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Why Bad Looks Good

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Seeing Green? Cannabis Use Associated With Domestic Violence

New research adds marijuana use as a risk factor.

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Domestic Violence Awareness Month highlights the epidemic of domestic abuse, a crime that often flies under the radar.

Having prosecuted countless crimes of domestic abuse in my over 20 years as a prosecutor, my experience is consistent with research findings regarding the fact that physical abuse is often precipitated by observable risk factors.

In an attempt to reduce the likelihood of interpersonal violence, there has traditionally been an emphasis placed on precursors such as anger management, history of violent behavior, and alcohol abuse. But marijuana? Because it is a drug that enjoys a more peaceful reputation than many other illicit substances, the finding that it is linked to interpersonal violence requires us to re-examine the complicated relationship between personality traits, substance use, and violent behavior.

juana for both medical and recreational use, research continues to focus on potential consequences of using the substance. There is a strong focus on marijuana's potential impact on driving, operating machinery, performing cognitive tasks, caring for children, and other activities that require mental alertness and good judgment.

Physiologically, marijuana can create relaxation, decrease reaction time, stimulate appetite, and promote sedation. But can it make someone violent?

Marijuana Use and Interpersonal Violence

A study by Ryan C. Shorey et al. (2018) linked marijuana use and interpersonal violence (IPV).[i] The authors began by reporting that marijuana use is commonly reported among men arrested for domestic violence, a report that is concerning given the fact that past research has established a link between marijuana use and IPV.

Acknowledging IPV as a serious public health problem, the authors set out to discover whether marijuana was linked to IPV on its own, versus in combination with other factors. Accordingly, their research examined the link between marijuana use and IPV perpetration after controlling for three known risk factors for IPV: alcohol use and related problems, antisocial personality symptoms, and relationship satisfaction.

They found that marijuana use was “positively and significantly associated” with all forms of IPV (physical, psychological, and sexual) even after controlling for all three risk factors. They also found that the link between marijuana use and sex-

search, which suggests that polysubstance users report more frequent IPV episodes than their non-polysubstance using counterparts.

The association between marijuana and domestic violence may be better understood within the context of how other risk factors lead to domestic abuse.

Other Domestic Violence Risk Factors

Megan J. Brem et al. (2018) found other factors to be linked to IPV in men arrested for domestic violence.[ii] The title of their article, “Antisocial Traits, Distress Tolerance, and Alcohol Problems as Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence in Men Arrested for Domestic Violence,” described the scope of their research.

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The authors adopt a research-based definition of distress tolerance as “an ability to withstand aversive internal and external states elicited by a stressor.” They note that people with lower levels of distress tolerance are likely to engage in impulsive behaviors geared to reduce distress, rather than

In their study, they found that traits of antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) were linked to psychological aggression perpetration both directly and indirectly, through distress tolerance and problematic use of alcohol. They also found that ASPD traits were linked to elevated problems with alcohol, which was linked to psychological aggression perpetration.

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However, when they controlled for psychological aggression perpetration, they found that neither distress tolerance nor problems with alcohol explained the relationship between traits related to ASPD traits and physical assault. They opine, “It is plausible that alcohol problems increased participants’ susceptibility to involvement in antisocial activities, including IPV perpetration, thereby reducing the likelihood that distress tolerance would account for the relationship.”

Future research will no doubt examine whether substances other than alcohol may increase susceptibility to IPV perpetration in the same fashion. Also note that in correlational studies, it's always possible that hidden variables (such as personality traits or psychopathology) could explain the association between the variables under examination.

Targeting All Forms of Domestic Abuse

toxic relationships include physical abuse, which can progress incrementally over a time—often culminating in significant physical harm.

In all cases, however, a familiarity with risk factors is helpful for both potential victims and abusers, with an eye toward intervention, treatment, and ultimately eradication of this often-deadly societal epidemic.

References

[i] Ryan C. Shorey, Ellen Haynes, Meagan Brem, Autumn Rae Florimbio, Hannah Grigorian, and Gregory L. Stuart, “Marijuana Use Is Associated With Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration Among Men Arrested for Domestic Violence,” *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* 4, no. 1, 2018, 108–118.

[ii] Megan J. Brem, Autumn Rae Florimbio, JoAnna Elmquist, Ryan C. Shorey, and Gregory L. Stuart, “Antisocial Traits, Distress Tolerance, and Alcohol Problems as Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence in Men Arrested for Domestic Violence,” *Psychology of Violence* 8, no. 1, 2018, 132–139.



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