

Cannabis Abuse and the Course of Recent-Onset Schizophrenic Disorders

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Abstract

Objective

We sought to examine the relation between cannabis abuse and the symptomatic course of recent-onset schizophrenia and related disorders.

Design

A prospective cohort study over a year using monthly Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale assessments.

Participants

Cannabis-abusing patients (n=24) were compared with nonabusers (n=69). Eleven patients were mild and 13 were heavy cannabis-abusing patients.

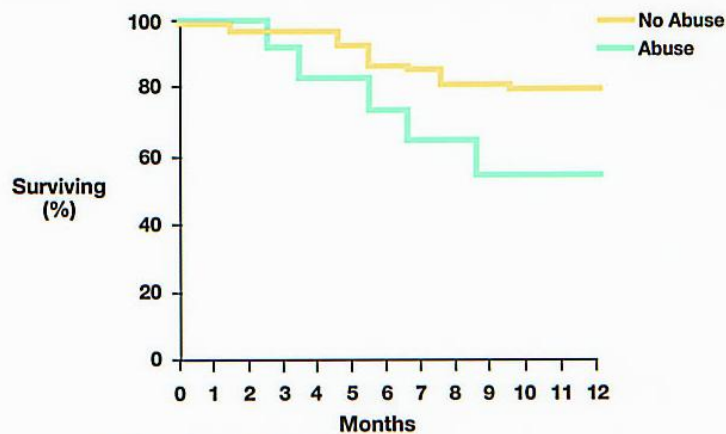
Results

Significantly more and earlier psychotic relapses occurred in the cannabis-abusing group ($P=.03$). This association became stronger when mild and heavy cannabis abuse were distinguished ($P=.002$). No confounding effect of other variables, eg, other street drugs, was found. In all but one patient, cannabis abuse preceded the onset of the first psychotic symptoms for at least 1 year.

Conclusions

Cannabis abuse and particularly heavy abuse can be considered a stressor eliciting relapse in patients with schizophrenia and related disorders and possibly a premorbid precipitant.

SURVIVAL CURVES OF TIME UNTIL PSYCHOTIC RELAPSE BY NO ABUSE AND ABUSE OF CANNABIS



Linszen et al. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*, 1994.

This slide shows some research that using cannabis increases psychotic symptoms in people with schizophrenia. On the left are the percentage of people who do not have a psychotic relapse, with 100% on the top and 0 percent on the bottom. The bottom part of the graph shows time in months from the beginning of the study. If you look at the yellow line, you can see that people who do not abuse cannabis relapse slowly with schizophrenia symptom episodes over time. The green line shows that people who abuse cannabis relapse significantly more rapidly. At 6 months, about 30% had relapsed and 70% were left without symptoms. At a year out, you can see that almost 50% had relapsed compared to only 20% of the group who did not abuse cannabis.