

Prevalence and correlates of early-onset cannabis use in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Introduction and Aims: Initiation of cannabis use at an early age elevates risk of harm, particularly if use is frequent.¹⁻³ This study investigates trends, demographic patterning and correlates of early-onset cannabis use.

Design and methods: Repeat cross-sectional data was from a nationally-representative survey of Year 10 students, aged 14-15. We investigated population trends in past month, weekly and daily cannabis smoking (2012-2018) and prevalence by gender, ethnicity and school decile in 2016-2018 (pooled). We used logistic regression to explore associations between early-onset cannabis smoking (weekly or more often) and possible predictors.

Results: Preliminary analysis showed prevalence of past month cannabis smoking declined from 10% in 2012 to 8% in 2018 ($p=0.03$). There was no significant change in weekly or daily measures (3.4% and 1.2% respectively in 2018). Students in decile 1-2 schools (more deprived) were much more likely to smoke cannabis weekly (OR 7.57, 95% CI 3.55, 16.33) than students in decile 9-10 schools. We found marked ethnic differences, with Māori more likely and Asians less likely to smoke cannabis weekly than European students ($P<0.001$). Preliminary (univariate) analysis showed weekly cannabis smoking was associated with tobacco, alcohol and e-cigarette use; exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke (SHS) at home or in vehicles; poor parental monitoring; income $> \$20/\text{week}$; low/moderate self-esteem; psychological distress; low social connectedness, and social media use.

Conclusions: Early onset cannabis use is heavily concentrated in structurally disadvantaged communities in New Zealand. Increased socio-economic equity and reduced exposure to risk factors are likely to reduce cannabis harm.

References

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