The Highs and Lows of Cannabis Use Breaks: The Effects of T-Breaks vs Other Breaks on Risk.

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Introduction

- The highest rates of cannabis use and cannabis use disorder (CUD) are among young adults.
- Cannabis culture promotes the use of "Tolerance breaks" (T-breaks) to "alter the body's responsiveness to cannabis."
- Despite numerous websites promoting specific guidelines for and benefits from T-breaks, no scientific literature on the phenomenon exists.
- We defined T-breaks as any purposeful break in cannabis use for tolerance reasons.
- We also assessed other types of periods of abstention from cannabis use.
- Purpose: To determine the effect of cannabis use breaks for tolerance or other reasons on hazardous cannabis use, CUD severity, and cannabis use frequency at 6 month follow-up.
- Hypothesis: T-breaks will be associated with a decrease in hazardous cannabis use, cannabis use disorder severity, and cannabis use frequency at 6 months.

Methodology

- Participants were young adult (18-30 years old), community recreational cannabis users.
- 170 participants completed baseline and 6-month follow-up assessments.
- Independent Variables
  - T-breaks: Any period of abstinence from cannabis use in the last 6 months with the purpose of altering tolerance.
  - Other breaks: Any period of abstention from cannabis use in the last 6 months for non-tolerance related reasons (i.e., money, personal, no access, mental and physical health, relationship, school, and sport reasons).
- No break: Reported no breaks in cannabis use.
- Dependent Variables
  - Hazardous Cannabis Use: Cannabis Use Disorder Identification Test-Revised (CUDIT-R) is an 8-item self-reported questionnaire to assess hazardous cannabis use. Scores range from 0-32, higher scores indicative of hazardous cannabis use or a possible cannabis use disorder.
  - Cannabis Use Disorder (CUD) Severity: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. 11-item clinical interview assesses current CUD. Higher scores indicative of greater CUD severity.
  - Cannabis Use Frequency: Historical Assessment of Intervals of Cannabis Use (HAICU) assesses the number of cannabis use occasions per week.

Results

- Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the association between cannabis use breaks with hazardous cannabis use, CUD severity, and use frequency at 6 months controlling for age, sex, use status, age at first use, and baseline scores for each outcome.
- There were no differences between the groups for age, sex, race/ethnicity, age at first use of cannabis, and baseline CUD criteria or use frequency.
- There was a significant difference between tolerance break and no break groups for cannabis use status  
  - Chi2(1) = 7.193, p < .007
- There was a significant difference between groups for baseline hazardous cannabis use
  - T-break: F(1,98) = 5.412, p<.020
  - Other break: F(1,157) = 6.080, p<.015
- T-breaks were significantly associated with increased hazardous cannabis use and CUD severity at 6 months.
  - Participants who took t-breaks were younger than those who did not take a use break.
  - Other breaks were not significantly associated with any cannabis-related outcome at 6 months.

Conclusion

- T-breaks were associated with increases in future hazardous cannabis use and CUD severity.
  - While clinical severity increased, frequency of use did not change.
  - Notably, frequent users were more likely to take a T-break.
- T-breaks could be a potential risk behavior marker
  - Despite common lore that T-breaks are beneficial and healthy approaches for managing cannabis use, these findings suggest that T-breaks are indicative of greater risk and problematic use patterns.
- This is especially important given that many substance use assessments or clinical assessments currently ask about the occurrence of T-breaks.
- Future studies should examine:
  - Why young adults are taking use breaks for tolerance reasons.
  - The physiological mechanisms that occur during cannabis use breaks.

Acknowledgements

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Tables and Figures

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Hazardous Cannabis Use 6-Mo

- T-break: 11.6
- Other Break: 9.6
- No Break: 7.3

Cannabinus Use Disorder Severity 6-Mo

- T-break: 1.8
- Other Break: 1.1
- No Break: 0.6

Cannabis Use Frequency 6-Mo

- T-break: 5
- Other Break: 3.4
- No Break: 3.2