# Research Brief

## Psychoactive Substance Use Among Individuals with Chronic Spinal Cord Injury: Patterns and Characteristics

### Introduction

Psychoactive substances (PAS) are drugs or other substances that affect how the brain works. They can cause changes in mood, awareness, and behavior, and may contribute to increased risk of adverse outcomes, such as overdose or death. A few studies have found greater use of PAS among those with spinal cord injury (SCI), and there is a need for better understanding of the extent of this issue. The purpose of this study was to identify patterns of non-prescription PAS use (e.g., cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine-type stimulants, inhalants, sedatives or sleeping pills, hallucinogens, and opioids) among individuals with SCI, and to assess the role of demographic and injury characteristics in PAS use.

### Key Findings

- Of the 4,577 participants, 24.1% of participants claimed they have used at least one nonprescription PAS. Among these participants, 12.1% reported only using cannabis, while 7.7% reported only using other PAS, and 4.3% reported using both cannabis and other PAS.
- Cannabis was the most frequently reported PAS (16.4%) followed by sedatives or sleeping pills (8.0%).
- It was shown that women, participants with higher levels of education and income, and those with C1-C4 injuries who were unable to walk were less likely to report the use of PAS.
- Race and ethnicity were not related to PAS use.

### Conclusion

The study found nearly 25% of participants reported non-prescription PAS use within the past 3 months, which is higher than in the general population. There were differences in how personal characteristics related to individual's substance use. These findings may be used to identify individuals at a higher risk for PAS use, and tailor interventions. Further research will allow for a better understanding of the patterns seen between SCI and PAS use, which may prevent poor outcomes among those who are vulnerable.

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