

CENTERING THE PERSPECTIVES OF CANNABIS USERS: INSIGHTS FROM QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

6TH ANNUAL CCIC CONFERENCE 2019: HARM REDUCTION AND PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF CANNABIS LEGALIZATION

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WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

- Naturalistic inquiry
- Lived experience
- Socio-cultural context
- Ethnographic immersion
- Participatory or 'community-driven' approaches



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SOURCE: <https://theethnographyprocess.wordpress.com/>

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COMPARING QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative Research	RESEARCH ASPECT	Quantitative Research
Discover Ideas, with General Research Objects	COMMON PURPOSE	Test Hypotheses or Specific Research Questions
Observe and Interpret	APPROACH	Measure and Test
Unstructured. Free Form	DATA COLLECTION APPROACH	Structured Response Categories Provided
Research is intimately involved. Results are subjective	RESEARCHER INDEPENDENCE	Researcher uninformed Observer. Results are Objective
Small samples –Often in Natural setting	SAMPLES	Large samples to Produce Generalizable Results [Results that Apply to Other Situations]

<http://shayaresearch.blogspot.com/2011/04/qualitative-vs-quantitative-research-v3.html>

SHAYA'ATHMAN

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WHY QUALITATIVE?

- Ethics of inclusion
- Power & stigma
- Policy imperatives
- Practice change

“Nothing About Us Without Us”:
A manifesto by people who use illegal drugs

WE have the right to become involved in activities that affect our health and well-being.

WE have the right to be able to make informed decisions about our health, including what we do or do not put into our bodies.

WE have unique expertise and experiences and have a vital role to play in defining the health, social, legal, and research policies that affect us.



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My doctoral research project with adolescent girls on Toronto (2008):

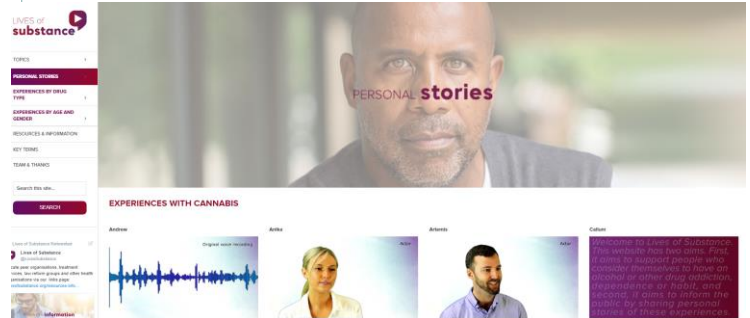
- Cannabis and tobacco co-use
- Cannabis, coping and mental health
- Cannabis as an aid in tobacco cessation



Me and my friends smoke weed often and every time we do we put some tobacco in it. It tends to make it burn better especially if it is damp. (Caitlin, 18)

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LIVESOFSUBSTANCE.ORG (AUSTRALIA)



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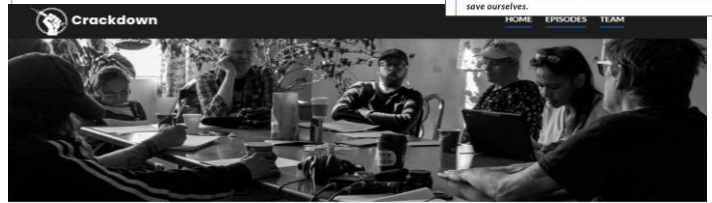
SEE-BEYOND.CA (ALBERTA)



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CRACKDOWNPOD.COM (B.C.)

Drug users are the experts. We've survived. We know policy better than policy-makers. We know law better than lawmakers. We know pharmaceuticals better than pharmacists. We know nobody's coming to save us. So we gotta save ourselves.



THE DRUG WAR, COVERED BY DRUG USERS AS WAR CORRESPONDENTS.

LATEST EPISODE
Episode 2: "Change Intolerance"
I never used heroin for years and years on the other stuff... Why would they change something that is already working? — Cherece Kozwatin, quoted in a 2013 *Magnum* article about marijuana in Washington state.

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CANNABIS: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

- Medical use, patient perspectives
- Non-medical experiences
- Stigma
- Criminalization <=> Normalization
- Gender (limited)
- Access: illicit and 'grey' markets



<http://www.drugpolicy.org/realistic-marijuana-use-stock-images>

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QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FROM CANADA



(From top left): Lynda Balneaves, Joan Botorff, Cameron Duff, Andy Hathaway, Pat Erickson, Jenna Valleriani

SEVEN RULES
 "Girls Are Retarded When They're Stoned." Marijuana and the Construction of Gender Roles Among Adolescent Females
 Authors: Jessica Warner, Timothy B. Heber, Ricardo Albanes

JOURNAL OF SCHOOL HEALTH
 Ontario, Canada, High School Teachers as Enforcers in the War on Drugs: What Their Students See and Say
 Jessica Warner, Ricardo Albanes, Oren Amitay

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<p>2011: Cannabis Users Knowledge and Opinions of Canadian Drug Laws (Brochu et al)</p>	<p>2011: Cannabis normalization and stigma (Hathaway et al)</p>	<p>2011: Health Effects of Using Cannabis for Therapeutic Purposes: A Gender Analysis (Bottorff et al)</p>
<p>2012: A Canadian perspective on cannabis normalization among adults (Duff et al)</p>	<p>2013: Perceptions of cannabis as a stigmatized medicine (Bottorff et al)</p>	<p>2014: Cannabis, risk and normalisation: evidence from a Canadian study of...adult cannabis users (Duff & Erickson)</p>
<p>2015: The role of anxiety in bisexual women's use of cannabis in Canada (Robinson)</p>	<p>2018: Parents are the best prevention? Troubling assumptions in cannabis policy and prevention discourses (Haines-Saah et al)</p>	<p>2018: Identity narratives in the face of market competition: the emerging legal medical cannabis market in Canada (Valleriani)</p>

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EXAMPLE 1: THE TRACE PROJECT (2006-16)

- There is a spectrum of use by youth: from social, to relief-oriented, to problematic.
- Youth were skeptical of biased or heavy-handed messaging.
- Stigmatizing youth who use cannabis as 'unhealthy' or 'addicts' is counter-productive.
- Youth are actively engaged in their own harm prevention strategies (two examples).



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EXAMPLE 2: CANNABIS & MENTAL HEALTH SCOPING REVIEW (2019)

Author ID	Year	Location	Topic
Mikuriya	1970	United States	Cannabis substitution in alcohol addiction
Way	1994	United States	Substance use in adolescence
All	1998	Malawi	Marijuana use and 'traditional' cultural beliefs
Labigalini	1999	Brazil	Therapeutic use of cannabis, other substance use
Nappo	2001	Brazil	User-reported changes in modes of cocaine use
Page	2006	Canada	Medical cannabis and Multiple Sclerosis
Bucher	2012	United States	Steroid, substance use among military personnel
Sehularo	2012	South Africa	Cannabis use and Psychosis
Thornton	2012	Australia	Substance use and psychotic disorders
Okello	2014	Uganda	Mental health literacy among high school students
Elliott	2015	United States	Cannabis use and PTSD among veterans
Pederson	2015	Norway	Cannabis users and ADHD
Rebgetz	2015	Australia	Spontaneous cannabis cessation and Psychosis
Robinson	2015	Canada	Bisexuality, anxiety and cannabis use among women
Mitchell	2016	Online forums	Discussions of ADHD and cannabis online
Rebgetz	2016	Australia	Cannabis cessation and Psychosis
Mitchell	2018	United states	Substance use and emotional functioning
Wagstaff	2018	United Kingdom	Substance use and Schizophrenia

- Only two qualitative studies from Canada (n=18/1900+)
- Few studies separating cannabis from other substance use
- Lack of participatory or community-driven designs
- Many populations and contexts remain unstudied (i.e. parents, gender, race, etc.)
- The need for 'patient-centered' or harm reduction approaches persists

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IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We need more qualitative and ethnographic studies of:

- Substitution and co-use practices
- Use in 'high-risk' populations and contexts
 - Pregnancy and breastfeeding
 - Youth at risk for psychosis
- How the transition to legal markets impacts communities
- How legalization shifts stigma and normalization
- Work within illicit cannabis and the legal cannabis industry

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