Continuity of cannabis use and violent offending over the life course.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:

Although the association between cannabis use and violence has been reported in the literature, the precise nature of this relationship, especially the directionality of the association, is unclear.

METHOD:

Young males from the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development (n = 411) were followed up between the ages of 8 and 56 years to prospectively investigate the association between cannabis use and violence. A multi-wave (eight assessments, T1-T8) follow-up design was employed that allowed temporal sequencing of the variables of interest and the analysis of violent outcome measures obtained from two sources: (i) criminal records (violent conviction); and (ii) self-reports. A combination of analytic approaches allowing inferences as to the directionality of associations was employed, including multivariate logistic regression analysis, fixed-effects analysis and cross-lagged modelling.

RESULTS:

Multivariable logistic regression revealed that compared with never-users, continued exposure to cannabis (use at age 18, 32 and 48 years) was associated with a higher risk of subsequent violent behaviour, as indexed by convictions [odds ratio (OR) 7.1, 95% confidence interval (CI) 2.19-23.59] or self-reports (OR 8.9, 95% CI 2.37-46.21). This effect persisted after controlling for other putative risk factors for violence. In predicting violence, fixed-effects analysis and cross-lagged modelling further indicated that this effect could not be explained by other unobserved
time-invariant factors. Furthermore, these analyses uncovered a bi-directional relationship between cannabis use and violence.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

Together, these results provide strong indication that cannabis use predicts subsequent violent offending, suggesting a possible causal effect, and provide empirical evidence that may have implications for public policy.

**KEYWORDS:**

Cannabis; epidemiology; violence; Δ-9-tetrahydrocannabinol

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