstream society. From a subcultural perspective, cannabis use could be understood as part of political opposition or as signifier of rejecting mainstream values (cf. Pedersen, 2009; Sandberg, 2013). Alternatively, and in line with the normalisation perspective, Duff and Erickson (2014) argue that cannabis use, since it has become an accepted feature of mainstream adolescents and young adults, should be assessed in terms of lifestyle and leisure rather than subcultural connections.

Researchers from several countries found support for the normalisation thesis (e.g. Duff, 2003, 2005; Parker, Williams, & Aldridge, 2002), showing that the choice to use cannabis is a rational consideration of costs and benefits and users do not belong to

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 20 5253918.

E-mail addresses: n.liebrechts@uva.nl, nienkeliebrechts@gmail.com (N. Liebrechts).

a deviant subculture; they are bound to mainstream society, and their lifestyles are rather conventional (Duff et al., 2012; Hathaway, 1997; Pearson, 2001; Shukla, 2006). Others criticised the normalisation thesis for simplifying youth's choices about drug use (Shiner & Newburn, 1997) and underemphasising the role of the (wider) social context of drug use attitudes and choices (Measham & Shiner, 2009; Pennay & Moore, 2010). Hathaway, Comeau, and Erickson (2011) showed that, notwithstanding indicators of normalisation, Canadian adult users had internalised stigma and experienced a mainstream perspective about cannabis as deviant.

The normalisation thesis is also criticised for being too broad and relying on a too simplistic distinction between recreational and problematic drug use (Shildrick, 2002). Moreover, scholars recently called for attention to social and structural contexts of cannabis use (Duff et al., 2012; Measham & Shiner, 2009; Pennay & Moore, 2010). A recent follow-up of the sample that had been the basis for the original normalisation thesis (Parker et al., 1998) provided some revision (Aldridge, Measham, & Williams, 2011). The follow-up study showed that as participants aged, they continued using drugs, yet through considering costs and benefits fitting their use around their (new) responsibilities, including jobs and children. The authors concluded that normalisation continued, yet acknowledged some critics, e.g. the meaning attributed to drug experiences and the role of structural factors in rational choice. The lives of these young adults were more in common with moderate alcohol use than with dependent drug use. Many studies on normalisation have focused on recreational party drug use, and far less on frequent cannabis use (Järvinen & Ravn, 2014). The debate would thus benefit from further examinations of the normalisation of cannabis. This qualitative longitudinal study in frequent cannabis users focuses on two aspects: the extent to which cannabis use is regulated to leisure time, and to what extent frequent cannabis users live conventional lives, away from delinquent or otherwise deviant subcultures.

Leisure and cannabis use

Classic studies demonstrated cannabis users are not a homogeneous group; most use recreationally and have various motivations to use (Becker, 1963; Goode, 1970). They choose when and where to use (Erickson, 1989; Hathaway, 2003; Zimmerman & Weider, 1977): mostly in private venues, with peers or partners and in suitable situations and moods, applying informal rules for regulation (Reinarman & Cohen, 2007). Rather than the leisure activity itself, the social setting (i.e. persons sharing leisure time) is associated with changes in cannabis use (Schaub, Gmel, Annaheim, Mueller, & Schwappach, 2010). Adolescents who regularly use cannabis have more selective lifestyles than occasional users, spending more time at a friends' place, concerts or clubs (Miller & Plant, 2002; Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004). Although an association between going out and occasional rather than regular cannabis has been reported (Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004), a partying lifestyle has commonly been linked to increased adolescent cannabis use (Ciairano, Bosma, Miceli, & Settanni, 2008; Thorlindsson & Bernburg, 2006). Frequent users holidaying in Ibiza were more likely to increase than diminish their frequency of use (Bellis, Hale, Bennett, Chaudry, & Kilfoyle, 2000; Briggs & Turner, 2012). In contrast, sports participation relates to less cannabis use (Lisha & Sussman, 2010; Terry-McElrath & O'Malley, 2011; Thorlindsson & Bernburg, 2006), although not in all studies (Peretti-Watel & Lorente, 2004).

Only few recent qualitative studies devoted attention to why and when adults frequently use cannabis, particularly to changes in use. Hathaway (2004) showed that long-term frequent cannabis users predominantly use to relax, feel good and enjoy music or television. Increased use was often associated with more personal freedom, and decreased use with more responsibilities. Users generally considered positive aspects to outweigh negative aspects of

their use (Hathaway, 2003). This was corroborated in a study among regular cannabis using adults (Osborne & Fogel, 2008). Respondents used cannabis while engaged in various leisure activities (e.g. socialising, watching movies, doing sports, and playing computer games); they did not report dependence problems or compulsive use, and rational decisions to use were generally accompanied by moderate use. Cannabis was used to enhance "leisure activities and manage the challenges and demands of living in contemporary modern society" (Osborne & Fogel, 2008: p. 562). Similarly, other studies concluded that cannabis is not a central aspect in the lifestyle of adult frequent users, and users are generally not part of a 'drug subculture' (Pearson, 2001; Shukla, 2006). Instead, cannabis use was largely a leisure time activity to disengage from daily stress, and is generally subordinate to other roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the majority is not involved in criminal behaviour apart from acquiring and using cannabis. Previous studies reporting a link between regular cannabis use and criminal offences and convictions (Bennett, Holloway, & Farrington, 2008; Derzon & Lipsey, 1999; Fergusson, Horwood, & Swain-Campbell, 2002) are hampered by the illegality of the drug, as it is suggested that most offences are related to possession and use (Fergusson, Swain-Campbell, & Horwood, 2003; Pedersen & Skardhamar, 2010). The more lenient Dutch policy allows deeper investigation of this association, as use is not liable to prosecution and the possession and sale of cannabis in so-called coffee shops for personal use are tolerated (Wouters, Benschop, & Korf, 2010).

This study

The link between leisure and young adult cannabis use has received some attention, and although changes in cannabis use have been found to be associated with changes in life circumstances (Hathaway, 2004; Shukla, 2006), it is largely unknown how changes in leisure develop over time and how they are related to transitions in cannabis dependence, as most studies are retrospective, have been limited to adolescence, focused on use and not dependence, or generated quantitative data. This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on normalisation and the relationship between frequent cannabis use, dependence and leisure over time. More specifically, this study will gain insights in the extent to which frequent cannabis use is socially accepted in a country known for its liberal cannabis policy (i.e. the Netherlands), and is stripped of subcultural and deviant associations. The existence of coffee shops makes cannabis readily available. This offers a great opportunity to assess whether easy supply (being part of the first dimension of normalisation) also implies that cannabis use (in our case: frequent cannabis use) is socially and culturally accepted in wider society (the second dimension of normalisation), comparable to alcohol use for example.

We prospectively studied the course of cannabis use and dependence in 47 young adult frequent users over 3 years using qualitative in-depth interviews. First, we explore how frequent users construct their leisure time and how changes in cannabis use interact with changes in leisure, and vice versa. We also assess the centrality of cannabis in their lives, and the absence of (subcultural) delinquency, which would be expected from the normalisation thesis. Dutch coffee shops allow users to easily acquire cannabis without any specific knowledge or subcultural affiliations. However, the cultivation of cannabis has neither *de jure* nor *de facto* been legalised in the Netherlands (albeit that growing up to five marijuana plants for personal use is tolerated). Moreover, successfully growing cannabis, either as a small-scale activity for own use or for large-scale purposes, requires specific knowledge and expertise that is gathered and shared through connections with other growers (Decorte, Potter, & Bouchard, 2011).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1075314>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1075314>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)