

Medical Cannabis Use by Older Veterans in Illinois



Brielle Ross¹, Laura Quintero, MS¹, Julie Bobitt, PhD¹

¹Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, ²Interdisciplinary Health Program

Background

Cannabis use among individuals over 50 has outpaced the growth observed across other age groups. From 2006 to 2013, the rate of past-year marijuana use among persons 50 years or older increased by 71.4%. While research on cannabis use in older adults has expanded, little is known about use among sub-groups of older adults including older Veterans.

Purpose

This study, which was part of a larger study that analyzed non-veterans and veterans and sought to explore the use of cannabis by older Veterans enrolled in the state of Illinois Medical Cannabis Patient Program (MCP). In particular, we sought to:

- Provide a description of the Veterans enrolled in the MCP
- Determine how and why older Veterans use cannabis
- Describe self-reported outcomes of their cannabis use

Methods

This study utilized an electronic survey that consisted of 83 questions. Survey questions included information about military service, usage of other drugs and accessed their pain levels. The surveys were sent between June and September 2019 by the Illinois Department of Public Health to all individuals over the age of 60 who were currently enrolled in the Illinois MCP. Of the 4,066 responses, there were a total of 568 Veterans who participated in the survey.

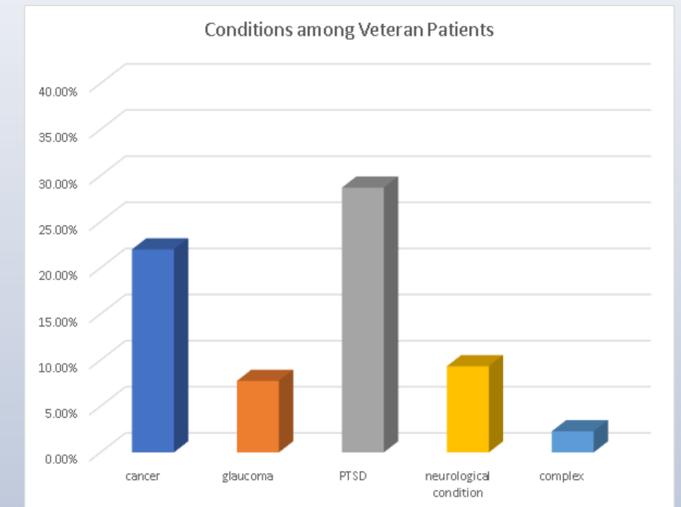
Results

- Veterans who participated in the study were predominantly white males (92%)
- The average age of Veterans cannabis users is 69.55 years old
- Compared to non-Veterans – Veterans in the study were more ethnically diverse (14%)
- Those who utilize cannabis had higher socioeconomic status, marriage and retirement rates
- Veterans reported using cannabis primarily for pain related conditions (40%) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (29%)
- The pain related conditions include cancer, glaucoma, PTSD, neurological and other complex conditions

Table.1 with demographics of Non-Veterans and Veterans

	Non-veterans Mean (%) n = 3175	Veterans Mean (%) n = 593	p
Age (Mean (SD))	66.86 (5.79)	69.55 (6.25)	<0.001
Gender			<0.001
Male	1317 (41.0)	547 (92.1)	
Female	1858 (59.0)	46 (7.9)	
Ethnicity			0.003
Non-hispanic White	2833 (90.6)	499 (85.9)	
Non-hispanic Black	133 (4.3)	41 (7.1)	
Hispanic	90 (2.9)	20 (3.4)	
Other Non-Hispanic	70 (2.2)	21 (3.6)	
Education level			<0.001
College degree and above	1481 (46.8)	224 (37.8)	
No college degree	1694 (53.2)	369 (62.2)	
Marital Status			0.039
Married	2021 (64.0)	404 (68.5)	
Not married	1154 (36.0)	189 (31.5)	
Employment			<0.001
Employed	748 (23.6)	70 (11.8)	
Not employed	2427 (76.4)	523 (88.2)	
Financial status			0.029
Use of opioids in the past year			0.008
Yes	1433 (45.4)	233 (39.4)	
No	1742 (54.6)	360 (60.6)	
Use of benzodiazepines in the past year			<0.001
Yes	1032 (32.6)	103 (17.4)	
No	2143 (67.4)	490 (82.6)	

Fig. 1 A Graph of reported conditions among Veterans users



Discussion

Older Veterans in our study report using cannabis primarily for pain-related conditions and PTSD. Future studies should consider the relationship between cannabis use and the use of opioids and benzodiazepines by older Veterans.

Limitations of the study include that it wasn't originally intended just for Veterans and it relies on self-reported data. Also because we only observed individuals enrolled in the MCP, attitudes towards cannabis could be biased.



STUDENT AGING RESEARCHERS IN TRAINING

Special thanks to Dr. Schwingel and Laura Quintero. Thanks to Dr. Bobitt in Interdisciplinary Health, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and to the participants.

Table.1 with demographics of Non-Veterans and Veterans

	Non-veterans Mean (%) n = 3175	Veterans Mean (%) n = 593	<i>p</i>
Age (Mean (SD))	66.86 (5.79)	69.55 (6.25)	<0.001
Gender			<0.001
Male	1317 (41.0)	547 (92.1)	
Female	1858 (59.0)	46 (7.9)	
Ethnicity			0.003
Non-hispanic White	2833 (90.6)	499 (85.9)	
Non-hispanic Black	133 (4.3)	41 (7.1)	
Hispanic	90 (2.9)	20 (3.4)	
Other Non-Hispanic	70 (2.2)	21 (3.6)	
Education level			<0.001
College degree and above	1481 (46.8)	224 (37.8)	
No college degree	1694 (53.2)	369 (62.2)	
Marital Status			0.039
Married	2021 (64.0)	404 (68.5)	
Not married	1154 (36.0)	189 (31.5)	
Employment			<0.001
Employed	748 (23.6)	70 (11.8)	
Not employed	2427 (76.4)	523 (88.2)	
Financial status			0.029
Use of opioids in the past year			0.008
Yes	1433 (45.4)	233 (39.4)	
No	1742 (54.6)	360 (60.6)	
Use of benzodiazepines in the past year			<0.001
Yes	1032 (32.6)	103 (17.4)	
No	2143 (67.4)	490 (82.6)	

Fig. 1 A Graph of reported conditions among Veterans

