



Health warnings on cannabis dispensary websites

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Introduction

- Dispensary market is growing quickly - necessary to keep an eye on it and survey its expansion (Peiper et al., 2017)
- Research is inconclusive about whether or not legalization truly causes increased cannabis use (Snitzman & Yolotov, 2017) but it does cause increased dispensary presence
- In a 2016 study, only 20% of sampled dispensary employees had medical training (Haug et al., 2016) and yet dispensary employees and their websites still make health claims and give health advice to patients (Luc et al., 2020)
- Not only making health claims, also not including relevant contraindications with cannabis use (Kruger et al., 2020)

Present Study

- Aims to quantify differences in warning types and frequency of those warnings on cannabis dispensary websites across the country
- Coded $N = 387$ dispensary websites for the presence of:
 - Psychological adverse effect information
 - General use warnings (i.e., “start low and go slow” referring to dosing)
 - Gynecological warnings (i.e., don’t use when pregnant or breastfeeding)

Methods

- 15 dispensaries randomly selected from each state with medical or recreational cannabis (if state had less than 15, all dispensaries were coded)
- Use of an informal website (potguides.com) to simulate real-life internet searches by patients supplemented with FDA lists when necessary (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2019)
- After 3 practice rounds, 3 trained research assistants went through all websites and coded for the binary presence of relevant contraindications (codebook available upon request) with miscodes resolved through discussion

Results

- General use warnings were most prominent (46% of dispensaries)
- Used logistic regression to assess presence of health warnings as a function of legality status of the state
- Recreational states’ dispensaries significantly less likely to have cannabis use warnings for pregnant women than medical states dispensaries, perhaps due to regulations in medical states to have certain information present on the website ($OR = .46, SE = .12, p = .002$).

Discussion

- General use warnings were seen to be most common in association with edibles; “start low and go slow” being the most common advice
- Dispensaries with patient handbooks and information sheets tended to provide the most detailed information on warnings and use
- Future directions for this research include conducting a thematic analysis on the openly accessible website content and text of the warnings to define patterns in how this information is being displayed to potential customers

“...just like alcohol, unfortunately, you can have too much leading to anxiety, rapid heart rate, or an extreme sedative effect called “couch-lock”

Tetrachoric Correlations of Study Variables

	GynoYN	PsychYN	GenYN	Legality
GynoYN	1.00	.86*	.90*	-.27*
PsychYN	.86*	1.00	.96*	-.19*
GenYN	.90*	.96*	1.00	-.11
Legality	-.27*	-.19*	-.11	1.00

Note: * = $p < .05$

Questions?
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