

# **Medical Cannabis: Vulnerable Populations, Mental Health Conditions**

Shanna Babalonis, Ph.D.

University of Kentucky

College of Medicine

Department of Behavioral Science

Center on Drug and Alcohol Research

# Medical Cannabis & Psychiatric Conditions

Overall, we know very little about medical cannabis and how it affects vulnerable populations, including those with psychiatric conditions

# Cannabinoids: Schizophrenia, Psychosis

- Endocannabinoid dysregulation has been detected in patients with schizophrenia and psychosis
- Cannabis associated with earlier psychosis episode in adolescents (association only)
- Cannabis use a risk factor for psychosis in those pre-disposed
- Several studies reported decreased anandamide concentrations of CSF in patients compared to controls; this appears to normalize with non-cannabinoid treatment; limitations to these studies (e.g., concomitant cannabis use)
- Cannabidiol (CBD) being explored as a treatment (some positive results in early studies; not conclusive) (see Leweke et al., 2018)
- Psychosis symptoms are more severe in patients that smoke marijuana compared to patients who have stopped or who have never used marijuana (Setien-Suero, 2019)

# Anxiety

- Many anecdotal reports that cannabidiol (CBD) alleviates anxiety (overall, appears to be the primary reason individuals report taking non-Rx CBD)
- Not well-established in the literature (little to no evidence in high quality studies in humans)
- Medical cannabis also reported to have some anxiolytic effects
- However, can also induce anxiety/panic as an acute reaction (along with tachycardia which can worsen anxiety reaction)
- No high-quality, placebo-controlled studies have thoroughly examined cannabis or CBD effects on anxiety – data desperately needed