

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study seeks to explore the relationship between help-seeking behaviors and non-help-seeking behaviors pertaining to substance misuse. The study seeks to explore the relationship between substance use and beliefs about mental health treatment.

**Methods:** The current study utilizes data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSUDH). The current study focuses on participants who are male and female adults, ages 18 years and older, who misuse substances of all racial and ethnic backgrounds who misuse substances. The variables in this study are help-seeking behaviors and substance use.

**Results:** Chi-square test analysis was conducted to measure whether participants felt alcohol and marijuana use was causing problems with emotions, nerves, or mental health, and if it affected their perceived need for treatment. The current results are consistent with previous findings in that individuals are less likely to seek mental health treatment when they misuse substances. Current data found a trend between help-seeking behaviors, race/Hispanicity, and gender. Although data was not statistically significant, non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black/African American groups responded having the greatest number of alcohol consumption compared to other race/Hispanicity groups.

**Conclusion:** Although the current findings did not quite support the hypothesis, it did highlight the how substance use affects help-seeking behaviors. The current findings suggest how substance use influences help-seeking behaviors for mental health treatment and how it may be essential to reduce barriers for individuals to seek mental health treatment for their substance misuse. Further assessment is necessary to identify individual's beliefs about mental health treatment and reasoning behind substance misuse in order to provide effective mental health treatment.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Significance

- In 2019, 20% of Americans had a mental illness and a substance use disorder. Many have the disorder and do not receive treatment for it (Thomas, 2019).
- The lifetime illicit drug and alcohol use rates increase dramatically when individuals turn 18 years old (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 2016).
- A variety of barriers, such as self-sufficiency, stigma, and cost, deter individuals from seeking and receiving mental health treatment and services (Choi, DiNitto, & Marti, 2014; Mason et al., 2013; Mojtabai et al., 2014).

#### Purpose

- This study seeks to find a relationship between mental health help-seeking behaviors and substance use among adults by gender and race. Specifically, the study seeks to explore the relationship between help-seeking behaviors and non-help-seeking behaviors pertaining to substance misuse. The research will address barriers to seeking and accessing mental health services for individuals with substance use problems in hopes to break down barriers.

#### Research Question

- What is the relationship between mental health help-seeking behaviors and substance use among different races and genders?

#### Hypotheses

- Caucasian men are more likely to misuse substances and less likely to access mental health services.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Prevalence of Substance & Mental Health Issues

- Substance misuse deters individuals from seeking mental health services (Kirkner, Relyea, & Ullman, 2018; Mulvaney-Day et al., 2012).
- Diverse reasons as to why individuals choose substances as their coping method (Kirkner, Relyea, & Ullman, 2018; Mulvaney-Day et al., 2012).
- Traumatic experiences and posttraumatic stress disorder play a large role in substance misuse (Kirkner, Relyea, & Ullman, 2018).

#### Gender and Race Differences with Substance Misuse

- Males are more likely to have a substance disorder than females (Welty et al., 2016).
- African-American males were most likely to misuse and be dependent on marijuana than any other race (Mason et al., 2013).
- Caucasian males are more likely to be at risk for binge drinking and marijuana than Caucasian females. Caucasian males and females are more likely than other racial groups to be at risk for substance use (Mason et al., 2013).
- Although Caucasians have a higher likelihood of drinking to intoxication and binge drinking, the other racial groups are very close as well. All other racial groups experience problems related to alcohol misuse, but a higher likelihood of marijuana-use (Minich, Rospenda, & Richman, 2009; Welty et al., 2016).

#### Relationship Between Substance Misuse and Help-seeking Behaviors

- Disproportionate amount of substance users who do not seek mental health services and misuse substances. There is a lower rate of help-seeking behaviors for marijuana-use in comparison to other drugs and alcohol misuse. Overall, there is a lower rate of help-seeking behaviors among marijuana no matter what status they had with marijuana use (Choi, DiNitto, & Marti, 2017).

#### Race and Gender Differences in Mental Health Services Access

- Caucasians are more likely to utilize mental health services compared to non-Caucasians (Edlund, Booth, & Han, 2012; Minich, Rospenda, & Richman, 2009; Narendorf & Palmer, 2016).
- Nonwhites who use mental health services have decreased drinking problems when compared to nonwhites do not use services (Minich, Rospenda, & Richman, 2009).
- Women were more likely to perceive, seek and receive mental health treatment compared to men and all other racial groups (Dschaak & Juntunen, 2018; Edlund, Booth, & Han, 2012; Mason et al., 2013; Minich, Rospenda, & Richman, 2009; Narendorf & Palmer, 2016).

### METHODS

#### Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- Secondary data was obtained from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSUDH).
- The current study only focuses on participants who are adults (ages 18+) and use substances.
- Current data examines race/Hispanicity, gender, age, education level, self-reported overall health, and substance use.

#### Measures

##### Descriptive Statistics

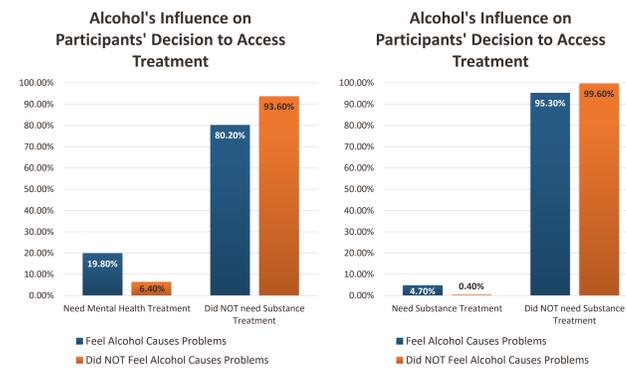
##### Race/Hispanicity

What is your best estimate of the number of days you drank alcohol during the past 30 days?	What is your best estimate of the number of days you used marijuana or hashish during the past 30 days?
During the past 12 months, did you want to or try to cut down or stop drinking alcohol?	During the past 12 months, did you have any problems with your emotions, nerves, or mental health that were probably caused or made worse by drinking alcohol?
During the past 12 months, did you want to or try to cut down or stop using marijuana or hashish?	During the past 12 months, did you have any problems with your emotions, nerves, or mental health that were probably caused or made worse by your use of marijuana or hashish?
Did you continue to use marijuana or hashish even though you thought it was causing you to have problems with your emotions, nerves, or mental health?	During the past 12 months, did you need treatment or counseling for your alcohol or drug use?
Ever had anxiety?	Ever had depression?

### RESULTS

#### Chi-Square Test Analyses

##### Relationship Between Effects of Alcohol and Treatment



##### Ability to Cut Down Drug and Substance Use

Relationship between Ability to Cut Down Alcohol and treatment	Need Substance Treatment %()		Need Mental Health Treatment %()	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Able to Cut Down Alcohol Intake*				
Yes	1.5% (109)	98.5% (7258)	8.6% (658)	91.4% (7037)
No	0.4% (67)	99.6% (18598)	6.9% (1299)	93.1% (17576)

\*p < 0.01

Relationship between Ability to Cut Down Marijuana and treatment	Need Substance Treatment %()		Need Mental Health Treatment %()	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Able to Cut Down Marijuana Intake*				
Yes	2.4% (46)	97.6% (1896)	10.7% (224)	89.3% (1865)
No	1.5% (53)	98.5% (3581)	8.4% (318)	91.6% (3488)

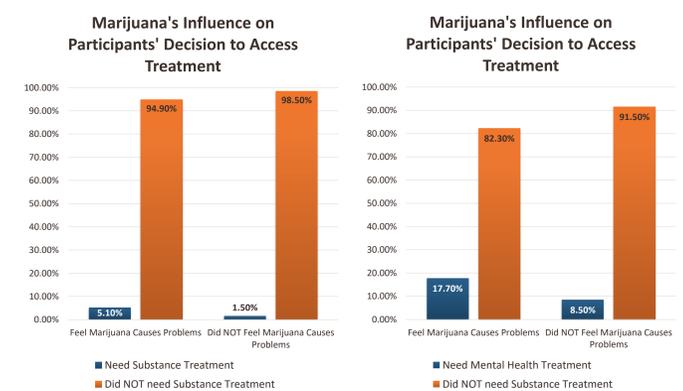
\*p < 0.01

##### Relationship Between Gender, Race, and Need for Substance Treatment

Relationship between Gender, Race/Hispanicity and Need for Substance Treatment	Perceived Need for Substance Treatment %()	
	Yes	No
Race/Hispanicity*		
Non-Hispanic White	0.5% (125)	99.5% (23551)
Non-Hispanic Black/African American	1% (41)	99% (3995)
Non-Hispanic Native American/American Indian Native	1.1% (6)	98.9% (544)
Non-Hispanic Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.6% (1)	99.4% (177)
Non-Hispanic Asian	0.1% (2)	99.9% (1356)
Non-Hispanic more than one race	1% (11)	99% (1109)
Hispanic	0.5% (27)	99.5% (5421)

\*p < 0.01

##### Relationship Between Effects of Marijuana and Treatment



### DISCUSSION

#### Summary of Findings

- Findings were inconsistent and could not support the hypothesis.
- However, findings indicated a trend between substance misuse and help-seeking behaviors. Current findings were in support of previous studies: adults are less likely to seek mental health treatment when they misuse alcohol and marijuana substances.
- Similarly, a trend between misusing substances and mental health effects were prevalent: adults who misused alcohol reported having mental health effects; whereas, adults who reported misusing marijuana did not report having mental health effects.
- Future research should analyze the differences between racial/ethnic groups and alcohol and marijuana use. Future findings will help social workers understand the discrepancies and adapt intervention and resources to findings.
- Future research should identify the relationship between gender and substance use.

#### Implications

- There are a variety of reasons as to why participants did not perceive a need for mental health treatment. Further assessment of individuals who misuse substances is necessary to provide appropriate resources and services.
- Mental health treatment barriers include self-medication, self-sufficiency, stigma, and more. Barriers may play a crucial role in seeking mental health treatment. Further assessment is needed to understand individuals' reasoning for not seeking mental health services. Assessment of barriers helps social workers in breaking down barriers.
- Reducing barriers will assist individuals in accessing the mental health care they need. Furthermore, reducing barriers can impact the society at large, not just individuals who misuse substances, which therefore provides more accurate information on mental health services and promotes individuals to seek mental health services and resources.

#### Strengths and Limitations

- Large sample population provided reliable source of information.
- NSUDH's survey data asked specific questions that focused on substance use and mental health treatment which depicted good general analysis of sample population.
- Despite the large sample population, there are limitations to this study that should be considered.
- Due to the dataset's use of cross-sectional surveys, causality cannot be inferred.
- Self-reported data may not be valid.
- Participant bias may be present because the subject of the matter was substance use and treatment.

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