

IS CANNABIS A SUBSTITUTE OR COMPLEMENT TO ALCOHOL? A STUDY OF RECREATIONAL DRUG USE EMPLOYING SELF-REPORTS AND BIOLOGICAL MARKERS

Anne Line Bretteville-Jensen

Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Postboks 4404 Nydalen, 0403 Oslo, Norge

Background and aim: One important question concerning the ongoing cannabis liberalization debate is whether cannabis use also affects users' consumption of alcohol – and if so, whether it increases or decreases it. Despite the clear-cut ramifications for public health, relatively few studies have empirically tested if cannabis is a substitute or complement to alcohol, and many of those studies are limited by the use of less-than-optimal self-reported data. This study revisits the topic in a group of recreational substance users by analyzing information from biological tests in addition to self-reports.

Methods: A sample of young adults (N=1099, response rate 76%) was recruited outside 12 popular nightclubs centrally located in Oslo, Norway. Participants provided questionnaire information on basic demographics as well as their lifetime, last year, last month, and last 48 hours drug use. They also provided a saliva sample, which was examined for cannabis and a range of other illegal drugs. Finally, their Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) level was measured by a breathalyzer.

Results: Preliminary results from multivariate analyses indicate that recent cannabis users (i.e. participants with cannabis-positive saliva tests and/or self-reported cannabis use within the last 48 hours) also tested positive for alcohol and had as high, or higher, BAC levels than the remaining study participants.

Conclusion: These empirical results suggest that cannabis is not a substitute for alcohol. To what extent it is a complement, however, will be further analyzed and discussed.