

ncpic e-zine

september 2011

national cannabis
prevention and
information centre

- contents
- commentary on research p2
- research publications p2
- media stories this issue p3
- What do we know? cannabis use in a sample of regular ecstasy users and people who inject drugs p4

what's
new
in
cannabis?

2011 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music Competition

We are pleased to report that we have received 29 entries for this year's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music competition – almost double the amount submitted for last year's competition! Judging will commence over the next month and the winner will be announced towards the end of October on the NCPIC website.



director's report

Jan Copeland (PhD) – Professor/Director, NCPIC

This month we welcomed Lucy Albertella to the Centre to work with Melissa Norberg across a range of projects, but particularly exploring the potential for Smartphone apps for the delivery of cannabis-related information and interventions. Lucy was previously with our consortium partner the Ted Noffs Foundation. I'd like to draw your attention, once again, to the pop-up box on our website that links to a survey to examine cannabis users' views on aspects of the use of apps. [Please click on it and let us know your views.](#)

In early September, Paul Dillon and his team commenced the consultation phase of a new website to assist schools with cannabis prevention activities. We were pleased to welcome representatives from education departments across all jurisdictions to a meeting to discuss current issues around cannabis prevention and potential collaboration with a number of projects that the Centre is planning. We set out by thanking them for their invaluable assistance in disseminating NCPIC materials and resources across all systems – State, Catholic and Independent, since the inception of NCPIC. A number of NCPIC staff presented information on the work targeting school-based young people that we had completed. In my introduction I stressed our acknowledgement that, like general medical practitioners, teachers have many expectations placed on them to address a wide range of society's concerns. I argued that given the evidence regarding the crucial window of early adolescence with regard to cannabis use and its direct effect on educational attainment, that cannabis

deserved a place at the educational table. Paul outlined our plans to develop a 'stand-alone' website for school communities dealing with cannabis prevention and asked those present to provide us with input on the viability and usefulness of such a site. Their advice on the day was most helpful and we are currently collating their written comments to inform our planning. We hope to bring the group together again in the future as the project develops.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music Competition closed this month. We are thrilled that this project continues to grow and be taken up by more communities and organisations and we thank them for their support. This year we had 29 entries, almost twice as many as last year, from across the country. The prize money is \$5,000 and the winner will have the chance to professionally record their song at a two-day workshop with *Skinnyfish Music*, Australia's leading record label for Indigenous artists, as well as receiving invaluable expert advice about the music industry. A runner-up prize of \$1,000 will also be awarded. The winners will be announced in late October.

We have commenced work on the program for The 2nd National Cannabis Conference to be held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, 19th – 21st September 2012. We are thrilled to announce that Dr Paul Morrison (UK Institute of Psychiatry) will speak on cannabis and psychosis (based on his studies with injecting THC and CBD that have aired on the BBC); Dr Ryan

continued on page 2

commentary on research cannabis and social welfare assistance: a longitudinal study – a comment on Pedersen (2011)

Peter Gates

Early and frequent cannabis use may be associated with poor educational achievement, unemployment, reduced income and dependency on welfare. The research depicting the association between cannabis use and a need for welfare assistance has been chiefly conducted in the United States (US), where cannabis use is high and the welfare system is underdeveloped in comparison with some European countries such as Germany or Norway.

To provide a “case for contrast”, Pedersen (2011) utilised data on 2606 individuals from a 15-year longitudinal follow-up (1992 to 2005) of a Norwegian population-based sample (the “Young in Norway” study) and linked this information with time-series data on crime and historical events. That is, as the frequency of cannabis use in Norway is much lower than in the US, and Norway is a well-developed welfare state, the association between cannabis use and welfare-seeking may be more delineated.

In this study, 14 per cent of participants had used cannabis within 12 months of interview at 21 years. Through the ages of 21-23 years, 6 per cent of participants had received welfare assistance. This figure reduced to 4 per cent of participants when regarding receipt

of welfare through the ages of 28-30 years. Cannabis use at the age of 21 was associated with receipt of welfare assistance in the 21-23 age span (up to five times more likely for individuals using cannabis more than 50 times in the past 12 months). This association was significant when controlling for: parents’ socio-economic status, parents’ alcohol problems, parental support; peer substance use or conduct problems; the participant’s school grades at age 15; presence of conduct disorder, depression, anxiety or impulsivity; and the frequency of tobacco, alcohol, other drug use and criminal charges. This association was even stronger for frequent cannabis users (50+ occasions of use in the previous 12 months) at age 28 years, although for other less frequent cannabis users the association was marginal.

In the final analyses, parental socio-economic status, parental alcohol use, and parental support, as well as the participant’s school grades, co-morbid anxiety or depression, and nicotine dependence, were all significantly associated with receipt of social welfare assistance. In addition to these factors, the contribution of cannabis use to subsequent welfare assistance was reported to be 32 per cent. Of note was the lack of significance in the association between increased welfare assistance and the early initiation of cannabis use, or the use of other substances.

As Pedersen notes, this study included a wide variety of factors that may influence the receipt of welfare assistance, although as is

typical of longitudinal studies, other uncontrolled factors could not be ruled out in explaining the associations found. In particular, this study did not control for patterns in the participants’ employment status or any biological factors. As such, no explanation as to the mechanisms behind the observed associations could be proposed, although the receipt of welfare was notably reported after the onset of cannabis use. Overall, this study highlights the importance of considering cannabis use – over and above other substance use – when investigating predictors of welfare-need.

Pedersen, W. (2011). Cannabis and social welfare assistance: A longitudinal study. *Addiction* 106, 1636-1643.

continued from page 1
director’s report

Vandrey (Behavioral Pharmacology Research Unit, Johns Hopkins) on cannabis dependence withdrawal and treatment; and Dr Mike Zvolensky (The University of Houston) on emotional disorders and the nature and treatment of cannabis use disorders. I anticipate a stellar Australian line-up to join them including Dr Nadia Solowij, Dr Wendy Swift, Prof Iain McGregor and A/Prof Alan Clough to name just a few. The conference will have a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities theme. The call for abstracts will open on 1 November 2011 and close on 1 March 2012 and we look forward to your submissions.

research publications

Relevant publications examining issues to do with cannabis that have been published in the last month include the following:

Chang, G., Orav, E.J., Jones, J.A., Buynitsky, T., Gonzalez, S., & Wilkins-Haug, L. (2011). Self-reported alcohol and drug use in pregnant young women: A pilot study of associated factors and identification. *Journal of Addiction Medicine* 5, 221-226.

Cousijn, J., Goudriaan, A.E. & Wiers, R.W. (2011). Reaching out towards cannabis: Approach-bias in heavy cannabis users predicts changes in cannabis use. *Addiction* 106, 1667-1674.

Dakwar, E., Nunes, E.V., Bisaga, A., Carpenter, K.C., Mariani, J.P., Sullivan, M.A., Raby, W.N., & Levin, F.R. (2011). A comparison of independent depression and substance-induced depression in cannabis-, cocaine-, and opioid-dependent treatment seekers. *American Journal on Addictions* 20, 441-446.

Distel, M.A., Vink, J.M., Bartels, M., van Beijsterveldt, C.E., Neale, M.C., & Boomsma, D.I. (2011). Age moderates non-genetic influences on the initiation of cannabis use: A twin-sibling study in Dutch adolescents and young adults. *Addiction* 106, 1658-1666.

Every-Palmer, S. (2011). Synthetic cannabinoid JWH-018 and psychosis: An explorative study. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 117, 152-157.

Gray, K.M., Riggs, P.D., Min, S.J., Mikulich-Gilbertson, S.K., Bandyopadhyay, D., & Winhusen, T. (2011). Cigarette and cannabis use trajectories among adolescents in treatment for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and substance use disorders. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 117, 242-247.

Pedersen, W. (2011). Cannabis and social welfare assistance: A longitudinal study. *Addiction* 106, 1636-1643.

continued on page 3



Each issue we will examine some of the cannabis-related stories that have received media attention across the country. The headlines are listed below in bold, with a short summary and/or commentary regarding the content of the news story beneath.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of a particular story, please contact Clare Chenoweth at c.chenoweth@unsw.edu.au

loophole closed for marijuana smoking devices

Herald Sun: August 29, 2011

The Victorian State Government will make cannabis smoking devices, including bongs, illegal from next year. Fines of up to \$1465 will be issued to shops selling these devices, components of the devices or “bong kits”. Minister for Mental Health, Mary Wooldridge says “This will stop the confusing message that while it’s OK to display and sell equipment used for smoking cannabis, it’s illegal to smoke cannabis.”

cannabis: the not-so-mild high

Cosmos: September 1, 2011

This extensive feature article on the effects of cannabis details the changes in attitude to cannabis over the past few decades, the growing public awareness and research findings about the mental health impacts of using cannabis, and the concerns held for young people using the drug. NCPIC’s Professor Jan Copeland comments on the impact of cannabis on the developing brain, “We’re now getting very good and specific information about the effects of cannabis on the adolescent brain, and how absolutely vital a window that is.” Other issues covered in the article are the effect of cannabis on the body’s endocannabinoid system, cannabis potency changes, dependence on cannabis and efforts to assist

those withdrawing from the drug. For a copy of the article, please email info@ncpic.org.au

cannabis users curb their habit with online program

Medical Observer: September 16, 2011

NCPIC’s online study, ‘Reduce Your Use’, which aims to help users cut down or quit cannabis, is featured in this article. It has been found to help “heavy cannabis users cut down their use of the drug.” Study leader Dr Sally Rooke, explains that while participants in the ‘control group’, who were simply given information about cannabis, rather than put through the online program, also reduced their use of the drug, “overall, findings were better for the experimental group.” There was approximately “twice as much abstinence in the experimental group compared to the controls.” The online program will soon be available to members of the public at the NCPIC website, www.ncpic.org.au

marijuana blocks PTSD symptoms in rats

The Australian: September 21, 2011

A study conducted by Haifa University and published in journal, *Neuropsychopharmacology*, has shown that cannabis “administered in a timely fashion could block the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in rats.” According to the study’s findings, “rats treated with marijuana within 24 hours of a traumatic experience successfully avoided any symptoms of PTSD.” Study leader, Dr Irit Akirav says “there is a critical ‘window of time’ after trauma, during which synthetic marijuana can help prevent symptoms similar to PTSD in rats.” Rats who received cannabis within 24 hours of the trauma still displayed high levels of anxiety, but did not develop PTSD symptoms, as did those rats that were given cannabis at 48 hours post-trauma or no cannabis at all.

marriage helps cut crime: study

Science Alert: September 27, 2011

According to a Monash University study, marriage can help reduce people’s likelihood of being involved in crime due in part, to its influence on the

continued from page 2

research publications

Reinarman, C. (2011). Commentaries on Pedersen (2011): Does cannabis cause poverty too? Moving beyond the malevolence paradigm. *Addiction* 106, 1644-1645.

Robson, P. (2011). Abuse potential and psychoactive effects of delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol oromucosal spray (Sativex), a new cannabinoid medicine. *Expert Opinion on Drug Safety* 10, 675-685.

Rössler, W., Vetter, S., Müller, M., Gallo, W.T., Haker, H., Kawohl, W., Lupi, G., & Ajdacic-Gross, V. (2011). Risk factors at the low end of the psychosis continuum: Much the same as at the upper end? *Psychiatry Research* 189, 77-81.

Schwope, D.M., Scheidweiler, K.B. & Huestis, M.A. (2011). Direct quantification of cannabinoids and cannabinoid glucuronides in whole blood by liquid chromatography-tandem mass spectrometry. *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry* 401, 1273-1283.

Villagonzalo, K.A., Dodd, S., Ng, F., Mihaly, S., Langbein, A., & Berk, M. (2011). The relationship between substance use and post-traumatic stress disorder in a methadone maintenance treatment program. *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 52, 562-566.

continued on page 4

continued from page 3
media stories this issue

“development of self-control because it provides new standards of behaviour as well as a reason to maintain those standards.” The study found that young cannabis users “who went on to marry were less likely to have continued using the drug than those who remained single.”

teens turn to other vices as result of sleep deprivation

IBTimes: September 28, 2011

The US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has found that “grumpy teens who are not getting the recommended amount of sleep tend to engage in more risky, unhealthy acts” such as drug use and fighting. Having less than eight hours sleep a night was found to be associated with “cigarette, alcohol and marijuana use” amongst other risky behaviours.

police waiting for legal advice in relation to alleged supply of cannabis cookies to council workers

ABC North Coast: September 30, 2011

Police have “finalised their investigation into an alleged supply of cannabis cookies to two Ballina Shire Council workers.” The council “alleges two of its workers unwittingly ate the cookies during their morning tea break.” NCPIC’s Professor Jan Copeland says “Even a relatively small amount would make them impaired drivers” and could place them and others at risk while “operating heavy machinery.” Professor Copeland goes on to say that cannabis has been shown to increase the risk of having a motor vehicle crash “by two to three times.”



cannabis use in a sample of regular ecstasy users and people who inject drugs

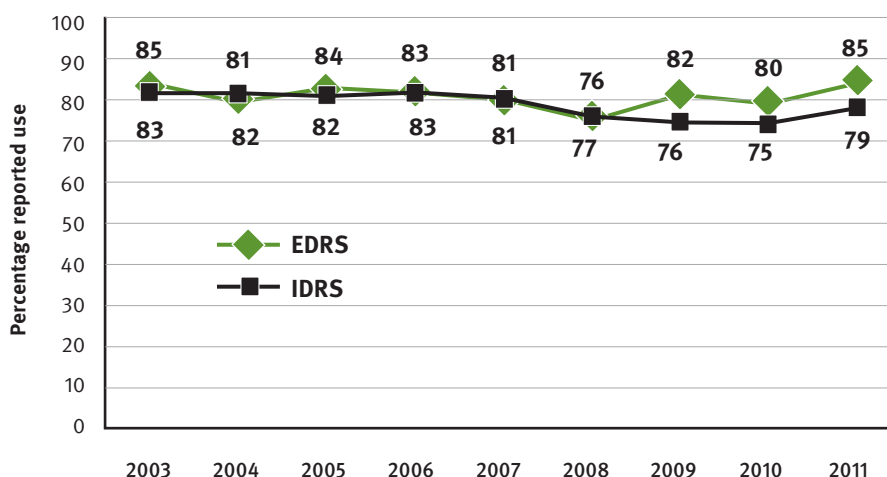
Rachel Sutherland, NDARC

Results from the 2011 Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) have shown a significant increase in recent cannabis use among regular ecstasy users (REU) (see Figure 1). In addition, the frequency of cannabis use had doubled since 2010, with the median days of use in a six month period increasing from 24 days (once a week) to 48 days (twice per week). This

is the highest frequency of use reported among this population since 2006. The proportion of REU who reported consuming cannabis on a daily basis also significantly increased, from 14 per cent in 2010 to 18 per cent in 2011. On the last occasion of use, participants reported smoking a median of one cone or two joints. Alcohol continued to be the most common drug used by REU (98%), followed by tobacco (86%) and then cannabis (85%). Twenty per cent of REU also nominated cannabis as their main drug of choice, second only to ecstasy (27%).

Similarly, the Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) found that recent cannabis use had also increased slightly among people who inject drugs (PWID; see Figure 1). Seventy nine per cent of this sample reported cannabis use within the proceeding six months, and of those, 51 per cent were using on a daily basis (stable from 2010). On the last occasion of use, participants reported using a median of four cones/two joints. Among this population, tobacco (94%) was the drug used most often followed by cannabis (79%) and then methamphetamine (66%) and alcohol (65%).

Figure 1: Recent use of cannabis in REU and PWID nationally, 2003-2011



Source: EDRS REU interviews, IDRS PWID interviews.



NCPIC is a consortium led by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre and is an Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing initiative

For further information on NCPIC, its work and activities please contact Clare Chenoweth on (02) 9385 0218

Street address:

National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC)
 UNSW Randwick Campus
 NDARC UNSW
 R1 Level 1
 22-32 King Street
 Randwick NSW 2031

Postal address:

National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC)
 PO Box 684
 Randwick NSW 2031