

# **Cannabis Reclassification**

**A Submission to the  
Advisory Council on the  
Misuse of Drugs**

September 2005

# Submission

*A joint Submission to the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs  
by the Maranatha Community and the Council for Health and Wholeness*

## 1. **Misleading the young**

It is our experience at street level working amongst children and young people that a grossly misleading message was given to teenagers when cannabis was down-graded from a Class 'B' to a Class 'C' drug in January 2004. The overwhelming majority of teenagers we speak to are now convinced that cannabis is harmless and many of them believe that the police will not trouble them if they use it or deal in it. An alarming proportion believe it to be legal.

Before reclassification took place wrong messages were passed out to children about cannabis. Even in 2002 a survey by Life Education Centres showed that 86% of primary school children thought that cannabis was legal and 79% thought it was safe.

## 2. **Real Damage**

Our day-to-day experience points to the fact that real damage has been done to the welfare of young people in our country through the relaxation of perceived public attitudes to cannabis. We are experiencing a substantial increase in young people whose lives have been messed up, particularly during recent months with the growing use of stronger varieties of cannabis such as skunk. Young people themselves are saying that they are confused, lethargic and subject to acute mood changes, all of which is affecting their education and family life.

We are often approached by young people who are severely addicted to cannabis and would wish to escape from what older people told them was a harmless pursuit. They are angry because they believe they have been misled.

## 3. **Libertarian Lobbyists**

We believe that far too much attention has been given to the militant lobby groups which urge the legalisation of all drugs or the adoption of so-called 'harm reduction'. We believe far too little attention has been given to the views of countless people working with drug addicts at grass roots level. Who are committed to a drug-free society.

We strongly support the President of the UN International Narcotics Control Board when he says "*Advocates of drug legalisation,*

*particularly of cannabis, are vocal and have access to considerable funds that are used to misinform the public". The UN Board has clearly warned us against these lobbyists who crusade for 'harm reduction'. They say "Contrary to all available evidence such lobbyists have persisted in proclaiming that there are safe ways in which to use drugs". They warn that supporters of legalisation "pursue their goals through aggressive, well-funded campaigns and with missionary zeal. Their arguments however do not reflect the truth. The truth is that there are no safe ways to abuse drugs".*

#### **4. Moving towards a Crisis in Mental Illness**

Before the reclassification of cannabis there was substantial and universal documentation of the direct links between cannabis use and psychosis, schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. Professor Hamid Ghodse, one of the leading drug experts in the world warned "*It is quite worrying that we might end up in the next ten or twenty years with our psychiatric hospitals filled with people who have problems with cannabis*".

There are growing fears that the long-term impact of widespread cannabis use in the United Kingdom is being ignored. Professor Robin Murray of the Institute of Psychiatry has reported that inner city psychiatric services are nearing a crisis point with up to 80% of all new psychotic patients reporting a history of cannabis use. He pointed to recent studies showing that those who use cannabis in their teens are up to seven times more likely to develop psychosis, delusions or manic depression.

#### **5. Strong Drugs Damaging Immature Minds**

British youngsters are using cannabis earlier and smoking more of it than any previous generation. There is more evidence today than ever of paranoia, memory disturbance, bewilderment and aggression, particularly as the stronger strains such as skunk and nederwied have become more widely available since reclassification.

Insufficient attention has been given to the risks faced by immature young users. A paper by J. Giedd et al in 1999 stated that as the brain does not finish its development until the mid 20's, drug abuse could alter the normal course of the maturing brain in the teenage years.

#### **6. Influences upon Public Policy**

The libertarian influence upon policy formulation has been very pronounced in considering the scourge of cannabis. Over one-third of the members of the ACMD are members of pro-liberalisation organisations, whereas it has few, if many, members from organisations

which oppose the liberalisation of drugs. Similarly, the Home Office Affairs Select Committee in the selection of witnesses to give oral evidence on Reclassification heard about three times as many witnesses favouring relaxation or even legalisation in comparison with witnesses opposing relaxation.

## **8. Harming the Education of the young**

There is little doubt that the effect of cannabis on schoolchildren and students in general has been grossly underestimated. According to the American Academy of Paediatrics, concentration, attention span, learning and memory are all affected by cannabis which can cause damage to the brain cells. A paper by Nadia Solowij stated that loss of interest in hobbies, sports, school and inability to sustain attention are all widely observed with cannabis use.

## **9. The Social Implications**

The social damage caused by cannabis in terms of road accidents and disruption of communities, is incalculable. Several years ago Professor Griffith Edwards warned "*There is enough evidence now to make one seriously worried about the possibility of cannabis producing long-term impairment of brain function*".

Cannabis, like alcohol, is an intoxicant and affects mental functioning. Concentration, perception and vigilance are all impaired. It is significant that long after any alcohol would have disappeared from the body cannabis persists. A report published in Aviation and Environmental Medicine reported that airline pilots could not land their planes properly on flight simulators even 24 hours after 20mg of THC. Pilots were unaware of the problem

Increasingly, cases are being brought to the courts in which those found guilty of serious offences have been strongly influenced by cannabis.

## **10. Urgent Appeal**

It is now a matter of the utmost urgency that the decision to reclassify cannabis be reversed without delay. Unless this is done we will continue to mislead the young.

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