

2014/2015 Summer Studentship Project Application Form

Send to: Research Office, University of Otago Christchurch, PO Box 4345, Christchurch, by 5pm on **4 July 2014**

Supervisor Information (First named supervisor will be the contact):

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Research Category (Choose one category only – to be used for judging the students' presentations):

Clinical ✓

Laboratory

Community

Project Title (20 words MAXIMUM):

Ease up on the Pot: Cannabis users' moderation experiences

Project Description:

Rationale

Cannabis is the world's most widely used illicit drug and use rates are particularly high in New Zealand (Degenhardt et al. 2012). A significant proportion of cannabis users experience problems as a result of their use, and many are concerned about this. Whilst problematic cannabis users can be readily identified with brief screening measures, this is not routinely done. Cannabis users are difficult to recruit into treatment, with household surveys indicating only 3.2% people who used cannabis having ever received help with reducing their use (Ministry of Health, 2010). One reason may be that many concerned users may not be willing to stop their use altogether. Moderation is widely accepted in the area of problematic alcohol use, but to date is little explored in the area of cannabis use. Users who reduce their consumption rather than stopping entirely are likely to experience a reduction in cannabis related harm, potentially to the point of any harm being eliminated, with a use level akin to low risk drinking for alcohol use.

To date there has been little investigation into moderation of cannabis use as a treatment strategy for cannabis users. In order to better estimate the feasibility of moderation as a treatment strategy for cannabis users this study will explore cannabis users experiences with moderation, either through treatment, or more likely when self-initiated without formal assistance.

Research Questions:

Could a moderation message be used as part of a brief intervention for problematic cannabis use? In order to advance this question two strategies will be employed:

Literature search

- How common is moderation treatment for cannabis users? Many studies report outcome measures other than abstinence but this does not mean that a moderation option was provided for treatment participants. A review of the literature will identify studies that involved treatments that explicitly supported moderation goals, or studies that identified the goal choices of the participants. While the principal supervisor is familiar with the cannabis treatment literature the project will allow for a more thorough and systematic examination of the published literature.

User interviews:

Individual semi-structured interviews with 10-15 cannabis users would seek to explore the following areas:

- Concerns about their cannabis use, and for concerned users, their preferred method of addressing this including an exploration of their ideas about abstinence or moderation of use. How many users concerned about their use want to stop and how many want to moderate?
- How could moderation as a supported treatment goal impact treatment seeking and engagement?

- What are the moderation experiences of cannabis users, what strategies do they use and what works and what doesn't (and how much was change influenced by external forces, eg reduced supply, reduced finances, new partner). What rules to maintain or to reduce have they employed? Are they aware of associates' experiences with moderation attempts?
- What level of cannabis use would users regard as being low risk?

The target group for the user interviews will be 10-15 current cannabis users who are currently or had previously been concerned about their use and had made an attempt to reduce their use, with or without the support of formal treatment. They will be recruited initially via advertisements at 298 Youth Health Centre and tertiary institution notice boards, with subsequent interviews identified by snowballing. Care will be taken to balance gender and age range (e.g over and under 25 years)

References

Degenhardt, L. and W. Hall, *Extent of illicit drug use and dependence, and their contribution to the global burden of disease*. The Lancet, 2012. 379: p. 55-70.

Ministry of Health. 2010. Drug Use in New Zealand: Key Results of the 2007/08 New Zealand Alcohol and Drug Use Survey. Wellington: Ministry of Health.

