Abstract

Objective: Although substance use (SU) is elevated in ADHD and both are associated with disrupted emotional functioning, little is known about how emotions and SU interact in ADHD. We used a mixed qualitative–quantitative approach to explore this relationship.

Method: Narrative comments were coded for 67 persistent (50 ADHD, 17 local normative comparison group [LNCG]) and 25 resistant (20 ADHD, 5 LNCG) substance users from the Multimodal Treatment Study of Children with ADHD (MTA) adult follow-up (21.7–26.7 years old).

Results: SU persisters perceived SU positively affects emotional states and positive emotional effects outweigh negative effects. No ADHD group effects emerged. Qualitative analysis identified perceptions that cannabis-enhanced positive mood for ADHD and LNCG SU persisters and improved negative mood and ADHD for ADHD SU persisters.

Conclusion: Perceptions about SU broadly and mood does not differentiate ADHD and non-ADHD SU persisters. However, perceptions that cannabis is therapeutic may inform ADHD-related risk for cannabis use.