Cannabis use, other illicit drug use and substance use disorders: a 14-year follow-up study

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Background:
Although illicit drug use and dependence is associated with a range of early life circumstances that put individuals at greater risk, studies suggest cannabis use (CU) in late adolescence to be the strongest risk factor. However, evidence regarding this association remains conflicting with uncertainty as to what extent the association is an effect of the drug itself, reflects characteristics of the users, or is a consequence of other uncontrolled confounders. This study aims at increasing the understanding of pathways from CU to substance use disorders (SUD).

Methods:
We used a general population-based cohort of a random sample in Stockholm County, (collected 1998-2000) with linkages to the national in- and outpatient register. The study base comprised participants aged 20-64 (N = 10345), followed-up between the years 2001-2014. Logistic regression analyses were conducted to test associations between self--reported CU and subsequent SUD. Odds ratios (ORs) were estimated with 95% CI.

Results:
Preliminary results show that among cannabis users at baseline (N = 1618, 15.6 %), a third also reported other illicit drug (OID) use (5.4%). Crude OR for SUD in cannabis users was 4.44 (2.82-7.00, 95% CI), and the association remained stable after adjusting for sex, age, education, economic deprivation and family tensions. Adjusting for alcohol use attenuated the association (OR 3.14, 1.93-5.11, 95% CI), and OID use largely attenuated the association (OR 1.27, 0.68-2.36, 95% CI). Additional analyses and adjustments to the models will be conducted.

Conclusions:
Our results suggest that cannabis use increases the risk for substance use disorders. This association seems to be explained by other illicit drug use.

Key messages:
- There does not seem to be an independent effect of CU on the risk for SUD.
- However, the large majority of OID users also reported CU (77%).