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Understanding Youth Perceptions on Cannabis

Katie Fleming, M.A.

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

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Introduction

- Youth are at an increased risk for harms related to cannabis use
- Perceived risk of use relates to rates of substance use



Study Rationale

- Youth lack clarity about the effects of cannabis on the body and brain
- We need a better understanding of what Canadian youth think about cannabis



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Canadian Youth Perceptions on Cannabis

November 2016





Study Objectives

To uncover the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of youth about cannabis to help inform prevention efforts



Participants

- 77 youth participated:
 - Ottawa and Perth, Ontario, Saskatoon, Calgary and Wainwright, Alberta, and Pictou County, Nova Scotia
- Recruitment was designed to provide contrasting opinions within groups, but foster an environment where participants related to one another



Why Youth Smoke Cannabis

- Peers and family
- Boredom
- Availability and acceptability
- “Healthier than other substances”
- Medical, physical and mental



Understanding Effects of Cannabis

- “Youth don’t care about these”
- Cannabis “affects everyone differently”
- Long-term consequences only apply to heavy, chronic use



Cannabis and Driving

- Perceived to affect driving, but depends on the person
- Slows reaction time and ability to divide attention
- Alcohol-impaired driving is more dangerous
- Youth found it difficult to visually identify a cannabis-impaired driver (i.e., not stumbling or slurring)



Cannabis and Brain Development

- Many youth knew, assumed or guessed cannabis affects brain development:
 - Didn't know how or why
 - Didn't deter use
 - “Recreational use doesn't affect the brain”



Cannabis and Addiction

- “THC has been confirmed that it's not addictive but it's not the chemical that's addictive, it's the rush. It's the feeling and it's the notion that there's nothing wrong in that moment is what's addictive.”



Cannabis Legal Status

- Youth thought they could possess small amounts, just not enough to sell
- Confused by varying policies and the presence of dispensaries in Canada



Cannabis Portrayal

- Media and social media
- Views on enforcement
- Medical use



Suggestions for Prevention from Youth

- Include harm reduction as opposed to “just say no”
- Start prevention efforts earlier with consistent follow up
- Have a discussion with youth, asking about what they think



Knowledge Mobilization

- Youth are confused about the effects of cannabis, especially given all the information available to them
- Youth did not report having open and honest conversation with family and youth allies
- Youth said that they want to be involved in prevention efforts



Addressing a Need

- **A Canadian Talk Guide**
 - Engages in meaningful discussions around cannabis
 - Supports decision making
 - Provides support for non-biased conversations



Next Steps

- We will conduct an in-person needs assessment and co-design workshop
- The workshop will identify barriers and facilitators to having protective, unbiased conversations with youth about cannabis use to inform their decisions
- Product development will be informed by the workshop discussion



Contact Information

Katie Fleming
Knowledge Broker
kfleming@ccsa.ca

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction
www.ccsa.ca

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