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A Preliminary Comparison of Cannabis Use in Subsyndromal Gamblers: Select Neurocognitive and Behavioral Differences Based on Use.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES:: Cannabis and gambling are 2 common forms of impulsive behavior among young adults. Although both cannabis use and gambling have been associated with specific cognitive deficits on tasks related to decision making, no studies to date have examined the possible effects on neurocognition in those who simultaneously gamble and use cannabis.

METHODS:: To address this question, the present study analyzed 214 subsyndromal gamblers from a larger study on impulsivity. Of these subjects, 64 (29.9%) were current cannabis users (last use within the last 3 months) and 150 (70.1%) had no history of cannabis use in the last 3 months, along with 163 healthy controls. Participants were assessed on various cognitive and clinical measures, including measures for gambling severity and impulsivity.

RESULTS:: Subjects using cannabis had higher rates of current alcohol use disorders and more frequent gambling behavior per week. Gamblers who used cannabis also exhibited significantly greater scores on one measure of attentional impulsivity. Both gambling groups differed from healthy controls on all clinical and select neurocognitive variables, consistent with previous research.

CONCLUSIONS:: These results indicate that cannabis use in young adults who gamble is associated with nuanced behavioral differences, although causality could not be determined. Longitudinal research should examine cannabis use in subsyndromal gamblers over time to characterize whether these findings are causative.

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