

Cannabis use in the Australian Population

Results from the Australian Longitudinal Study of Health and Relationships

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Aim

- To present patterns of cannabis use over three years of data
- To provide prevalence and incidence data for cannabis use in the Australian general population
- To present cannabis use patterns by sex and age

Background

- According to the 2007 National Drug Survey (NDSHS) 37% of males and 29% females have ever used cannabis
- In the last 12 months cannabis use was reported at 9% (NDSHS)
- There exists little Australian population cohort data that examines patterns of cannabis use over time - most publications focus cross-sectional data, on young adults or sentinel convenience samples (i.e., IDRS data)

Method

- Representative Australian household sample
- Men and women aged 16–64 years
- Selected by random digit dialling
- Computer-assisted telephone interview
- Interviews undertaken yearly
- Intake panel (n=8656), panel 2 (n=6609), panel 3 (n=5447)

Cannabis questions

Ever used cannabis at least 10 times
Used cannabis in the last 12 months
Frequency of cannabis use (day, weekly, less often)

Results

- At intake - 1 in 4 people had ever used cannabis: 31% of men and 20% of women.
- At intake - In the last 12 months 9% of the population had used cannabis: 11% men and 6% women. This prevalence estimate remained constant across the three panels/years

First time use (during study period)

Since the intake interview 0.7% of the population used cannabis for the first time. Men and young adults were more likely to report first time cannabis use (see figure 1)

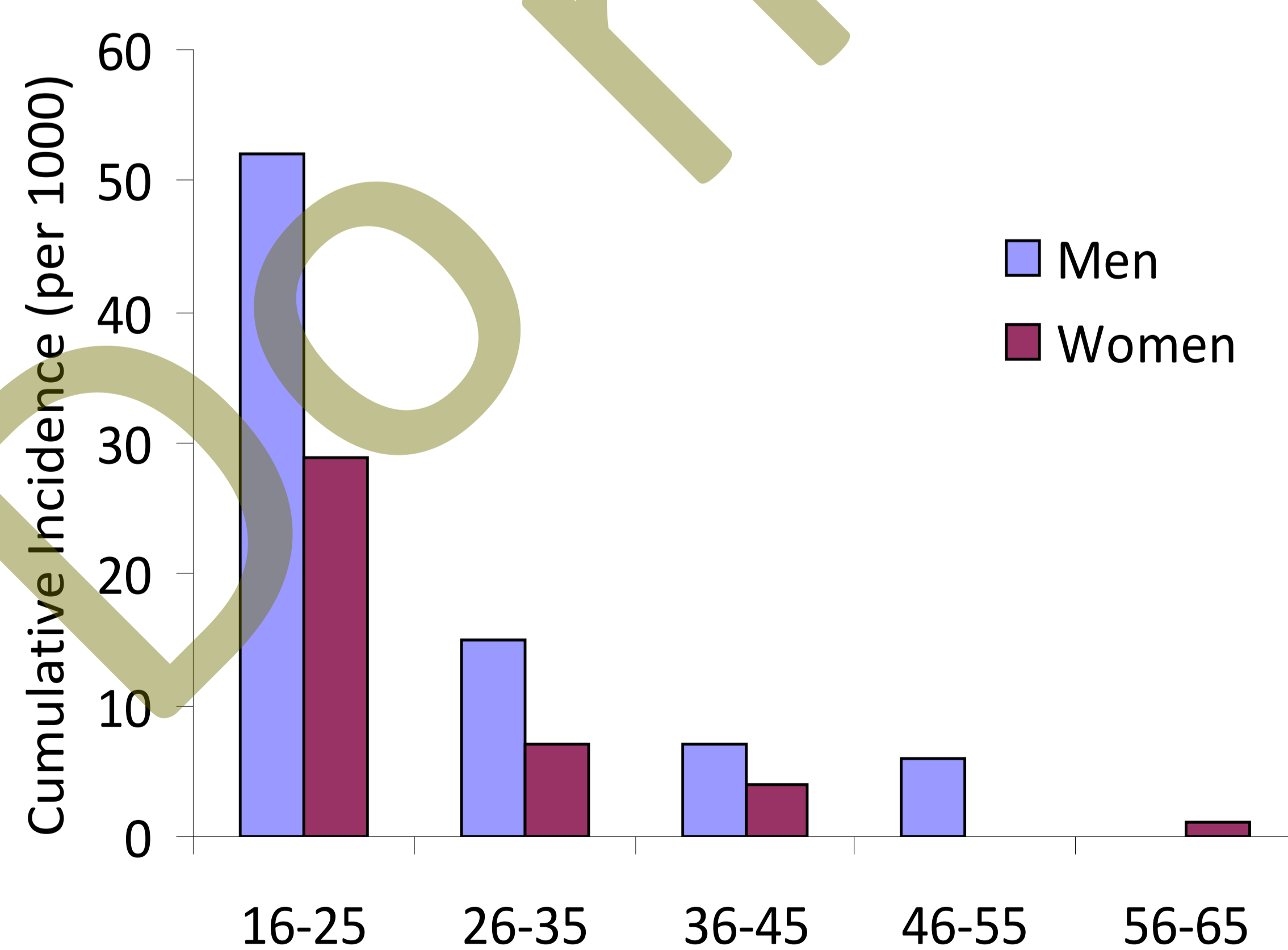


Fig. 1: First time cannabis use since intake

Patterns of Cessation (during study period)

During the study the cumulative incidence for cannabis cessation was 25%. Women were more likely to cease using cannabis; cessation patterns varied by age group (see figure 2)

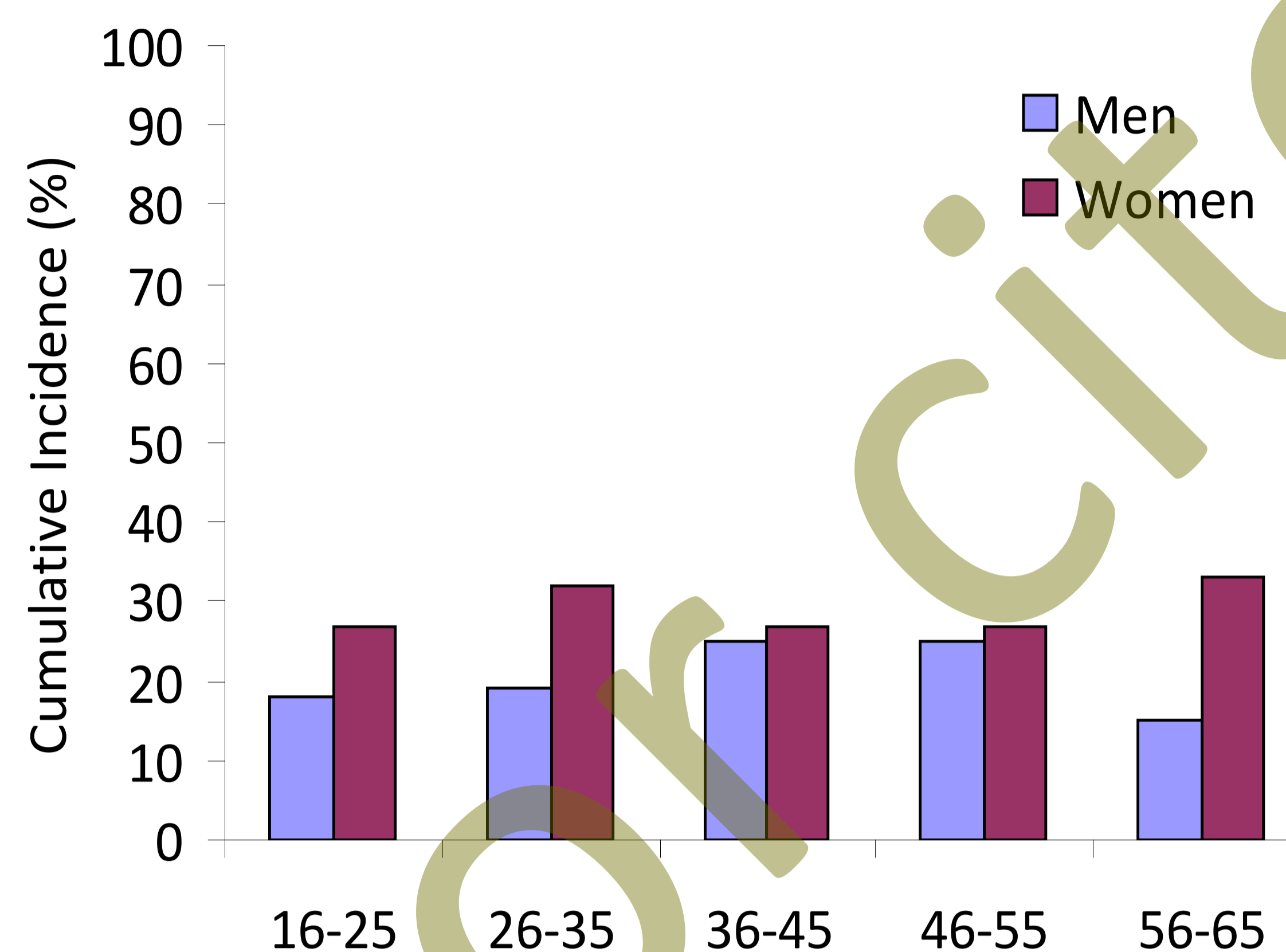


Fig. 2: Cannabis cessation during the study

Of those who reported regular cannabis use in the year prior to intake 7% had reported cessation at the second interview but then regular cannabis use at the third interview (i.e., yes, no, yes).

Changes in frequency of use (over the study period)

For the majority of people who used cannabis the frequency of use did not vary greatly during the study period (see table below). Whilst most people (60%) who used cannabis daily (at time T-1) continued to do so each year of follow-up (time T), 40% reported a reduction in cannabis use across time. Those who used cannabis weekly were more likely to remain as weekly users or indicate using more infrequently (less often). The majority of people who used cannabis infrequently at any interview continued to do so at each successive interview.

Previous use (T-1)	Current use (T)			Total
	Daily	Weekly	Less often*	
Daily	61	20	19	100
Weekly	16	50	34	100
Less often*	4	17	79	100

* Less often refers to monthly or yearly

Discussion

- The prevalence of cannabis use reported here is slightly less than those reported in NDSHS. This disparity is likely a result of our population having an upper age limit of 64 whilst NDSHS did not have a limit
- Whilst the onset of cannabis use (during the study period) was more common among young adults it was still observed in those 35 years and older
- Cessation of cannabis use was more likely for women than for men during the two year follow up
- Patterns in frequency of use (see table) suggest that during the three year study period any change in cannabis use was towards less use
- Future research will highlight variations in cannabis behaviour for other socio-demographics as well as predictors of cessation

ALSHR is based at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, Melbourne.
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