



# The Relationship Between Anxiety and Seeking Treatment for Drug Abuse

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## Introduction

- Individuals with mental health disorders have an increased vulnerability to drug abuse than those without mental health disorders (American Addiction Center, 2023). The presence of a mental health disorder may impact one's ability to seek treatment in addition to barriers around vital care rooted in economic and racial inequality.
- Understanding the intersection between substance use and anxiety disorders is important for effective treatment, as the presence of both could exacerbate the symptoms of the other (Stewart and Conrod, 2008).
- There is an established link between cannabis use disorder and high rates of comorbid anxiety disorders and an integrated approach to cannabis and anxiety reduction treatment has proven to be more effective (Buckner J.D., et al., 2018).

## Research Questions

- Do individuals with anxiety seek treatment for cannabis abuse more or less than those without anxiety? Does this relationship differ for individuals using other drugs?
- How do other factors such as income, sex, and race, impact the relationship?

## Methods

### Sample

- Individuals with anxiety disorder in their lifetime (n=43,093) from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (NESARC) of 2001-2002, a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults in the the U.S.

### Measures

- Cannabis abuse/dependence prior to the past 12 months, and generalized anxiety over the course of a lifetime, were measured using DSM-IV Diagnoses.
- Evaluating participants who sought treatment was measured by the question: "Ever sought help because of medicine or drug abuse?"
- Variables including cocaine abuse/dependence and opioid abuse/dependence were measured using DSM-IV Diagnoses, race was measured by self-identified imputed

race/ethnicity, and income was evaluated by total personal income in the last 12 months, collapsing responses to a scale of 1 (lowest income levels) to 4 (highest income levels).

## Results

### Univariate

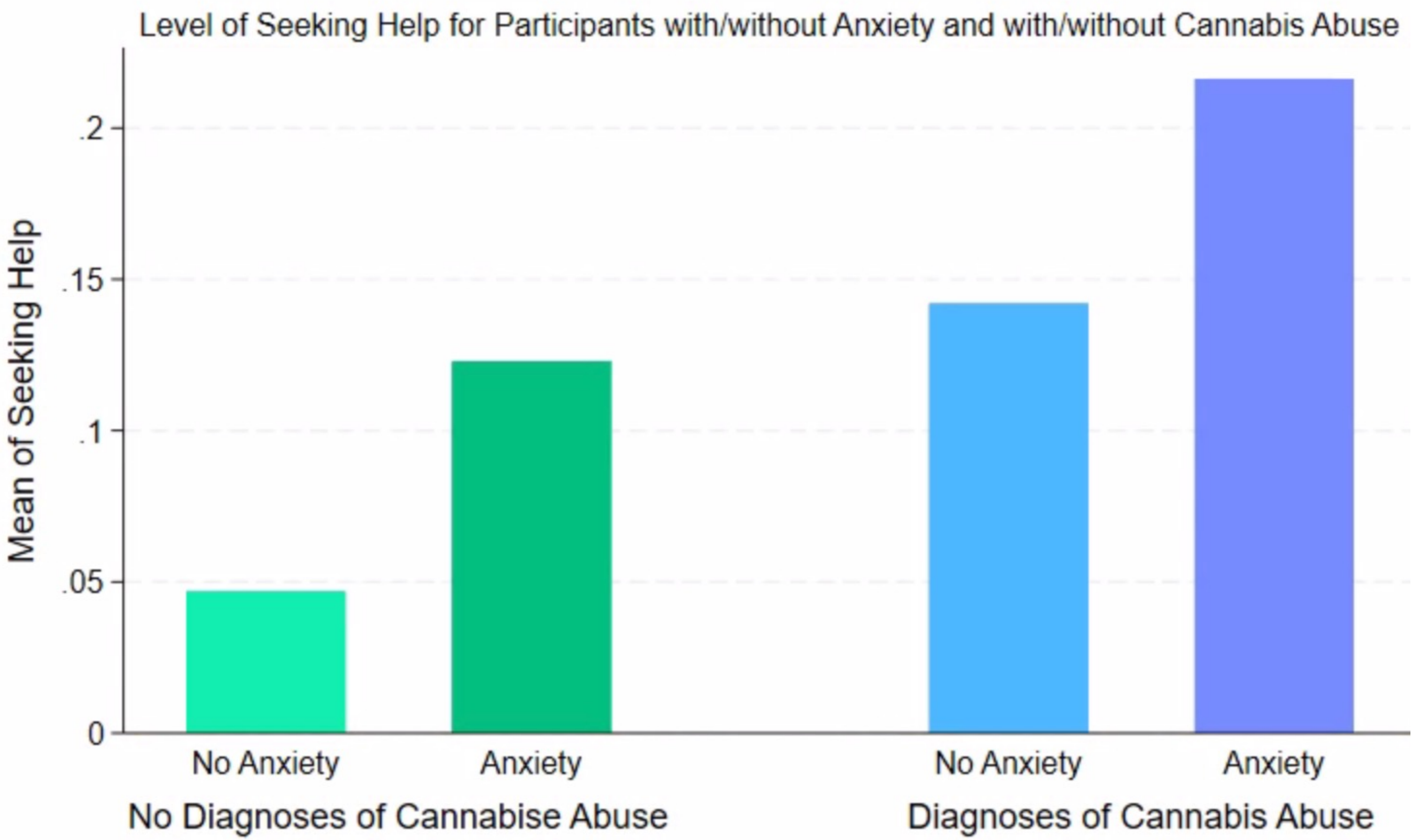
- 4.7% of participants (n=1938) met the criteria for generalized anxiety disorder in their lifetime.
- 8% of participants met the criteria for cannabis abuse/dependence.
- Out of those who report using drugs, 9.5% say that they sought help in their lifetime.

### Bivariate

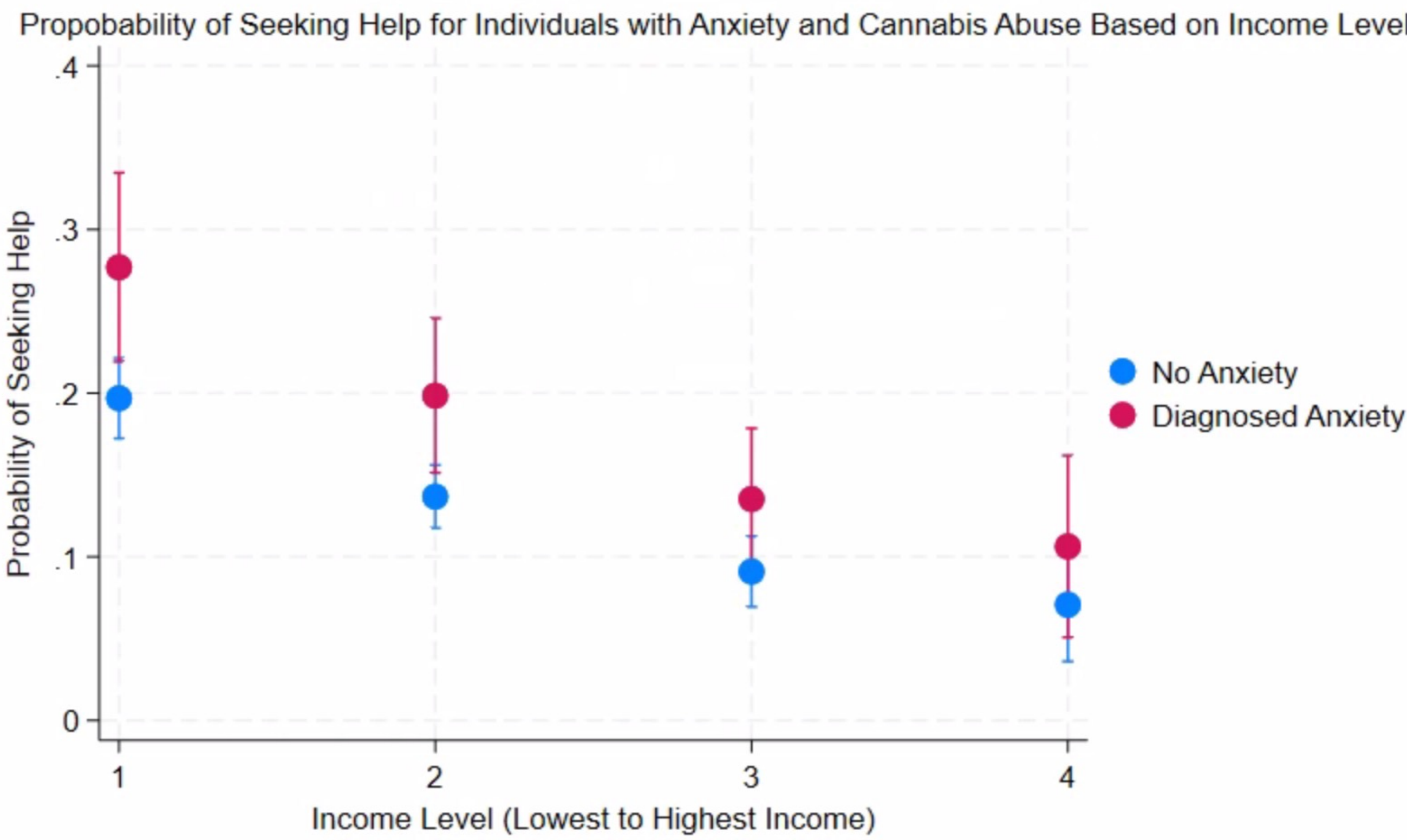
- Chi-square analysis showed that individuals with anxiety were significantly likely to have sought help in their lifetime ( $p < 0.001$ ).

### Multivariate

- Logistic regression analyses showed that individuals with anxiety and cannabis use disorder were significantly more likely to seek help than those without (OR 1.67,  $p < .001$ ).
- Opioid abuse and cocaine abuse are not significantly correlated with anxiety disorder and seeking help.
- Sex and race are not significant predictors in seeking help for individuals with anxiety and cannabis use disorder.
- Income levels are statistically significant in explaining the relationship between anxiety, seeking help, and cannabis abuse (OR 3.2,  $p < .001$ ).



**Figure 1: Level of Seeking Help for Participants with/without Anxiety and with/without Cannabis Abuse**



**Figure 2: Probability of Seeking Help for Individuals with Anxiety and Cannabis Abuse Based on Income Level**

## Discussion

- Individuals with anxiety are more likely to seek treatment for drug use than those without anxiety. This may be because individuals already have accessed mental healthcare treatment.
- Though expected that individuals with lower levels of income would seek help less, the results demonstrate that they are more likely to seek help, a notable finding.
- Further research is crucial in determining what kinds of therapy/treatment is most effective for individuals with both drug use and mental health disorders.

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