

The Information Seeking-Behaviour & Unmet Knowledge Needs of Older Medicinal Cannabis Consumers in Canada

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Outline

- Background
- Research Questions
- Methods
- Findings
- Discussion



Background

- Older cannabis consumers (aged 60+): ↑ cannabis consumption in recent years (Rotterman, 2019). Many for medical reasons, most commonly pain (Tumati et al., 2022).
- Prior research has centered on younger populations - little is known about how older Canadians seek out and access information about cannabis, and whether or how their information needs are met.
- Problematic because older persons are at higher risk of experiencing harmful side effects or negative health consequences (Hall, 2018; Minerbi et al., 2019), but may be hesitant to access their healthcare providers for information.
- Suggests a need to provide this population with better access to information and education about safely and effectively using cannabis to treat health conditions.

Study Objective

- To understand older consumers' experiences of accessing information about cannabis for medicinal reasons.

Research questions:

1. How do older adults go about accessing information about medicinal cannabis and what information sources do they consult?
2. What type of information do they seek?
3. What are their greatest unmet knowledge needs?



Methods

- Qualitative Descriptive design (Sandelowski 2000, 2010).
- Eligible participants (60+, consumers or prospective consumer for health reason) recruited through self-selection from across Canada.
- Semi-structured telephone interviews (20-60 minutes).
- Conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and thematic analysis.



Findings

- **Final sample:** 34 cannabis consumers and 2 prospective consumers.
- **Age:** median = 69.4 (range = 60-86).
- **Gender:** Man = 14, Woman = 22.
- **Province:** Alberta = 23, Manitoba = 4, Nova Scotia = 4, Ontario = 2, British Columbia = 2, Quebec = 1.
- **Town/City/Rural:** City = 27, Town = 6, Rural = 3
- **Reason for consuming:** Pain = 21, Sleep problems = 19, anxiety = 13, depression = 4.
- **Preferred form of consumption:** oil/tincture= 22, smoking= 13, vaporizer= 6, edibles= 6, topical cream/gel= 5, oil gel caps= 4, mouth spray= 3.
- **Preferred type of cannabis:** THC= 9, CBD=7, Both/Combination THC/CBD= 17.

Themes

3 themes characterizing older cannabis consumers' information seeking:

1) Knowledge Sources

2) Types of Information

3) Unmet knowledge needs



Knowledge Sources

- Online sources
- Cannabis retailers
- Family and friends
- Medicinal Cannabis Producers
- Healthcare professionals
(cannabis-specialized and not)



Types of Information

- **Effects & Medicinal Benefits:** CU13 “whether it would be effective or not ...What other people experience...what are the results from other people using it?”.
- **Side Effects & Risks:** CU19: “negative effects... any long-term side effects”. CU15: “is it compatible with other medications? Any contraindications?”
- **Cannabis Products:** CU12: “which product is best for you. Is it the CBD oil? Is it the gels? Is it ingesting it in food?” (CU12). Many were averse to smoking and preferred oil extracts that could be taken sublingually or ingested. Differences between CBD and THC.

Unmet Knowledge Needs

3 Broad Categories of Participants

- 1) **Sufficiently informed** (19/36): considered themselves to have sufficient knowledge and reported that they had no unanswered questions.
- 2) **Require basic knowledge** (13/36): which included prospective consumers, indicated that they had unanswered questions about basic information related to medicinal cannabis.
 - 1) **Higher learners** (4/36): had sufficient basic knowledge but were interested in acquiring a higher-level understanding of medicinal cannabis.



Unmet Knowledge Needs: Dosing

Little direction beyond “go low and slow”. CU26: confused about correct “quantities, the recommended dosages”. CU3: I'm on my own... I am completely on my own. And I'm experimenting and sometimes with some side effects that I find really uncomfortable.”

CU3: “When I first started using the CBD oil I asked them for doses, like how much you should use and that sort of stuff but they weren't very knowledgeable. So I had to figure it out for myself ...experimentation is the only way really. There's no guidelines....nobody has been able to say, 'OK, if you use this brand, you're going to need to use this much and start with this much and work from there.' The information isn't out there. I sort of adjusted what I take...was sort of self taught”.

Unmet Knowledge Needs: Treatment of Particular Health Conditions & Advanced Knowledge

- **Specific Health Conditions:** CU30: “my area of interest is very high is on bone health. Can CBD can actually help with bone density?” CU34: “CBD for neuropathy...somebody who knew something about that in each store or some central information place”
- **Advanced Knowledge:** “the history” of cannabis as a medicinal treatment... “understand the biochemistry”

Discussion

- Older people are increasingly seeking information about cannabis for health reasons and many have unmet information needs.
- Problematic that numerous participants reported relying on recreational sellers with no medical expertise for information about using cannabis medicinally.
- Primary care providers should become more familiar with cannabis as a therapeutic option. Evidence-based resources are available:

Useful link: CCSMH resources on Cannabis, which are well laid out and focused on older people: <https://ccsmh.ca/cannabis-and-older-adults-project/>

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