



Abstract Title: Bisexual women's strategies to reduce cannabis use risks

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Introduction

Studies in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and France show that bisexual women use cannabis at high rates relative to other women. Despite this international pattern, little is known about what risks bisexual women perceive in relation to using cannabis, or how they negotiate those risks.

Objectives

This presentation answers the questions, what do bisexual women view as the risks of illegal cannabis use? What strategies do they use to ameliorate these risks? And, how might these risks and strategies change in the wake of cannabis legalization?

Methods

This community-based study draws qualitative data from 16 bisexual women in Toronto who use illegal cannabis twice or more per week (frequent use). Participants had completed a provincial survey of bisexual mental health, identified as women, lived in the Toronto area, and had expressed interest in follow-up research by providing their contact information.

Semi-structured one-hour interviews were conducted with nine women and focus groups of two hours were held with seven women (one group of three, and one group of four), all of whom frequently use illegal cannabis. Interview guides included questions about risks women associate with illegal cannabis use and the strategies by which they address those risks.

Interviews and focus groups were open-coded, keeping close to participants' own words. Codes were organized by key concepts and developed into theme memos. A team of bisexual and ally researchers, and 12 bisexual community members guided the study, and provided feedback on theme memos and data analysis. Four undergraduate students analyzed the theme memos.

Results

We identified three categories of risk: 1) Risks related to the illegality of cannabis use, such as arrest, loss of child custody, loss of rental housing; 2) Social risks related to cannabis use, such as being perceived as unprofessional, immature, or unreliable; and 3) physical risks, such as lung damage, memory loss, overeating, lethargy, and compulsive use. Some of the strategies employed to reduce risk entailed their own hazards, such as when women compromised their physical safety to avoid arrest.

Conclusion

While legalization will address many associated with illegal cannabis use, social and physical risks will remain relevant. Given the high rates of cannabis use among bisexual women in North America, and internationally, understanding these risks and strategies is important to work effectively with bisexual women as the legal context of cannabis use shifts.

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