

Student-led study identifies link between IBD and substance use disorder

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Heather Carney, lead author and third-year pharmacy student. Credit: University of Manitoba

A new study published last month in *Inflammatory Bowel Diseases* has found that one in six persons with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) experience a substance use disorder in their lifetime.

"The rates of IBD in Canada are among the highest in the world," says lead author Heather Carney, a third-year pharmacy student, who was supervised by Dr. Kaarina Kowalec, assistant professor, College of Pharmacy, Rady Faculty of Health Sciences. "Separately, IBD and substance use disorder have a significant impact on quality of life. Our research is among the first to investigate substance use disorder in IBD and provides a foundation for future research of the burden and harms of comorbid IBD and substance use disorder."

IBD is an inflammatory condition, encompassing [ulcerative colitis](#) and Crohn's Disease, where the body launches inflammatory responses against the gastrointestinal tract, resulting in symptoms such as severe diarrhea, abdominal pain, weight loss and fatigue.

The study, conducted by Carney through a College of Pharmacy-funded Undergraduate Summer Research Award, also identified that people with IBD and who are men, smokers, those who have past or current anxiety disorders, and those with more pain are at greater risk for experiencing a substance use disorder.

For the study, Carney evaluated the prevalence and risk factors of substance use disorders in those with IBD using data collected from 247 individuals in Manitoba with IBD, recruited as part of a larger study investigating psychiatric comorbidities in immune-mediated inflammatory diseases.

Carney says that while it has been established that there is a strong association between IBD and several psychiatric [disorders](#), including depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder, there was minimal prior research of the association between substance use disorder and IBD.

Carney says they hope to see more resources allocated for prevention and harm reduction to help decrease the burden of substance use disorder in those with IBD as well as in the general population. She also hopes to see future research on the effect of substance use disorder on outcomes in IBD, which are still unknown.

"The prevalence of substance use disorder in those with IBD suggests an opportunity for screening and targeted interventions. We know [substance use disorder](#) can have a profound effect on the individual and the community—including issues at school or work, relationship difficulties, behaviour changes and legal problems," she says.

More information: Heather Carney et al. Prevalence and Risk Factors of Substance Use Disorder in Inflammatory Bowel Disease, *Inflammatory Bowel Diseases* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/ibd/izaa014](#)

Provided by University of Manitoba

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