



# Perceived Access to Cannabis and Other Substances in University Students Post Cannabis Legalization

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## INTRODUCTION

- In April 2017, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-45 which meant to keep cannabis out of the hands of youth and keep profits out of the hands of criminals and organized crime <sup>2</sup>.
- Due to the current legalization, concerns about the impact of cannabis use on youth are heightened.
- Ease of access refers to the range of ability to access a particular drug such as cannabis, alcohol, nicotine and other illicit drugs.
- Concerns about perceptions of access are not only specific to cannabis since legalization has occurred, but to alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs as well <sup>1,3,4</sup>.
- This study is one of the first studies in Canada since the legalization of cannabis, to investigate whether cannabis use selectively influences perceived access to nicotine, alcohol, cannabis or illicit drugs.

## METHODOLOGY

- Participants were undergraduate students (N = 111) in years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 from The University of British Columbia Okanagan campus. They were asked to indicate their sex (i.e. male, female, other or prefer not to say).
- **The Cognition and Substance Use Study – Part One** was administered which measures social relationships, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings associated with social interactions and perspectives of substance use.
- Questions applicable to this study asked about current or intended use of nicotine, alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs without a prescription, how much they used on a typical day, and when the last time they used was.
- Ease of access was measured by asking students “How difficult it is for you to get the following drugs; Nicotine, Alcohol, Cannabis and Other drugs without a prescription?” They rated their answers on a 7-point Likert scale from “Extremely difficult” to “Extremely easy”.
- Students were reminded that their answers are kept secret and to please answer as honestly as they can.

## DISCUSSION

### Conclusions:

- A minimal difference between current users and non users of cannabis and alcohol was found for how easy it is to access nicotine and alcohol.
- A difference in perceptions of ease of access to Cannabis and illicit drugs was reported by students who are currently using cannabis or alcohol but not to nicotine and alcohol.
- Students who currently use cannabis or alcohol report higher ease of access to cannabis and illicit drugs than those who do not currently use.
- The hypothesis that cannabis use or alcohol use selectively influences perceived access to nicotine, alcohol, cannabis or illicit drugs, is supported by these findings.

### Implications:

- The current evidence suggests that programs which are aimed at reducing perceived ease of access and use, should remain a key priority.
- This study is valuable for future prevention research.
- Due to the infancy of legalization of cannabis in Canada, further replication study research on perception of access would be valuable if it were conducted with students who are attending a university in another province.

### Limitations:

- Due to the infancy of legalization in Canada, no information is yet available on the long term effects of Cannabis legalization in Canada.
- The sample size had a higher ratio of female to male students.
- This survey included a sample of university students from the province of British Columbia which has been historically recognized as a high cannabis consumption province. Therefore, the results may not be generalizable to other provinces.

## Research Question

Does cannabis use and/or alcohol use selectively influence perceived access to cannabis, nicotine, alcohol, or illicit drugs?

How difficult is it for you to get the following drugs?				
Condition	Nicotine	Alcohol	Cannabis	Other drugs without prescription
Extremely easy	0	0	0	0
Very easy	0	0	0	0
Somewhat easy	0	0	0	0
Neither difficult nor easy	0	0	0	0
Somewhat difficult	0	0	0	0
Very difficult	0	0	0	0
Extremely difficult	0	0	0	0

Note. Perception of Access Measure

Please answer the following questions about your cannabis use: How often do you use marijuana?

0 Monthly or less  
 1 2-4 times a month  
 2 2-3 times a week  
 3 4 or more times a week  
 4 never

Please answer the following questions about your alcohol use: How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

0 Monthly or less  
 1 2-4 times a month  
 2 2-3 times a week  
 3 4 or more times a week  
 4 never

## RESULTS

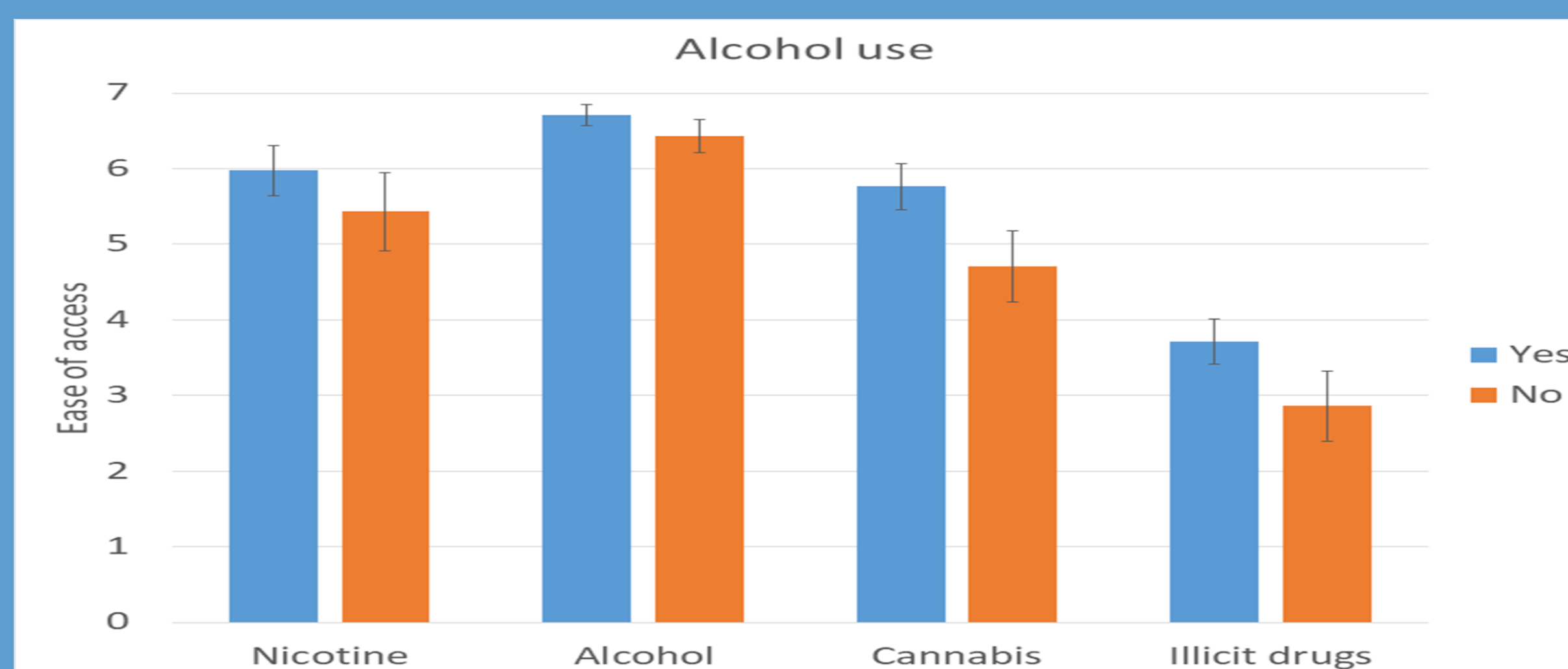


Figure 1. Post legalization levels reported by University students for ease of access to alcohol

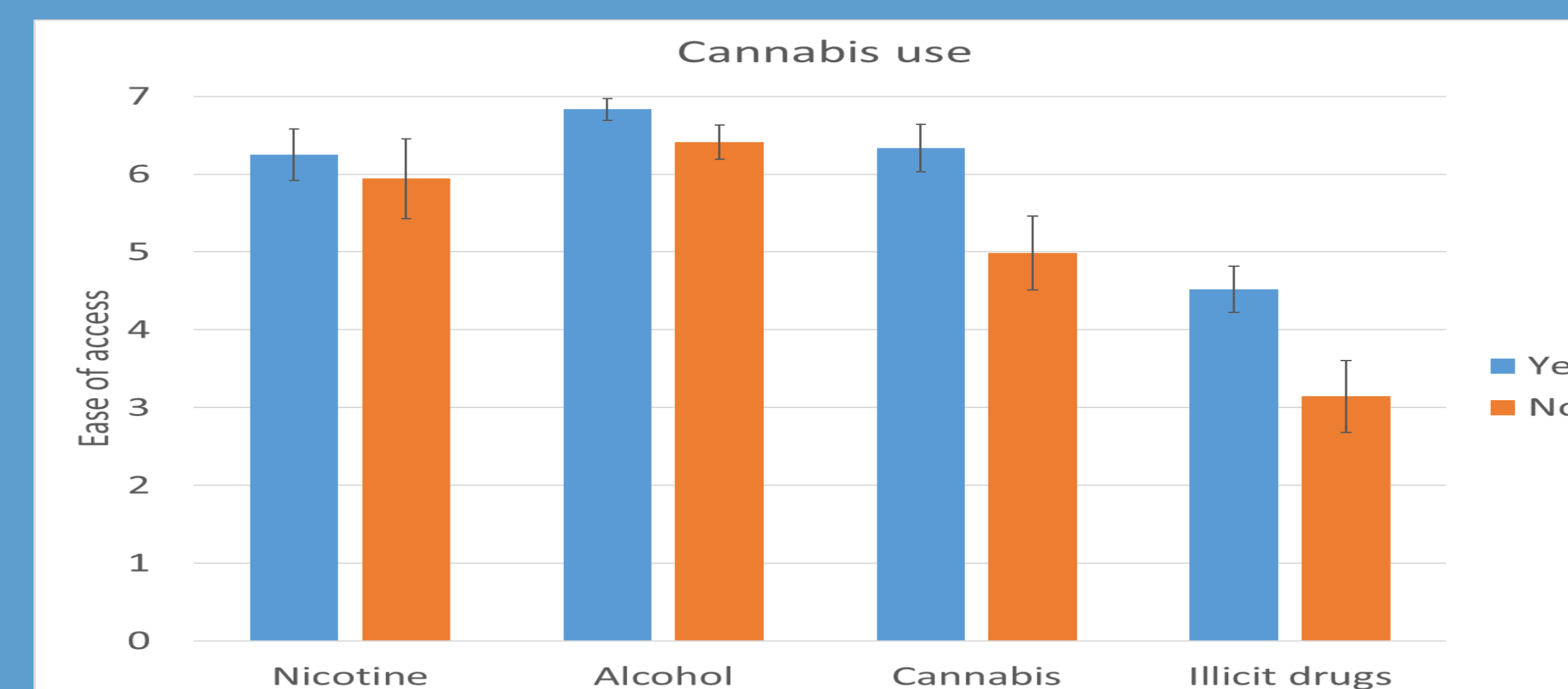


Figure 2. Post legalization levels reported by University students for ease of access to cannabis

### Descriptive Statistics

- Participants ranged in ages 14 to 32 years ( $M=19.95$ ,  $SD=2.29$ ) at the time of the study. 22.5% of the sample were Males ( $n=25$ ), and 77.5% of the sample were females ( $n=86$ ).
- Students were currently enrolled in years 1 ( $N=37$ ), 2 ( $N=46$ ), 3 ( $N=15$ ), 4 ( $N=8$ ), and 5 ( $N=5$ ) of their studies at the University of British Columbia Okanagan.

### Cannabis Use

67% of students ( $N=74$ ) out of 111 students answered if they used cannabis, 84% reported cannabis use and 16% reported no use.

### Alcohol Use

100% of students ( $N=111$ ) answered if they used alcohol, 92% reported alcohol use and 8% reported no use.

## REFERENCES

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