

Health Perceptions of Cannabis: A Qualitative Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Information on the health perceptions of cannabis is often based on subjective experience which could result in the spread of misinformation regarding the health effects of cannabis.
- ❖ At the same time, anecdotal evidence can help lend a broader understanding of a complex phenomenon.
- ❖ The current investigation is a qualitative extension of research conducted by Magnan and colleagues (2019) in which they investigated perceptions of cannabis consequences.

Table 1. Most commonly reported health effects

Health Effect	Examples	<i>f</i>
Increases Appetite/Weight Gain	Makes You Extraordinarily Hungry; Makes You Hungry; Munchies; Thirsty	122
Increased Relaxation	Calming; Helps Relax; Calm People Down	97
Increased Paranoia	Makes People Paranoid; Makes You Paranoid to Some Extent	43
Increased Laziness	Promotes Laziness; Drowsiness; Sluggish	37
Kills Brain Cells/Damages Brain	Reduced Cognitive Ability; Kills Brain Cells; Brain Deterioration	20

METHOD

- ❖ 408 psychology undergraduate students
 - ❖ Participants indicated whether they ever used (72%) and in the past month (60%).
- ❖ Responded to an open-ended prompt to provide additional perceived effects of cannabis use not included in a pre-determined list of 49 potential consequences.
- ❖ Participants indicated whether they believed that the effect was true or false.

RESULTS

- ❖ Of the 1765 responses to the open-ended prompt, roughly half ($f = 880$; 49.8%) were coded as items similar to those already on the initial survey.
- ❖ The remaining 885 responses categorized (Table 1): (1) increases appetite/weight gain, (2) increased relaxation, (3) increased paranoia, (4) increased laziness, and (5) kills brain cells/damages brain.
- ❖ Endorsement of any of these perceived consequences did not significantly differ based on lifetime use (χ^2 s: .21-.57, p s: .48-.65) or past-month use (χ^2 s: .31-1.06, p s: .30-.58).

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Responses to the open-ended prompt provided additional perceived health effects.
- ❖ Responses showed similarities to pre-determined items on the inventory (i.e. "Increased Laziness" could also be interpreted as pre-determined item "Lower motivation to get things done"). The top three most frequently reported open-ended items represented acute effects.
- ❖ Further examination of these data as well as replication among different populations is needed for a better understanding of perception of consequences of cannabis use.
- ❖ Such investigations have the potential to inform future lines of empirical inquiry and health messaging efforts about the positive and negative effects of cannabis.