

Young Aboriginal people who have never used marijuana in the 'Next Generation Youth Well-being study': a strengths-based approach

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Introduction and Aims: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) people have a long and strong history of resilience; however, a deficit approach is often taken with messages of poor health. This study takes a strengths-based approach and aims to examine the demographic factors and behaviours associated with never using marijuana among young Aboriginal people in Australia.

Design and Methods: The study is led by an Aboriginal woman from Western Australia. We employed Aboriginal peer recruiters in Western Australia, Central Australia and New South Wales who recruited Aboriginal people aged 16-24 years. We used the Kessler Distress Scale (K6) to measure distress. Logistic regression was used to assess the demographic and behavioural factors associated with never using marijuana.

Results: Of the 521 participants, 301 answered the marijuana or demographic questions. A total of 174 (57.8%) had never used marijuana. A higher proportion were from WA (51.5%) and were 16-19 years old (56.5%). Never using marijuana was independently associated with being a parent (Adjusted odds ratio (AoR): 2.80, p=0.043), never smoking tobacco (AoR: 29.73, p<0.001), never drinking alcohol (AoR: 2.78, p=0.028), not having anxiety (AOR: 3.49, p=0.022), having lower levels of distress (AoR: 2.63, p=0.016).

Discussion and Conclusions: Most of participants had never used marijuana. There is a clustering of not using marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco. Those who had not used marijuana had better mental health outcomes. Delaying the use of these substances has benefits and awareness programs with young people are needed so they can make informed decisions that suit them.

Implications for Translational Research: It seems substance use is clustered and that young people with good mental health are less likely to use substances. Holistic programs are needed so that young people can make informed choices that suit them and practical tools so they are able to manage stressful life events when they occur.

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