Cannabis Use and Non-Use in Hispanics of Imperial County, CA

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Background

Imperial County, CA is situated just 17 miles north of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico and is inhabited by 180,883 residents.[1] 83% of the population is Hispanic or Latino and 31% are immigrants, the majority originating from Mexico.[1]

The only legal access to cannabis (marijuana) in the Imperial County has been through licensed delivery-only dispensaries.[2] Despite this, cannabis was the most prevalent drug in the Imperial County and was the highest seized drug at the Southwest CA-Mexico border in 2000.[3]

The recent legalization of cannabis in California necessitates that studies investigate cultural attitudes, perspectives, and the use of cannabis in those communities that are directly impacted by the policy changes. Hispanics of California are one such community and are of particular interest as they make up the second largest ethnic group in California and are one of the ethnic groups with the highest rates of cannabis use and cannabis use disorder.[1,4]

Documentation of ethnic communities' attitudes, perspectives, and cannabis use can aid in identifying the communities that will most benefit from cannabis use education, prevention, and intervention efforts in the future.

Objectives

- To identify the reasons for use and non-use of cannabis in the Hispanic community.

- To develop an understanding of current social attitudes and perspectives towards cannabis within the Hispanic community.

- To determine the level of cannabis use in the Imperial County's Hispanic community in order to compare to both U.S. population and U.S. Hispanic levels of use.

Methods

- Anonymous self-administered paper questionnaires were conducted in English and Spanish with customers selected at random from 3 local Walmart stores in the Imperial County.

- To be eligible for participation, subjects had to be Hispanic, over the age of 12, and current residents of the Imperial County, CA.

- Attitudes towards cannabis legalization was assessed using a 5- point rating scale (1=strongly support , 5=strongly oppose)

- Perceived stigma towards cannabis use was assessed using an 8 item 5-point Likert scale adapted from the Perceived Stigma of Substance Abuse Scale (PSAS) developed by Luoma, J.B. (2010).

- Associations between variables was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 24.0 for Windows.

Demographic Data

- 174 valid surveys were analyzed (56% female and 44% male)

- Mean age of participants was 33.04 years

- 73% of participants were U.S. born and 26% were immigrants from Mexico

- 97% of participants were Mexican, 2% Cuban or Puerto Rican, and 1% some other Hispanic ethnicity.

Results

CANNABIS USE

- Average age of cannabis use onset: 17.28 years (SD=5.19)

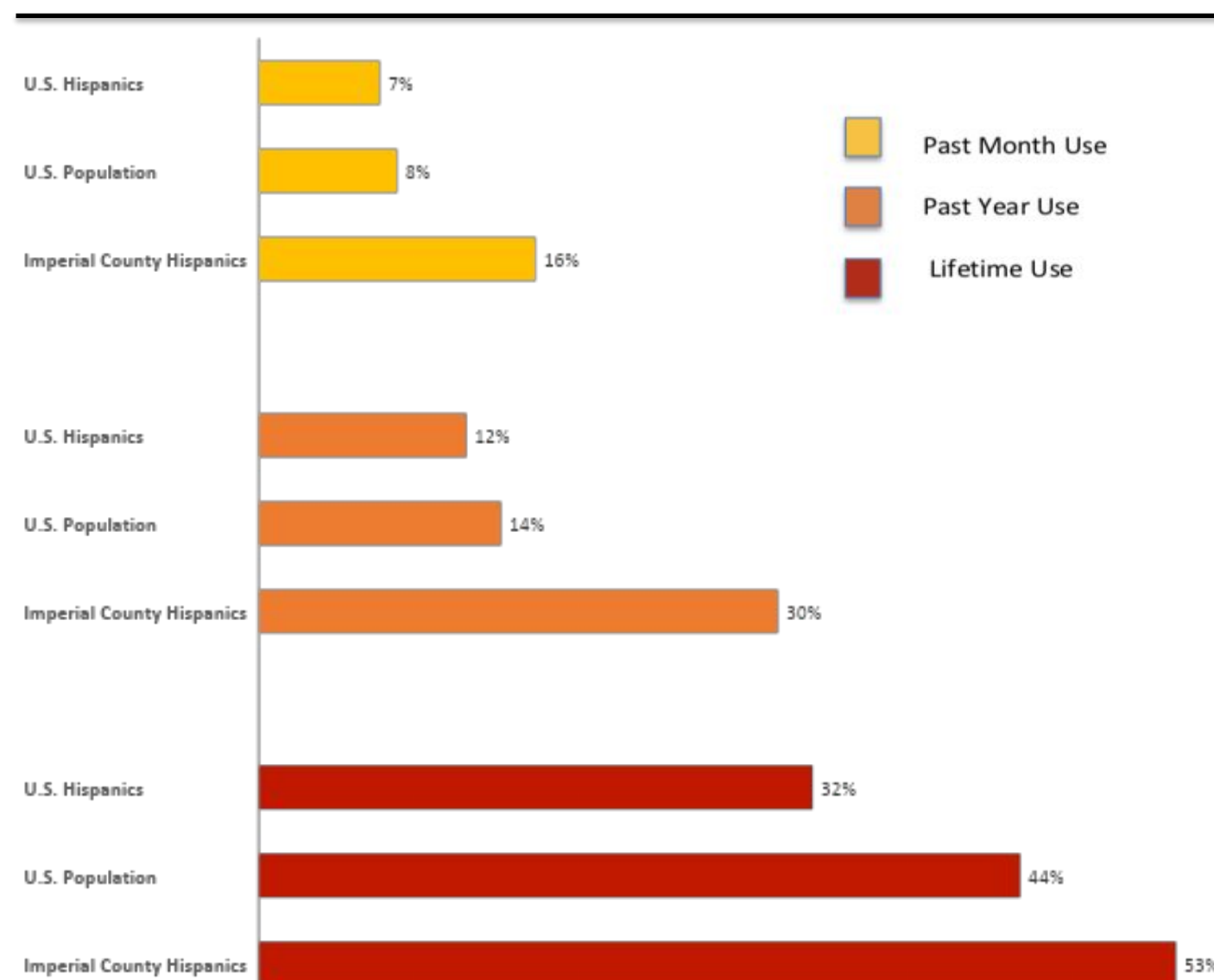- Percentage of current cannabis users (past 30 days): 16% of total sample

FIGURE 1. CANNABIS USE AMONG IMPERIAL COUNTY HISPANICS, U.S. HISPANICS, AND U.S. POPULATION.*[5]

*U.S. Hispanic and U.S. Population data pulled from SAMSHA 2015 national survey.
*Cannabis use was defined as having used cannabis or a cannabis-containing product at least 1 or more times in the specified time period.

- The most common reasons for abstaining from cannabis were due to negative personal or observed experiences, and fear of legal, social, or interpersonal repercussions.

- The most common reasons for using cannabis were due to stress relief, experimentation, anxiety coping, and pain relief.
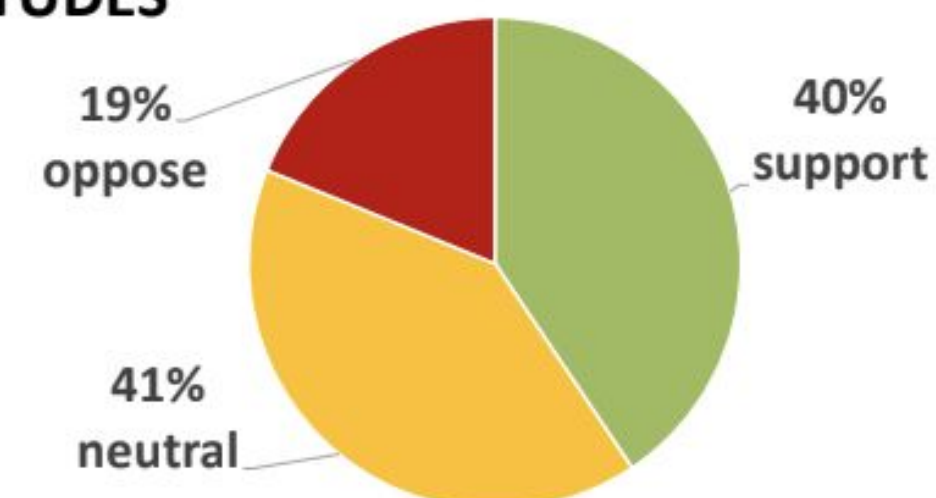
ATTITUDES

FIGURE 2. IMPERIAL COUNTY HISPANIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEGALIZATION OF CANNABIS

- Perceived social stigma towards cannabis was near the midpoint or neutral (M=3.17) out of a 5-point Likert scale.

- Time spent living in the U.S does not have a significant effect on the amount of lifetime cannabis use in this sample.

Conclusions

Based on the sample studied it appears that:

- Hispanics from the Imperial County appear to have higher rates of cannabis use in the past month, past year, and lifetime than U.S. Hispanics and the U.S. population. It is possible this is due to geographical proximity to the U.S.--Mexican border, one of the country's major entry points for cannabis.

- Overall perceived stigma towards cannabis is neutral in the Hispanic population sampled in this study.

- Hispanics from the Imperial County may be less likely to support legalization of cannabis than U.S. Hispanics (40 vs. 52%) and more likely to be neutral than U.S. Hispanics (41% vs. 4%).[6]

- Although this study aimed to survey a random sample of the population, it was limited to only surveying customers from local Walmart stores which may have introduced a socioeconomic status (SES) bias with an overrepresentation of individuals from lower SES. Future studies with similar objectives can be done by sampling from stores with a wider breadth of customer SES.

Acknowledgments

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