9 Conclusion

The evidence for a causal link between cannabis and mood and anxiety disorders is not as strong as that for schizophrenia. Not only are the effect sizes relatively smaller, there are several factors such as internalising symptoms, conduct disorders and cognitive style that may explain the association. That said, it is equally plausible that the adverse social and psychological consequences of cannabis use may well contribute to the emergence of these mental health disorders. In terms of drug education, it is quite reasonable to warn potential users of the association of cannabis use with mood and anxiety disorders while acknowledging that causality has not been conclusively demonstrated. Early, frequent and continued cannabis use may increase the risk of experiencing depression in adulthood, especially in females.

The research on anxiety and bipolar disorder is sparse, and results are mixed. Thus, it is difficult to conclude whether or not cannabis use plays a causal role in these disorders at this stage, particularly as alternative explanations have not been disconfirmed.

Genes clearly play an important role in mood and anxiety disorders, and it is likely that they interact with environmental risk factors, such as stress, and perhaps substance use, to bring about the onset of the disorder. Genes may lead to greater sensitivity to environmental risk factors, or they may lead to a greater likelihood of exposure to an environmental risk factor, or a combination of both [257].

Key Points: Cannabis and depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses

- Recent evidence suggests that early, frequent and continued cannabis use increases the risk of experiencing depression in adulthood, although the evidence for early self-medication is stronger for depression.
- There is a lack of evidence suggesting that cannabis plays a causal role in the development of anxiety disorders or bipolar disorder.
- Cannabis appears to adversely influence the symptoms of mood and anxiety disorders in the long term even though it may alleviate them during intoxication.