Adolescent caffeine use: associations with other substance use and depression in an Australian rural population

Georgina Black¹, Rachel Roberts², Rhys Scott¹, Emily Hunt²
¹Psychological Services, Families SA Statewide Services, DECD, SA, ²University of Adelaide, SA

Introduction and aims: Research suggests that caffeine use is increasing in the adolescent population and that it may have adverse effects for their health and wellbeing; however, there is little evidence to support these findings in Australian non-metropolitan samples. This study aims to describe caffeine use in an Australian rural adolescent sample, and its relationship to depression and other substance use.

Design and methods: Participants were 531 high-school students from rural South Australia, who completed the 6-Item Kutcher Adolescent Depression Scale (KADS-6) and measures of caffeinated beverage consumption and other substance use.

Results: Caffeine use was frequent for the sample, and was shown to increase across adolescence. Associations were found with use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit substances. A significant relationship was found between caffeine use and depression, and specifically with experiences of low mood, anxiety and low energy. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed low energy to be the strongest predictor of caffeine use, when controlling for age.

Discussion and conclusions: This study supported findings that Australian rural adolescents frequently use caffeine and that caffeine use may be associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including depression, and alcohol and substance use.