

"It could be bad, it could be good"

Substance Use Ambiguities During Early Psychosis



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Abstract

Young persons diagnosed with early psychosis may be more vulnerable to the adverse effects of substance use than the general population. It is important to know what motivates them to use or refuse substances after a psychotic break. Throughout 2021-2023, the research team conducted one-hour interviews informed by the social ecological model with 18 diverse young adults (about ⅓ self-identified as Latino, ⅓ Black, ⅓ white) enrolled in specialized early psychosis services in Texas. Interviews explored how these clients thought about the role of substance use in their lives before and after their enrollment in treatment. The drug of choice for most clients was cannabis (n=13, 72%) followed by alcohol (n=5, 29%). Some young adults chose to continue substance use to increase mental wellness, enhance everyday experiences, cope with stress, and gain social benefits. Clients who cut back expressed experiencing feelings of distress, life-altering events related to substance use (e.g., accidents), or the urge to harm one’s self or others while using. Both groups saw advantages to quitting and continuing. It is important to develop a nuanced understanding of how young adults experiencing early psychosis make choices about substance use to design services that are appealing to them. The option for clients to engage with services which are empowering and supportive can build one’s sense of agency and facilitate pathways to wellness.

Based on eighteen interviews, it was found that young adults using CSC clinics continue to use substances to increase mental wellness, enhance everyday experiences, cope with mental distress, and/or gain social benefits. Clients who ceased substance use did so when they began to experience feelings of distress and/or began to experience incidental outcomes such as life-altering events, the urge to harm the self or others, and a lack of expenses. Fourteen clients continue use while four have ceased.

Current Status	# of Participants	Total
Continued	14	79%
Discontinued	4	21%

Background

Gender	Female	Male	Nonbinary	Substance Mentioned	Cannabis	Alcohol	LSD	Cocaine	MDMA
Total	39%	56%	5%	Total	89%	67%	33%	33%	17%

The data in this poster is key to better understanding the pathways to obtaining support for clients who use substances. Clients were recruited and interviewed throughout a qualitative study involving Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) clinics affiliated with the Early Psychosis Intervention Network Texas (EPINET-TX). Inclusion criteria was being a young adult (ages 18 to 30), enrolled in a CSC program, English speaking, who reported substance use during their lifetime. The average age was 25.2. Youth with diagnoses of early-psychosis are at a higher risk for substance use,² so it is imperative to understand why clients either continue or discontinue use in order to improve and optimize their care experiences. Theoretical orientations such as moral agency, moral laboratories, the socio-ecological model (pictured to the right), and logics of care are utilized to analyze and interpret results.



Results

Continued Use	Total
Positive Mental Effects	71%
Enhance Social Experiences	71%
Cope with Mental Distress	77%
Relieve Physical Symptoms	29%
Discontinued Use	Total
Mental or Physical Distress from Use	64%
Major Life Events	59%
Family/Friend Encouragement	41%
Expense of Substance	64%

Discussion

Understanding the reasons for continued or discontinued substance use among clients of CSC clinics is essential to improving treatment outcomes. Greater understanding of motivations gives CSC clinics better insight into client concerns, perceived stigmas, and goals, which in turn, can improve treatment methods, outcomes, and the overall agency of clients. Through forms of narrative re-envisioning,⁵ moral laboratories,³ and collaborative logics of care,⁽¹⁾⁽⁴⁾ care experiences and interactions can become desirable to young adults experiencing symptoms of psychosis due to the reframing and acceptance of their substance use. Substance use is not a black or white issue, with 77% of clients continuing to use in order to cope with mental distress, care providers should consider the benefits to the use of substances despite diagnoses in order to cultivate a sense of support, agency, and wellness in clients.

Methodology

Semi-structured & Open-ended Interviews
60-90 Minutes in Length
Utilized the Socio-ecological Model
Explored Past & Current Substance Use
Coded through Dedoose
Identified Key Themes

Moral Agency & Self-Experimentation

Treatment programs for mental ailments have been referred to as a “revolving door.”⁵ Due to the high rates of people who continue to use, it is essential to reorient logics of professional care to ones of client self-experimentation with substances⁴ as well as ones of acceptance and encouragement to self-regulate with desired substances.¹ Healthcare intervention made up of peer-support communities wherein peopled opportunities, moral laboratories,³ and in turn, narrative reenvisioning and the construction of new moral selves become possible,⁵ are key to creating optimal pathways to care and wellness.

References

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