

cannabis and motivation

does the ‘amotivational syndrome’ exist?

Some people are concerned that prolonged and heavy cannabis use can cause a person to become withdrawn, lethargic, apathetic and unmotivated, a collection of symptoms that has often been referred to as the ‘amotivational syndrome’.

Others claim that there is no such amotivational syndrome, claiming that a person who fits this description may in fact be showing signs of depression or chronic intoxication rather than any such syndrome.

The only thing we can be sure about is that research into the existence of the ‘amotivational syndrome’ remains inconclusive.

what does the research say?

The evidence that exists for the ‘amotivational syndrome’ has been mainly collected from case-histories and observational reports of adult cannabis users.

These reports suggested that chronic, heavy cannabis users can experience a narrowing of interests and can become apathetic and unable to carry out complex long-term plans, endure frustration or concentrate for long periods of time. Others have been observed to become introverted or exhibit a childlike regression so that they are totally focused on the present at the expense of long-term goals.

While these reports represent the experience of some people, they fail to address how common the syndrome is or whether cannabis use in itself is the cause of these symptoms.

Controlled studies have not been able to prove the existence of the syndrome, yet clinical observations suggest that cannabis users experience a loss of ambition and impaired school and work performance. We do know that heavy cannabis use is linked to poorer educational outcomes and increased school drop-out rates. There is also evidence that the use of cannabis can impact on attention and memory.

At this point in time there has been no conclusive evidence to establish that heavy cannabis use causes an ‘amotivational syndrome’. The existence of such a syndrome remains uncertain because many cannabis users have other personal and lifestyle factors that may lead to a loss of motivation, such as unemployment, poverty, lower socioeconomic status or pre-existing personality or mental health issues.