

SWEET LEAF, A LIFELONG LOVE AFFAIR: PREVALENCE AND PREDICTORS OF CANNABIS USE AMONG AUSTRALIAN BABY BOOMERS

Roche A¹ & Kostadinov V¹

¹ National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University

Introduction and Aims: Recent demographic shifts have resulted in an unprecedented increase in the number of older Australians, and concomitant changes in their patterns of cannabis use. However, little research has been undertaken among older individuals. This presentation examines patterns and predictors of cannabis use among older Australians over the past decade.

Design and Methods: A cross-sectional study examining nationally representative data at two time points, 2004 (N=7127) and 2013 (N=7506), was undertaken. Data was sourced from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey. Descriptive analyses examined patterns of cannabis use among older Australians, and logistic regression explored predictors of use.

Results: Prevalence increased significantly ($p < .001$) from 1.5% to 3.6% among Australians aged 50+. The largest increase was seen in those aged 60-69 (0.5% to 2.0%). Among respondents aged 60+ use was significantly less likely among those who were retired (OR: 0.6, 95% CI: 0.4-0.9) and married (OR: 0.3, 95% CI: 0.2-0.6), and significantly more likely among those who lived in rural areas (OR: 1.8, 95% CI: 1.2-2.6), drank alcohol at risky levels (OR: 2.5, 95% CI: 1.6-3.8), smoked tobacco (OR: 5.8, 95% CI: 3.8-8.9), and used other illicit drugs (OR: 3.6, 95% CI: 2.0-6.3).

Discussion and Conclusions: In contrast to younger age groups (<40 years) where cannabis use has declined, use among older Australians is significantly increasing. The co-occurrence of cannabis use, risky alcohol consumption and tobacco smoking suggests that some older people will have a heightened risk of experiencing multiple morbidities.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Health and community services will need to develop an enhanced understanding of the physiological and psychological impacts of cannabis use among ageing clients/patients. Services should consider screening for cannabis use among older Australians to inform healthcare, treatment plans and appropriate policy responses.

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