Youth With Mood Disorders Who Use Marijuana at Higher Risk for Death

Young people who smoke a lot of weed are more likely to harm themselves and die of any cause.

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Smoking marijuana is common among young people with mood disorders, such as major depressive disorder and bipolar disorder. But young marijuana users are at greater risk for self-harm and death, suggest new findings published in JAMA Pediatrics.

The study was conducted by researchers at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and The Ohio State University College of Medicine.

Scientists identified 204,780 youth ages 10 to 24 with mood disorders between 2010 and 2017 from Ohio Medicaid claims data linked with death certificate data. Next, researchers followed up on these young people for up to one year from the initial claim until the end of enrollment, the self-harm incident or death.

More than 10% of youths with mood disorders used cannabis, according to study findings. In addition, investigators noted that marijuana use was significantly associated with older Black males diagnosed with bipolar disease or who exhibited signs of other mood disorders and had previously harmed themselves and used mental health services.

“We also found that cannabis use disorder was significantly associated with self-harm, including death by unintentional overdose and homicide,” said Cynthia Fontanella, PhD, an associate professor in the department of psychiatry and behavioral health at Ohio State and the study’s lead author.

These findings, however, didn’t help scientists understand what exactly caused high rates of self-harm and led to death, Fontanella said.

Mary Fristad, PhD, an emerita professor in Ohio State’s department of psychiatry and behavioral health and the senior author of the inquiry, suggested that reducing rates of cannabis use and cannabis use disorder among young people may possibly decrease their risk for self-harm and death.

She stressed that individual and family-based cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational enhancement therapy were found to decrease marijuana use in youth.

For related coverage, read “Mental Disorders Increase Risk of Early Death, Study Says.”

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