

# Concerned about cannabis



## A perspective from the Centre for Social Justice's Alliance

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The Centre for Social Justice has an Alliance of 300 poverty-fighting charities. A new poll has shown they are against political attempts to legalise or decriminalise cannabis. Seven out of ten charities are concerned about the effect it is having on their clients and families and more than twice as many are against legalisation than are for it.

Charities are particularly concerned that legalisation or decriminalisation could increase cannabis use amongst those they work with and exacerbate the problems users can face, which range from a lack of motivation to mental health difficulties.

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### Introduction

Drug addiction is ruining lives. It fuels family breakdown, worklessness, crime and poor mental health. Yet despite this, too little is done to tackle it. Urgent action is needed to reduce the number of people with an addiction and provide better treatment to those who already have one.

We have one of the worst drug problems in Europe, yet we currently underinvest in treatment.<sup>1</sup> The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) paper, *Ambitious for Recovery* (2014), outlines how to change this. We recommend the introduction of a ring-fenced 'Treatment Tax' to ensure it is not just the wealthy that have access to effective, abstinence-based treatment.

Cannabis is a growing addiction problem in the UK. In 2005-6, nine per cent of new presentations to treatment were for cannabis. By 2013-14 this had risen to 17 per cent. There is a particular issue with young people – 43 per cent of new presentations to treatment for those aged 18-24 were for cannabis, up from just 18 per cent in 2005-6.<sup>2</sup>

The CSJ's Alliance of frontline, poverty-fighting charities are concerned that legalisation or decriminalisation of cannabis would make this problem worse. They are a network of community-based, frontline organisations who are tackling the root causes of poverty in the UK. Many of them are working directly to combat addiction or are supporting those with addictions back into education or work. We outline their views below.

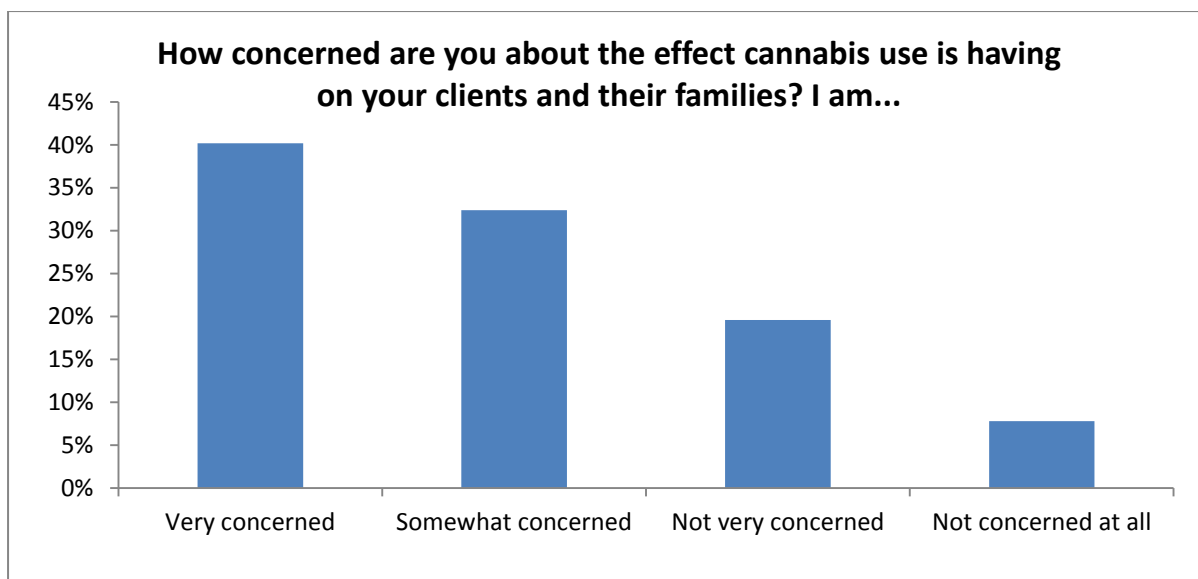
### Concerned about cannabis

Of the 102 charities who responded to a questionnaire, 73 per cent are concerned about the effect cannabis is having on their clients and their families, including 40 per cent who are 'very concerned'.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ambitious for Recovery*, Centre for Social Justice, 2014 [accessed via: [http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/CSJ2073\\_Addiction\\_15.08.14\\_2.pdf](http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/CSJ2073_Addiction_15.08.14_2.pdf) (02.03.15)]

<sup>2</sup> *Adult Drug Statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS)*, Public Health England, 2014 [accessed via: [www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/adult-drug-statistics-from-the-national-drug-treatment-monitoring-system-2013-14.pdf](http://www.nta.nhs.uk/uploads/adult-drug-statistics-from-the-national-drug-treatment-monitoring-system-2013-14.pdf) (02.03.15)]



Source: CSJ Alliance Questionnaire (total respondents: 102)

The charities share a few common fears. The most common concern is the effect that cannabis has on users' motivation. The CSJ were told how it makes people 'lazy... meaning that they miss appointments', how it limits them from fulfilling their potential and 'hinders them in finding work'. The two case studies below were provided by Alliance Charities:

*'A 20-year-old male who had regularly smoked cannabis since he was 13 became so paranoid and lethargic that he couldn't get out of bed in the morning to work. We had to call him and pick him up every day for three months to ensure he turned up for his apprenticeship.'*

*'I had one woman who was coming out of an abusive relationship, was finally starting to regain control of her life but started smoking cannabis to "take the edge off". Needless to say, all motivation she had, disappeared. She was happy with nothing all of a sudden and not in a positive way!'*

Physical and mental health is also a worry, especially for those who become long-term users. One charity told the CSJ:

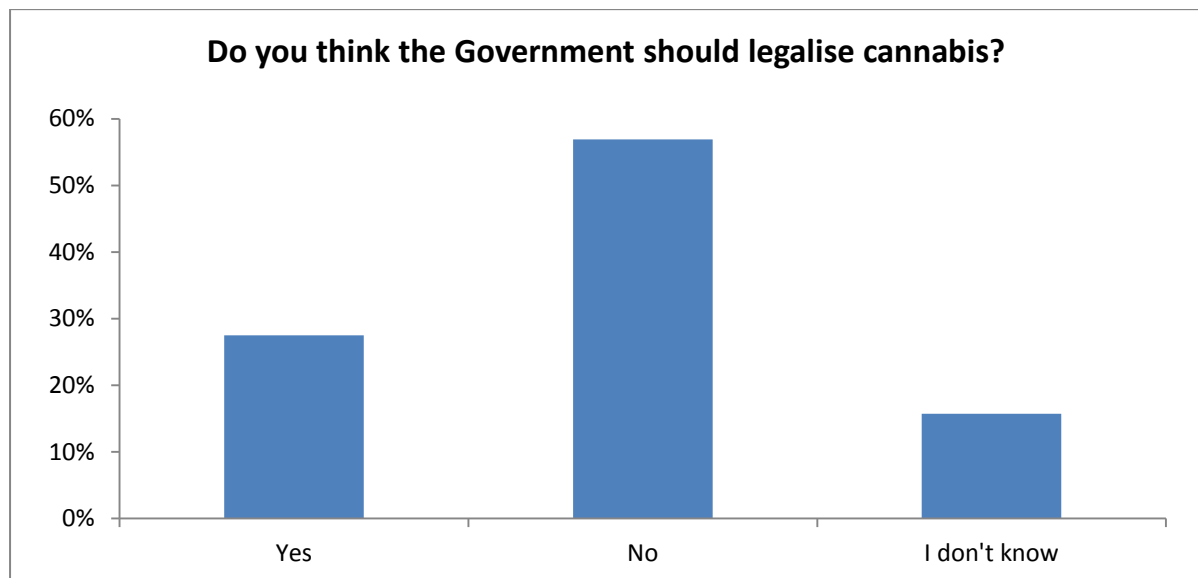
*'I have known clients suffer from mental health problems through paranoia & depression caused by their cannabis use. They have also been unable to work, prone to violent fits of rage when coming off cannabis.'*

These concerns are not ill-founded: recent research found that 'the risk of individuals having a psychotic disorder showed a roughly three-times increase in users of skunk-like cannabis compared with those who never used cannabis'.<sup>3</sup>

## Charities say no to liberalising cannabis laws

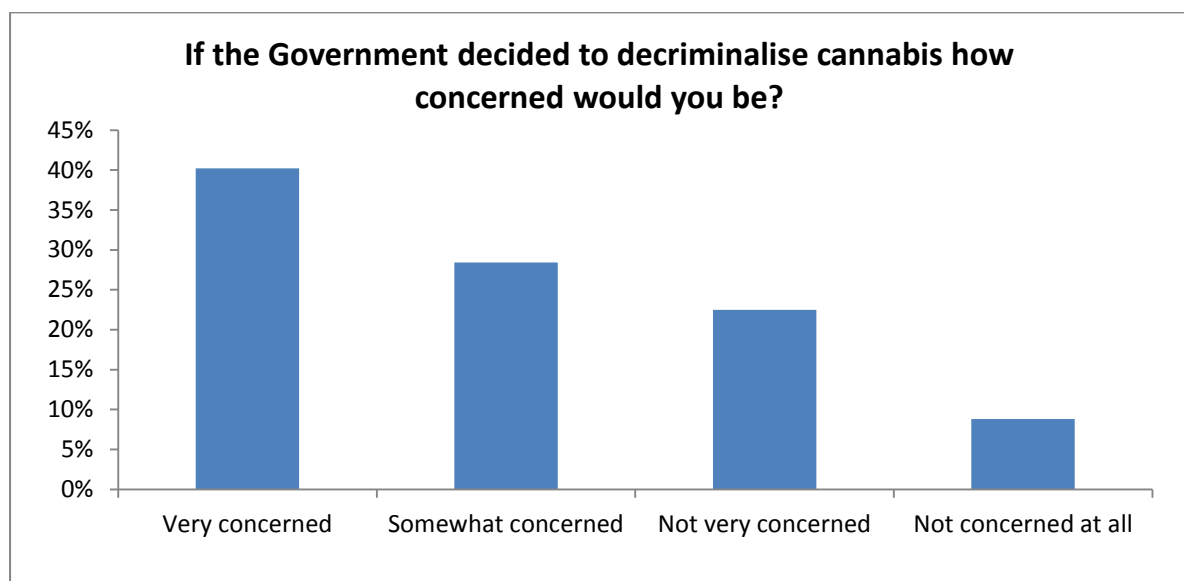
<sup>3</sup> Proportion of patients in south London with first-episode psychosis attributable to use of high potency cannabis: a case-control study, Lancet Psychiatry 2015 [accessed via: [http://www.thelancet.com/pb/assets/raw/Lancet/pdfs/I4TLP0454\\_Di%20Forti.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/pb/assets/raw/Lancet/pdfs/I4TLP0454_Di%20Forti.pdf) (02.03.15)]

The CSJ's Alliance is against both the legalisation and decriminalisation of cannabis, and believes that decriminalisation will lead to increased use. Twice as many are against legalisation (57 per cent) as those who are for it (28 per cent).



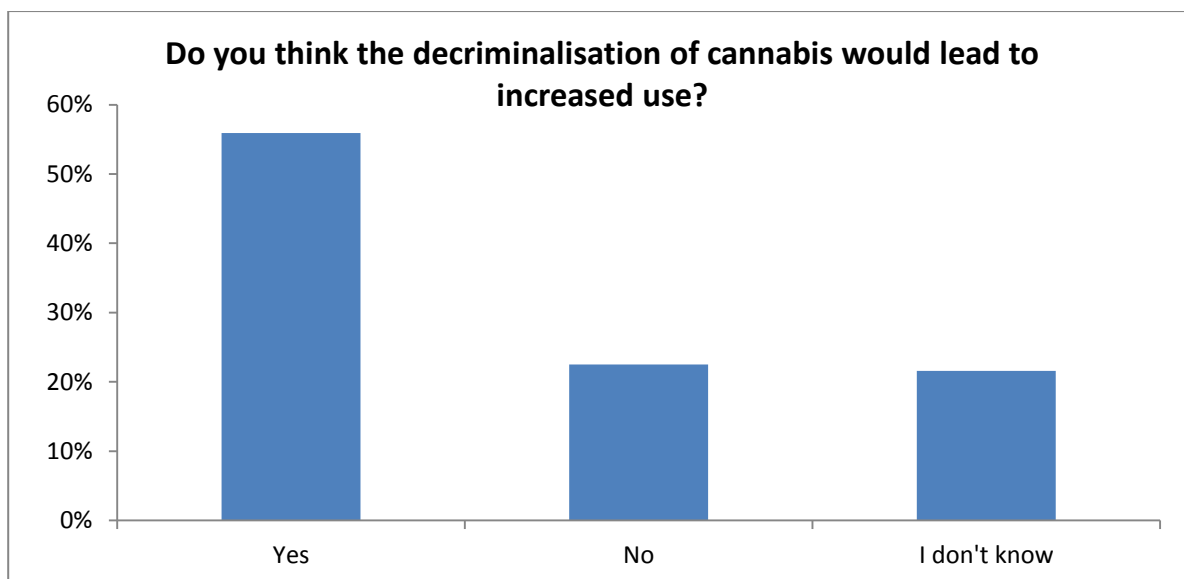
Source: CSJ Alliance Questionnaire (total respondents: 102)

Similarly, 69 per cent would be concerned if the Government decriminalised cannabis, with 40 per cent being 'very concerned'. Only nine per cent are 'not concerned at all' about decriminalisation.



Source: CSJ Alliance Questionnaire (total respondents: 102)

The majority (56 per cent) of charities think that the decriminalisation of cannabis would increase its use. Only 23 per cent think it would not.



Source: CSJ Alliance Questionnaire (total respondents: 102)

The CSJ's Alliance of poverty-fighting charities is against the liberalisation of laws on cannabis. This network of community-based organisations is working on the frontline in some of Britain's poorest neighbourhoods. Their perspective matters. It should make those in favour of the legalisation or decriminalisation of cannabis think carefully about their position. For, if cannabis is made more accessible, it is the communities in which these charities work that will pay the price.

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### **About the Centre for Social Justice**

The Centre for Social Justice is an independent think tank, established to put social justice at the heart of British politics. Moved by shocking levels of disadvantage across the nation, it studies the root causes of Britain's acute social problems in partnership with its Alliance of over 300 grassroots charities and people affected by poverty.

This enables the CSJ to find and promote evidence-based, experience-led solutions to change lives and transform communities. The CSJ believes that the surest way to reverse social breakdown – and the poverty it creates – is to build resilience within individuals, families and the innovative organisations able to help them.