

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES IN THE TREATMENT OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS AND MENTAL HEALTH COMORBIDITIES

KEEP IT REAL: A WEB-BASED RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL FOR REDUCING CANNABIS USE AND PSYCHOTIC EXPERIENCES IN YOUNG PEOPLE

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Introduction: Young Australians have one of the highest rates of cannabis use worldwide. Cannabis use a robust dose-response association with psychotic experiences (PEs), including sub-threshold positive symptoms (e.g., delusions/hallucinations). We tested the outcomes of Keep it Real (KiR), the first web-based program to target both cannabis and PEs for youth.

Method: Participants were N=680 (16-25 years) individuals recruited online who have used cannabis in the past month, and experienced PEs. They were randomized to KiR or an information-only control website; both were self-guided/fully-automated. The baseline and follow-up assessments at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months were self-completed with high follow-up rates (85% at 6m; 75% at 12m). Mixed models were fitted on the outcomes, adjusting for demographics, childhood trauma, impulsivity, history of psychosis, family history of substance dependence, and alcohol/methamphetamine use.

Key Findings: No significant time by group effects were found. Significant time effects showed that participants had reduced PEs from baseline (B=-1.17 to -2.70, p<0.001) and improved quality of life from 3m (B=0.37 to 0.45, p<0.05). Problem cannabis use (measured by ASSIST) consistently reduced from baseline (B=-1.74 to -3.26, p<0.001), and severity of cannabis dependence reduced from 3m onwards (B=-0.41 to -0.45, p<0.05). Participants were significantly less likely to engage in weekly or more frequent cannabis use at 3m (OR=0.54, p=0.009) and 6m (OR=0.46, p<0.001), but not 12m (OR=1.21, p=0.445). Most participants did not use amphetamines, but the minority who did showed poorer PEs and cannabis use outcomes. Website engagement may impact program effectiveness.

Conclusions: Web-based programs can achieve reductions in PEs and problem cannabis use.

Implications for Translational Research (optional): The accessibility and scalability of web-based self-guided/fully-automated interventions could help reduce growing public health concerns about the significant social, economic, and health impacts of cannabis use.