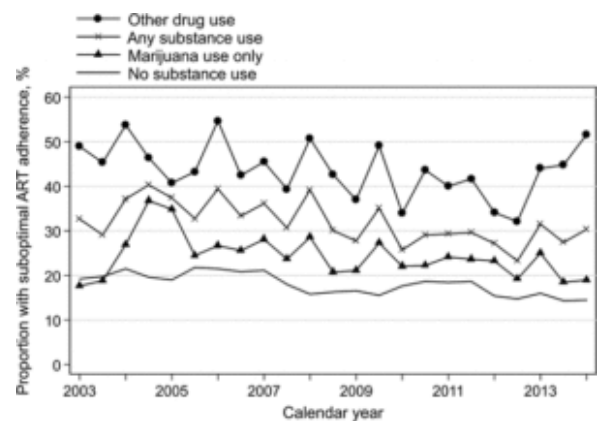
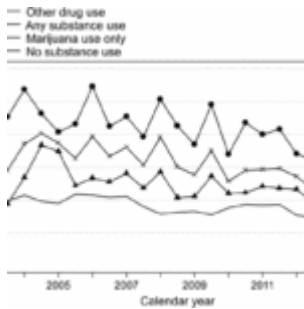


Marijuana May Decrease ART Adherence



Trends in suboptimal ART adherence by any substance use and by specific drug type. (WIHS, 2003-2014)

Marijuana is widely used to help alleviate the symptoms of a variety of diseases and the side effects of their treatments. With the recent legalization and decriminalization of marijuana in various areas of the world, the effects of marijuana use on drug treatment adherence is an important question that must be answered. In a study primarily funded by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) in the USA, the effects of marijuana use on HIV ART adherence was examined.

HIV positive patients usually undergo antiretroviral therapy (ART), a cocktail of pills that are taken daily. ART helps the patients maintain their CD4+ levels while reducing viral load.

Between 2003 and 2014, the Women's Interagency HIV Study semi-annually collected data from HIV positive women who were on ART. Zhang, Wilson, and Adedimeji, et al. later analyzed this data and placed participants in groups based on their drug use: marijuana only, other drug use, or no drug use. The researchers then classified different levels of ART adherence. Patients who took their drugs with <95% consistency were classified as suboptimal.

Patients who used marijuana daily were around 5% more likely to have suboptimal adherence compared to patients with no drug use. Compared to other drugs, marijuana's effect on adherence was relatively low. Long term studies on the effect of marijuana on adherence have been rare and contradictory. While the use of marijuana can help patients deal with HIV symptoms and ART side effects, HIV positive individuals should be wary of the possible effects of marijuana on ART adherence.

Journal article: [Zhang, Y. et al., 2017. The Impact of Substance Use on Adherence to Antiretroviral Therapy Among HIV-Infected Women in the United States. *AIDS and Behavior*](#)

Article by Maxwell Chan