

Drugs, the Law and You Survey Results



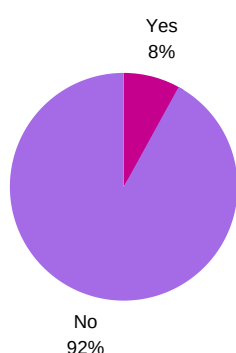
February 2021

This data sheet summarises the responses from people who responded to our survey exploring the impact of the UK's current drug legislation on people who take drugs and their families.

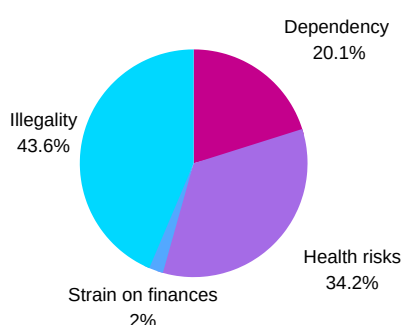
The survey was launched on 08/02/21 and closed on 11/02/21. We received 154 entries in total which included 121 complete responses to all questions. 143 responses came from people who confirmed that they are living or usually live in Scotland. This survey was self-selecting and was promoted through Crew's social media channels, on our website and through professional networks via email.

The survey questions focused on the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971) and asked questions around accessing health care, stigma and views on drug law reform. There were 18 questions in total including space for qualitative responses as comments. Please see page 20 for Crew's recommendations.

Do you think the Misuse of Drugs Act is fit for purpose? (n=154)

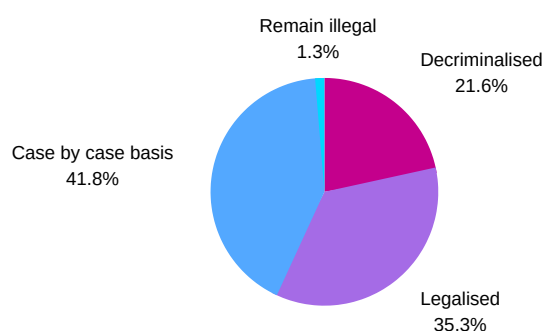


When you consider the following risks associated with drug use - which would be your biggest worry or concern? (n=149)



1. Developing a **dependency**
2. **Health risks** (physical or mental)
3. **Strain on finances**
4. **Illegality** and concern about interaction with the police/criminal justice system e.g. prosecution/criminal record

Do you think that drugs should be... (n=153)

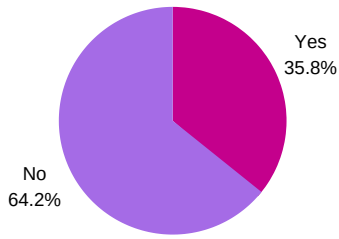


1. **Decriminalised** - meaning that possession of small amounts (considered a small amount for personal use) would not be a crime but supply and import would still be prosecuted
2. **Legalised** - meaning that there would be legal regulation of the sale of drugs in the same way that alcohol and tobacco are legally sold
3. Dealt with on a **case by case basis** - some drugs could be decriminalised and others legalised while others might remain illegal
4. **Illegal** - as per the current drug legislation

Comments

- Folks are going to take drugs anyway. In an ideal world, they would be sold with clear indication of contents/purity/(BS kitemark, haha). Would remove turf wars/stabbings/shootings by dealers, and tax from the sales would go to drug education and drug health care.
- I don't think any drugs should be illegal, but either legalised or decriminalised.
- Decriminalise drugs now to prevent deaths and make it easier for people to get the support that they need.
- The UK's cannabis laws are shockingly outdated, most other developed countries have FAR better drug laws than us, legalise, tax, and use the money for the NHS.
- Decriminalisation would help to reduce harms to users, but still wouldn't solve problems in the supply chain. Legalisation is probably an unrealistic goal, decriminalisation would be a good starting point.
- Perhaps through a system of individual (buy and take home) and premises (anyone can buy and consume on site) licenses?
- Ensure quality of substance and safety of users by regulating.
- I think all drugs should at least be decriminalised and many legalised. Portugal is an excellent example of how decriminalisation is a much more effective strategy at reducing addiction, crime and health risks.
- Addiction is not a legal/criminal issue it's a health issue.

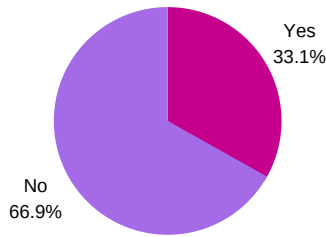
Have you experienced interactions with the police regarding illegal drugs? (n=151)



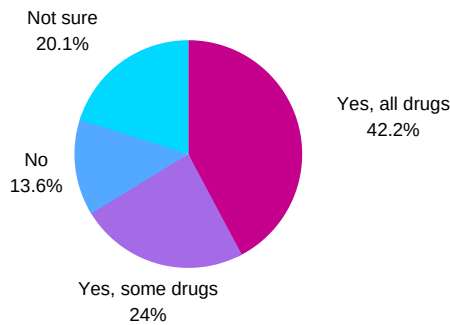
Comments

- I have interacted with the police while under the influence, but they either didn't notice or consciously ignored my state (context: middle class white man, at that point gurning my face off)
- One cannabis caution, was told by the male officer to 'not get caught again' as 'it will be legal soon'
- Other than seizure by border force - does that count as police?

Are you aware of the Police Recorded Warning response to low level cannabis possession in Scotland? (n=154)



Would you like to see the Police Recorded Warning System extended to other drugs in Scotland? (n=154)



For low level possession of cannabis, police in Scotland may choose to issue a Recorded Police Warning, which is recorded on the Police National Computer, but is not a 'criminal record'.



I don't think there should be a recorded warning system but it's still a better option than getting a criminal record.

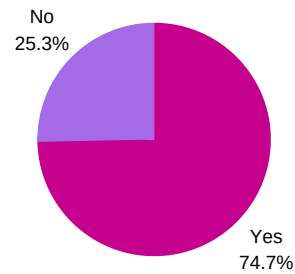


All drugs should be decriminalised or legalised and there should not be police involvement with tracking people in possession of these substances. If this is not an option, then I would vote for all drugs being moved to a recorded warning system, but this is much less preferable to me.

Comments

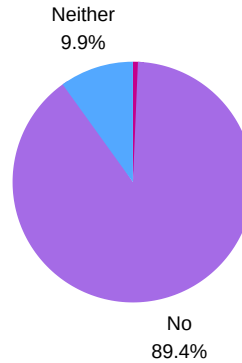
- I do not feel there should be records kept about you. But of course if it had to be done then it would be better than having a criminal record. Having a criminal record sucks.
- It would be better than what we have now but ideally possession would just be legal.
- It's still on a record though....
- It is a positive that is isn't wasting police time by pushing small busts through the court. Seems to still have time wasted on it with these warnings though. Maybe resources could be used for more testing on substances to educate people on what they are buying/ingesting.
- I think full decriminalisation would be a better option.
- Yes, putting people who haven't harmed anyone but themselves in jail is dangerous for society because it breeds hardened criminals of innocent people. Drug laws need reform to protect the most people they can.
- Small (personal) quantities of ALL drugs should just receive a caution like the cannabis caution (3 warnings in 6 months results in a more serious repercussion).
- Only in the case that legalisation isn't an option.
- My sphere of awareness is mostly alcohol, weed, MDMA, psychedelics. I don't know how this would work for "harder" drugs like opioids but I suspect less police intervention would reduce harm to all drug users?
- Full legalisation - individual licenses for purchase to take home, which require a degree of education - premise licenses to enable unlicensed individuals to partake in a controlled environment.
- Drugs laws should be completely overhauled to reflect what folk need: support, understanding and better access to care that puts their needs at the centre. People should not be given jail sentences for possession of drugs and also for sharing with friends and even selling. Often folks dealing are themselves trying to find their way out of something or may be being exploited themselves particularly young people. People using drugs should be separated in focus from serious organised crime that very much benefits from the current legislation.
- If it means people are not convicted or fined for using but can get quicker access to drug rehabilitation programs then that would be good.

Were you aware that it is an offence to supply someone with a drug named under the Misuse of Drugs Act even if you were giving them it for free and would carry the same penalties as sale of a drug in that class? E.g the consequences of selling ecstasy might be the same as giving it away for free to a friend. (n=154)



Do you think the current drug legislation in the UK helps prevent drug-related harm? (n=151)

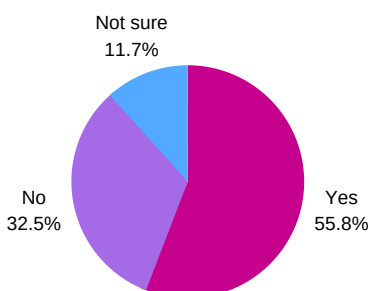
1. **Yes** - I think it helps to prevent drug-related harm
2. **No** - I think it leads to an increase in drug-related harm
3. **Neither** - I don't think that either increases or decreases drug-related harm



Comments

- People fear getting help.
- Harm by unknown contents of the drug itself. Harm by interaction with a dealer, who may not be just your mate. Harm by 'just say no' education, without realistic comparisons between drugs. Hmm, they lied to me about cannabis and I really enjoy it, can't see the harm. So maybe I'll just do coke too...or smoke some smack. ..?
- Quality of substance compromised by unregulated suppliers profits.
- For many drugs, the criminality is the primary source of harm - there would be almost no market for synthetic cannabinoids if cannabis was legal, for example, in addition to the violence and human trafficking involved in its production and sale.
- People develop issues with drugs because they are illegal and they can't get support as there is a moral judgement and risk of prosecution if too many people know you take drugs. Drugs are dangerous because they are illegal - there is no regulation, no safe consumption rooms and a lack of harm reduction interventions such as drug checking. People get paranoid because of the illegality. If you are doing something so clearly in opposition to 'normal' society then how can you feel cared for by it?
- Drugs are left completely in the hands of criminal organisations because the government refuses to decriminalise or legalise them. If legalised they could be regulated and the amount of drug deaths every year would drop.
- Demonising and criminalising drugs makes people less likely to seek help - I've overdosed (ecstasy, GHB) and never called for help for fear of repercussions.
- Drug dealers don't care about age limit, out for profit so powder substances can be tampered with, people losing jobs and unable to find work due to personal choices with your own body.
- Harm reduction includes full information about drugs being given, and programmes and social community care being in place for those that need it.

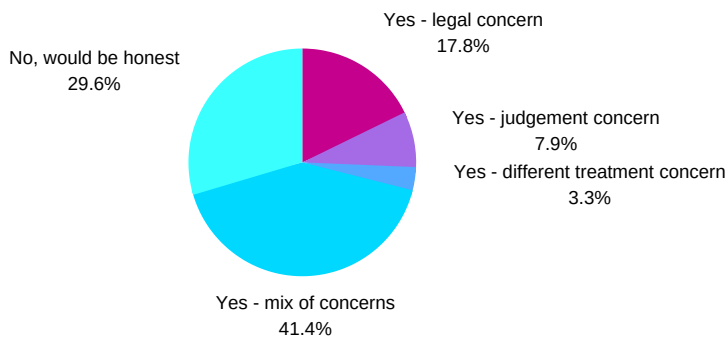
Would your concern over interaction with the police prevent you from accessing support, information or advice about drug use? E.g. going to a drug service or talking to your GP about your drug use. (n=154)



Comments

- I understand that I have a confidentiality agreement with my GP that he can't violate without a court order.
- [Yes] Every drug user (cannabis or more serious) I know thinks this way.
- A big problem is that illegal drug use carries a stigma. Known drug users will be discriminated against in terms of jobs etc. This may be the case even for users of drugs that are no more dangerous than alcohol and tobacco.
- Never has for me because I have a lot of confidence in the discretion of healthcare professionals. But that's probably influenced a lot by class/race privilege. Where there isn't a legal requirement for confidentiality I might be more cautious.

Would you avoid being honest about your illegal drug use to a professional (e.g doctor or counsellor) who you are seeing about a health and wellbeing issue that is not to do with drugs? E.g. if a doctor or dentist asked about your drug use in order to plan a dose of anaesthetic or a mental health professional asked about drug use? (n=152)

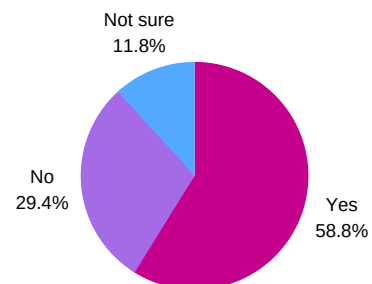


1. **Yes**, I would avoid being honest because of concern about the possible legal consequences
2. **Yes**, I would avoid being honest because of concern about judgement/assumptions that might be made about me
3. **Yes**, I would avoid being honest because of concern that I might be treated differently
4. **Yes**, I would avoid being honest because of a mix of the reasons listed
5. **No**, I would not avoid being honest

Comments

- I'm in my 50s, have a professional job, own my own house and perhaps don't look like someone who takes any kind of drugs. It's almost my duty to show this version of the drug user, in an attempt to change attitudes.
- As soon as drugs are mentioned, any possible health problems are assumed to be due to the drug use and cessation of use is the primary, if not only course of action discussed.
- Unless I had concerns about that particular professional e.g. they had prejudiced views and could make things difficult.
- Drug use affects my health so any doctor would need to know about potential contraindications, however the medical professional would need detailed data on drug interactions involving illegal drugs.
- But I would minimise my use or state it took place in a country where it is or was legal at the time.
- Most seriously, the potential legal repercussions, doctors also may claim to be impartial, but I live with a doctor, and they DO treat you differently/judge you if you use ANY drugs.
- I would not [avoid being honest] because of professional confidentiality but I recognise why others might.
- Would not disclose for fear of it impacting current employment.
- I work in social care and have been advised all through my career in training that drug use could result in job loss. The same does not apply to alcohol.
- Stigma attached to drug taking is wrong and they don't understand due to not educating themselves or outdated views thanks to misinformation spread by governments and other "professional" bodies for years.

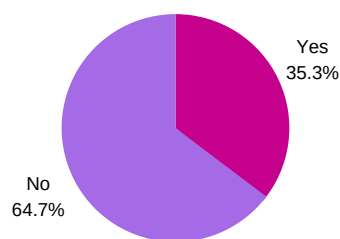
Have you ever been concerned that if you are honest about your use of illegal drugs you would not get the treatment that you needed? e.g access to mental health care or access to medication. (n=153)



Comments

- I've saw this happen, Dr's won't prescribe some medication due to previous drug use.
- I've never really been in that position.
- Specialist even told me about a place near my home that he thought sold cannabis!
- Yes, because regardless of what people say or act like, you do get judged for being an addict.
- ...had I been honest about my previous minor Xanax (alprazolam) addiction, I would not have been prescribed the temazepam which I NEED if I have an insomniac episode.
- Mental health team have been known not to give any treatment while someone is using drugs or advice the reason for poor mental health is drug use.
- Worry that mental health professionals might fixate on drug use as a cause for mental health problems, so excluding me from other possible treatments.
- It is well known if you admit to drug use you are refused to be seen by community mental health teams and are referred to other services. More waiting about- drug users are not aliens.
- I was not honest about previous substance use when receiving medical care and mental health care, as I knew they would view all of my problems as related to substance use, which wasn't true.

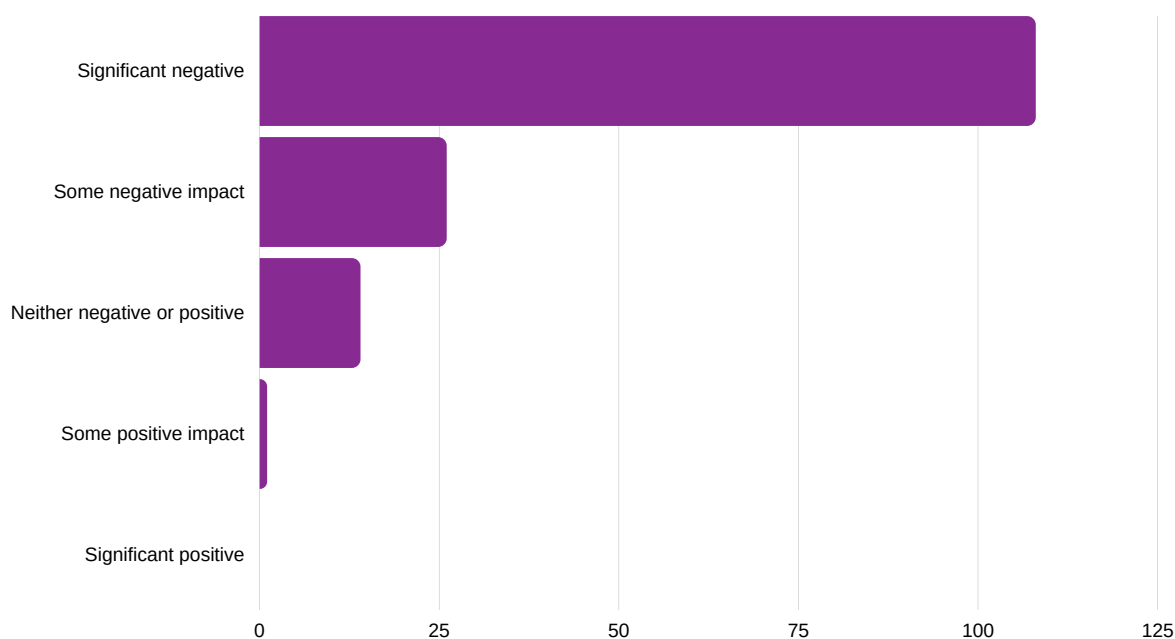
Have you ever been worried about getting emergency medical treatment for someone who has taken illegal drugs due to your concerns about legal consequences? (n=153)



Comments

- A long time ago, took a friend who was in a pretty bad way back to mine when they probably should have gone to A&E to be checked. We kept checking on them and they were fine after sleeping it off but obvs would have been devastating if they hadn't been.
- No - but can see why others would.
- Someone's life is worth far more than me going to jail. Why would I bother about that, at least they'd be alive.
- For myself, YES, for my friends and loved ones, HELL NO, I don't care if I die, I care very much about those I love.
- Not personally but I've lost friends and no others who have died from an overdose because they were out outside closes and left rather than have helped called because of the fear people have of being blamed
- Funny enough it was my friend who was put in this situation. I had not taken any heroin for 18 months. I was more an upper person. We both had a hit one night and I overdosed, and luckily enough my friend called the ambulance but did not stay for their arrival. This happened in England and the police do not come when there has been an overdose, which is a good thing.

What level of impact do you think the current drug legislation in the UK has on the stigma and discrimination people who take drugs experience? (n=151)



Comments

- It criminalised people who use drugs, especially those with addiction issues. Drugs are viewed as 'bad' and therefore the people that do them are 'bad' as they are illegal. This idea of bad is not true and incredibly damaging
- Thousands of people are dying because of it.
- I think it becomes unconsciously entwined with other problematic language used towards or about people who take drugs e.g. being clean or getting clean.
- Many people I know believe that drug use is socially unacceptable, simply because they are "illegal" and argue that since alcohol is illegal its use is not stigmatised in the same way.
- Which drug? Yes heroin has a stigma attached but cannabis is seen as cool.
- Before I ever tried any other "harder" drug, and I just smoked cannabis occasionally, I was labelled a junkie by my girlfriend at the time. I was kicked out of my house for having 2g of cannabis in my room BECAUSE IT IS ILLEGAL - were it decriminalised or legalised, my mother wouldn't have cared as she used to smoke/take ecstasy and acid but as it is illegal she is worried about losing her PVG [criminal background check required for working with vulnerable people] for me being in possession.
- Unsure. The legislation is meant to stigmatize/criminalize drug use, so it works somewhat to that effect.

What impact do you think the Misuse of Drugs Act has on the experience of families of people who take drugs?



Comments

- I have no personal experience with this but I am aware that families are separated over even minor drug use from parents, even as chaotic alcohol users and violent abusers are ignored.
- Negative, it puts people in situations they would never be in if they didn't have to meet people for drugs, if it was legal they would never have to be in these situations.
- Lack of acceptance and understanding.
- It makes it harder to support a family member when they have been criminalised by their behaviour and impacts the whole family if someone goes to jail or has to pay a fine.
- The stigma associated with using drugs travels and negatively affects families, especially if they have been bereaved due to a drug-related death.
- Drugs can have serious impact on individuals lives including death, families are largely impacted too as they grieve.
- Alienation of family members
- Close friends of mine have had their families torn apart because of the outcomes that the Misuse of Drugs Act has had on the drug users' lives. Criminalising individuals has worsened the repercussions on their lives and their families.
- Separation, stigma and despair
- Paranoia, arguments, kids kicked out of the house etc. Children neglected because of adults who cannot afford what they are using or the time spent finding it. But this happens with alcohol too.
- Increased stigma, decreased availability of help services, harder to get off "harder" drugs due to fear of jail time/criminal record, sheer ignorance.
- Misuse of Drugs Act criminalises recreational use of cannabis, whilst alcohol and tobacco pose much higher risk to health and longevity of the user and remain legal, it labels the users and compares heroin addicts to those who smoke cannabis.
- It makes helping those who struggle with addiction much harder.



Drug use is often a response to trauma and deprivation. Making this coping mechanism criminal simply adds to the trauma and stigmatisation which can lead to more drug use. Let's support people with the causes of their drug use.

- It creates a sense of stigma, shame and exclusion that acts against getting help and guidance from professionals.
- There is an immediate stigma due to any criminalisation.
- I had a friend who's mum tells people he committed suicide rather than that he overdosed.
- A negative, combative and prejudiced attitude towards families
- Seeing family members suffering as they are criminalised for something like addiction or even something as low-level as possession of something will of course have a negative effect on the families of said people.
- They have a greater fear and judgement to their family member who is taking the drugs.
- It devalues their family member. Labelling them as a criminal which carries so many negative perceptions. People feel the need to conceal that their loved one had a problem with a substance even after overdose and death due to the stigma of criminalisation.
- I would imagine it being extremely upsetting and frightening. I would like things to change to prevent this happening.
- A significant negative impact. Someone who makes great contributions to society and their community, who occasionally say takes psychedelics which helps them therapeutically, could receive a significant jail sentence leaving them unable to provide for their family. This could lead to poverty, trauma, and loss of opportunities.
- I'm not sure tbh [to be honest] as it could possibly save a life so joy for a family keeping a family member however maybe not if they go to jail for a long time.
- It reduces their loved one to an addict rather than a complex and loved human. The drug is all that can be seen. This can lead to trivialising medical emergencies and dismissing people.
- Stigma | Increased stigma | Increases stigma and prevents honest conversations between families
- Families who may not know much about drugs may presume a member of that family who is taking drugs is a bad person.

What impact do you think the Misuse of Drugs Act has on the experience of families of people who take drugs?

Comments continued

- Massive impact by not conforming to the drug the government want you to take such as alcohol and tobacco which is way worse for you in many cases and has no medical benefit. If you wish to use any other substance for whichever reason that is you are immediately a criminal and seen in the eyes as many as an "addict" and a stain on society all because a ancient legislation made up by dinosaurs mainly based on racist agendas and wanting to group people into classes.
- It makes it hard to view a future, your torn between what's right and wrong. You just want all the lies to go away but then you don't want what you value most to have one bad day. Some days are fine some days are hard how would police help with that ? It's a debate you have all the time it will never leaves your mind, the thought of calling 999.
- A negative one | Significant negative impact | Negative. Excluding. | Negative | Endless cycle | Fear | Overwhelmingly negative and unhelpful | A very bad one | Terrible.



It makes it hard to view a future, your torn between what's right and wrong. You just want all the lies to go away but then you don't want what you value most to have one bad day.

- Again, if you mean the impact of a conviction on family members, probably a bit of shame. If not an actual conviction, there might still be some shame/what will the neighbours think/how will my son-daughter actually get a job if they use drugs. Depends on the outlook of the family themselves, and the type of drug.
- Short term, drug-related prison sentences often totally disrupt family structures and have far-reaching negative impacts and contribute to the continual cycle of generational social deprivation and criminal behaviour.
- My friend stole from his mum to fund his habit. Spent 3 weeks inside doing cold turkey and od'd in a Dr surgery toilet that wasn't checked overnight. His mum blamed herself but she gave him chances, she blamed the prison service for not sorting out methadone and as much as she doesn't want to she blames the care taker for not checking the toilets before closing up. Guilt, shame, grief, helplessness are all effects of the addiction for the families and addicts. The Misuse of Drugs Act also criminalises and marginalises people who need support.
- Leads to a lot of stigmatisation and tension, it leads to whole families being demonised.
- Adds stress and struggle, harder to access help, good people are punished, more compassion and progressive thinking are needed, let's remove shame and stigma and be more open minded
- It adds extra anxiety on the shoulders of family members knowing their loved ones would be at risk of arrest and access to health services would be more difficult should they develop a dependency.
- Stops people getting help, more likely to get in trouble with the law than get help
- Extremely negative and stigma causing
- Terrible impact. When you are a mother you are constantly paranoid not because of the drugs but because in the back of your head, you are always worrying.
- There is a huge stigma with drug use and as a result of being shamed for it, many are left without support that they need
- A monumentally negative and stupid one
- Not sure but it seems designed to create divisions.
- It doesn't help them as much as it should, there should be more support for the families of people who take drugs.
- Huge impact, causes shame, stress, family break ups, social work involvement which is always negative. Financial strains and hardship.
- Families experience their loved ones being criminalised and marginalised instead of being supported with harm reduction or treatment options. Criminalising individuals can often lead them to lose touch with their family or avoid due to feeling ashamed of their use. Once a person has a criminal record they often feel stigmatised or "othered" which would exacerbate their drug use. It creates a wedge between families, and this "shame" of being involved in the criminal justice system can also impact other relationships in families, e.g families don't want to tell their friends / colleagues or access support themselves for fear of the stigma and views of other people. Criminalising people for using drugs can disintegrate families much quicker than the drug-use itself can.
- I think that it treats users as criminals and that prevents them from accessing medical help.

What impact do you think the Misuse of Drugs Act has on the experience of families of people who take drugs?



Comments continued

- It doesn't matter, Drug Addicts are degenerate stains on society, their families should be ashamed of them.
- It is unnecessarily harsh on users, many of whom are already "at the bottom" of society or who have pre-existing mental health issues / trauma and are self-medicating.
- Criminalizes it and doesn't have them deal with foundation issues.
- A devastating impact it's outdated and totally not relevant anymore we must progress, clearly it's not working other countries have rung the changes but as usual we're being left behind.
- Maybe makes it harder to seek help, definitely people who use hard drugs are looked on as criminals instead of having mental health problems.
- Usually makes them turn away from the person committing the crime, when usually lack support, and connection is the reason for taking the drugs in the first place.
- The fact drugs are illegal affects people including the families of users. Financial pressures, legal pressures and social stigma. If drugs weren't illegal, would these issues still exist? Yes, but they could be reduced by controlling drug use.
- Losing family members who are imprisoned because of their addiction which has a negative impact on their children.
- In no way shape or form does this benefit anyone suffering from drug abuse. It simply sugar-coats the bigger issues of human personalities with jail time, tougher employment restrictions and leaves people in fear to get help they actually require.
- I believe it may lead to family members not getting the support they need due to fear of them being stigmatised and falling foul of the law.



Losing family members who are imprisoned because of their addiction which has a negative impact on their children.

What changes, if any, would you make to current drug legislation in the UK?

Comments

- Legislation to protect those who have a small amount of cannabis for their use as could be for medical problems
- Legalise and regulate and additional mental health support
- Decriminalisation and a change in the law to allow safer injecting facilities ran by healthcare and an element of psycho-social support to those who access the service. With supports to those who want to break from the cycle of addiction.
- Ideally I'd go for harm reduction like the done in Switzerland. The drugs aren't the main problem. They are a problem, I'm sure not one person would like to see a family member ruin themselves with heroin etc. Locking people up in a cell isn't the correct path for this.
- I would make it a health issue as opposed to a legal issue.
- Legalise and regulate all drugs. Spend the tax revenue on health education and addiction services. There will be a substantial amount left over which can be used to better society...
- Some drugs should be treated the same and tobacco and alcohol. Legalised but highly controlled and managed so that they are safer to take. And for there to be much more information on how to take drugs safely in Scotland.
- Start again from scratch with an evidence-based approach. Legalisation would allow tax income to be put to other social initiatives like treatment but also community development
- I would decriminalise the use of, and carrying of all drugs for personal use
- Decriminalisation of lesser risky drugs, for addictions to be treated as an illness and not a crime.
- Decriminalise all drugs, legalise and regulate some like cannabis and psychedelics. Immediately offer protection and support to religions that consider entheogens sacraments.
- Possession legal for small amounts.

Comments continued

- Legalise or at least decriminalise all drugs similar to what they did in Portugal. Instead of treating addicts like criminals they should be offered mental health support, rehab facilities and group projects to help reintegrate them back into society and help them feel like part of a community. I genuinely believe that this would lower addiction rates, make drugs safer for those who want to use them, and it would also eradicate all street dealers by putting them out of business. Alcohol is a drug that kills more people than most hard drugs and yet this is a substance that is glorified in our society. I think that criminalising drugs was a mistake in the first place and was just a political move to stop people from rebelling against the government back in the 70s in America when president Nixon was in-charge. These laws destroy lives every day, I've watched it happen to friends and family around me. These laws lead to the shaming of drug addicts, we see them as criminals instead of severely traumatised people who need help.
- I'd probably lean towards legalising and heavily regulating the sale of drugs to adults >18. The extent of regulation would be different depending on the drug in question. For example: cannabis may be sold fairly freely (similar to alcohol currently) but in specialised shops, like that seen in Amsterdam/Colorado. Harder drugs such as: ecstasy, LSD, mushrooms, powder cocaine, speed, ketamine, etc may be sold in other specialised shops more like a pharmacy. Where users have to register with the service, there is no branding on the products. They are sold with clear guidance on usage, and comes with free information leaflets on those drugs. The purity/strength may be also be controlled to limit harm. Eg: 100% pure powder cocaine diluted with safe cuttings agents to reduce risk of over-consumption. Drugs like ecstasy, LSD, ketamine may have a certain consumption limit per month. Eg 4 tablets, tabs, 2 grams.
- First of all I would make cannabis legal. It is astounding that alcohol and tobacco are legal. Other drugs I would not have people being sent to prison. It may be necessary for them to attend some sort of well run drug venue which was run by ex users or users. Police should not have to worry about drugs also. Perhaps if it is a truck load and people are being used badly. I really think a lot of people need to get together and sort all this out.
- Safe injection centres, the option to get substances tested (like at festivals) and milder drugs being legalised.
- Instead of incarceration and fines put emphasise on rehabilitation and recovery.
- You get longer sentences through drugs than you do rape or murder! Penalties need looked at definitely.
- Full legalisation of cannabis, decriminalisation of all other drugs.
- Focus on support and rehab for heroin users.
- Complete and total decriminalisation. A Portuguese Model.
- Decriminalise all possession, make most drugs legal and tax them.
- Mix of legalisation and regulation. Move towards treating as a medical issue rather than criminal. Generate tax revenue.
- Weed should be decriminalised, some drugs like acid & mushrooms should be decriminalised and reclassified as medication in small doses. smack, crack, meth etc should stay illegal. There are "good" and "bad" drugs! Many drugs need re-evaluating, kratom, salvia, peyote etc need reclassified.
- I would legalise all drugs because that's what's needed for it to be considered a health issue. I'm not advocating people take drugs, but I do advocate that those who do can do so safely, and there is support available to come off them. This support should not come with the fear of criminal charges as it will discourage people from best helping themselves and instil a negative stigma upon them by others.
- Decriminalise all drugs, make Psilocybin and Cannabis legal to grow and consume medically and recreationally.
- I think that most drugs should be decriminalised.
- Decriminalise drug use, save lives and follow the evidence.
- At least decriminalisation. Preferable legalisation. Picking mushrooms shouldn't be criminalised
- To decriminalise possession of all illegal drugs. Legalise cannabis. Test drugs medically so there is more research and potential use for the benefits.
- Legalise and decriminalise all drugs. Move drug use into solely a public health issue and not a criminal issue.
- Scrap the misuse of drugs act entirely. Drugs are a concern for medical professionals, not politicians or police
- I'd like to see most or all drugs fully legalized and regulated so people know what they're taking and can take it safely if they so please. safe, free injection sites. etc.
- Decriminalise most drugs, make drug use less about the law and safe information and support systems.
- Legalise all drugs and treat addiction as a public health not criminal concern.

Comments continued

- Legalise cannabis, MDMA to allow users to make the most of its medical benefits and regulate cocaine to get it away from gangs and black market and allow society to reap the benefits on it instead of just the underworld which use funds to flaunt and invest in other malicious activities.
- I think if someone is caught in possession of drugs with no intent to sell or caught driving on drugs then the first course of action should be medical to assess whether further help may be needed for addiction. Unless you have been through or someone close to you has battled addiction you can never understand how hard it is and how different it is for every individual.
- Consider possible legalisation of some drugs and have licensed shops sell them.
- Legalise all, get the 'kitemark'/quality mark/purity value clearly displayed on packaging. Which would include advice on dosage/timings/set and setting (ie in the company of trusted friends/peers). With taxes specifically being spent on drug education, drug healthcare, and use of drugs, specifically psychedelics, in psychotherapy.
- I deem this level of drug use and abuse as a symptom of a deeply troubled system. Systematic inequality, extreme wealth divide, lack of opportunity, a failing health and social care system etc. However, in terms of more achievable changes we can implement, I would like to see some drugs decriminalized. I would also like to see a move away from the methadone based approach to opiate epidemic, as this often just replaces the addiction with a less dangerous, but in many cases equally harmful substance, without addressing the causes of addiction (trauma, mental health afflictions, deprived material conditions etc). Diverting money away from methadone programs and into mental health and abstinence based recovery will help to break the cycle of addiction and give those affected the best chance at being rehabilitated and reintroduced back into society as functioning and healthy individuals.



Decriminalisation is just the start. We need proper drug education, no scare mongering. Safe places for addicts to go for help where they're treated like the complex, beautiful humans they are.

- The decriminalisation of all or most drugs for possession of small personal amounts. The money spent chasing these 'crimes' which are people's persona decision and responsibility should be sent offering assistance to those who need it, in terms of mental support and rehabilitation.
- Legalise all drugs besides opiates.
- Create dispensaries for all drugs and legalise possession for personal use. Studies show people take fewer amounts if they know what is in their drug and countries that have legalised drugs show a lower amount of people taking drugs. Take the power away from gangs and increase funding for support services by taxing the drugs in dispensaries. People shouldn't be punished for looking for help and support.
- I would look at certain drugs and decriminalise, particularly those related to gang violence. I think heroine and crack users could be dealt with more compassionately and give them the help they may want.
- Legalise and regulate drugs. It's up to me what I put in my body. Not the state.
- Legalise and control.
- Decriminalisation of all drugs would just safe more lives per year and help people than being sent to jail and the problem made worse.
- Legalise all drugs give users healthcare instead of jail time!!!!!!
- I would make it stricter, but allow for the legislation for medicinal purposes in specific circumstances.
- Explore decriminalisation and legalisation, taking an evidence-based approach that prioritises harm reduction. This needs to be explored alongside policing, Naloxone availability, addressing stigma, education, and introducing a range of treatment options and more effective partnership working. For the drug-related deaths to have got as bad as they are, there are clearly multiple failings in Scotland's approach - legislation is just part of the problem, but needs to be addressed alongside other failings.

Comments continued

- Legalisation of cannabis. Decriminalisation of most other drugs that are currently illegal with the exception of the most addictive and destructive ones.
- Possession of small amounts of any drugs should not result in a recorded criminal conviction.
- Decriminalisation of drug use, legalisation of drugs such as cannabis as it is not really any more dangerous than cigarettes or alcohol.
- Legalise and regulate illegal drugs in the same way as alcohol and tobacco. Much like alcohol, tobacco, sugar and unhealthy foods, the government could respond to people's drug use from a public health perspective rather than a criminal justice issue to be "tackled".
- Decriminalisation + education. Punishments should be about rehabilitation/community work rather than jail time.
- Legalise and monies generated from sales ring fenced for treatment and support. Rather than criminalising someone the disposal could be mandated treatment.
- Have more support for drug takers Look further into what actually makes people become addicted.
- Take it out of the black market and away from the criminals. Regulate it and make it safe.
- To look at other countries i.e. Portugal.
- Allow the police to deal with proper crimes rather than minor drug offences. Regulate supply of certain drugs (like cannabis in the US / Canada / Netherlands) etc.
- Decriminalisation would be the most important step to protect users from harm. Reviewing classifications based on drug harm rather than moral panic would probably help too.



All drugs should be decriminalised or legalised and there should not be police involvement with tracking people in possession of these substances. If this is not an option, then I would vote for all drugs being moved to a recorded warning system, but this is much less preferable to me.

- More government funding into mental health charities and drug awareness schemes to make people more informed about the risks and less likely to be crippled by them.
- Legalise cannabis especially in medicinal circumstances. It is a great asset to those struggling with mental health and could help regain lost money from coronavirus if taxed.
- Legalise some specific less dangerous drugs and lower the penalties for personal possession.
- Decriminalisation and free testing of purity.
- Drug testing centres that prioritise anonymity and no legal ramifications; decriminalise cannabis.
- Legalised use combined with excellent care services and real education.
- Legalise drugs, humans should be free to choose their poison and if not then ban cigarettes and alcohol.
- Less punitive, the professional/user divide is growing with the harsh enforcement of the MoDA with most professional bodies adopting a scrutiny role rather than a welfarist one. This requires such support that users and families need to be adopted by the 3rd sector organisations rather than those which are state run.
- This box probably isn't big enough. But mandatory testing and adequate welfare at festivals/bigger clubs. better cooperation between harm reductionists and law enforcement in general + security at venues would be nice.
- Scrap and start again , base on fact not profit.
- Decriminalise possession for personal use. Legalise cannabis. Assess other drugs legal status based on holistic view of harm/risk to individuals and society. Take a grown up approach to discussion and decisions.
- Life in prison for drug gangs, like the kingpin type person.

Comments continued

- Allow adults to grow their own cannabis at home. Sort it out so that people can buy stuff with contents labels on the packs. Allow safe consumption spaces not just for people who use needles but also for cannabis users - like pubs or cafes.
- The fact that a person caught possessing cannabis can be treated with the same consequences as one who sold is ridiculous. Cannabis laws need to be updated or legalised completely.
- Decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use and of supply to a friend. Instead of criminalisation, users could be obliged to attend a group counselling course on safe drug use and offered rehabilitation support. The MDA should empower law enforcement to tackle the source of drugs imports and focus on the serious organisations that traffic drugs and other employ criminal activities to profit from the illicit market.
- Look to other countries for evidence based examples of good practice, lower death rates, other associated risk rates
- Legalised use combined with excellent care services and real education.
- Decriminalisation of all drugs, followed by legalisation of many or most, coupled with comprehensive mental and physical health services for those in need of intervention or assistance.
- Drugs laws should be completely overhauled to reflect what folk need: support, understanding and better access to care that puts their needs at the centre. People should not be given jail sentences for possession of drugs and also for sharing with friends and even selling. Often folks dealing are themselves trying to find their way out of something or may be being exploited themselves particularly young people. People using drugs should be separated in focus from serious organised crime that very much benefits from the current legislation.
- Legalise | Legalisation | Legalisation | Legalise cannabis | I would abolish it | Cannabis should be legalized.



Legalise, with a focus on raising funds for harm reduction and early intervention services.

- Decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use and of supply to a friend. Instead of criminalisation, users could be obliged to attend a group counselling course on safe drug use and offered rehabilitation support. The MDA should empower law enforcement to tackle the source of drugs imports and focus on the serious organisations that traffic drugs and other employ criminal activities to profit from the illicit market.
- Allow adults to grow their own cannabis at home. Sort it out so that people can buy stuff with contents labels on the packs. Allow safe consumption spaces not just for people who use needles but also for cannabis users - like pubs or cafes.
- I'm not particularly legal minded, so I don't know if all of this applies but No.1 instead of just telling people and children drugs are bad (which is an outright lie) harm reduction information should be far more available because people are going to take drugs whether the government likes it or not. The important thing is to save as many lives as possible and the more informed people are the more informed choices they can make. It's possible to be a responsible drug user not just an addict. I didn't get told that growing up. I also wasn't even told at my local addiction group that you can buy reagent tests to test your own drugs. I had to find most of the stuff I know now on my own. No.2 Decriminalize small amounts of all drugs, and legalising psychedelics and cannabis. Sending people to jail for carrying a gram or 2 of coke or heroin etc doesn't help anyone, it doesn't help society. It just gives people with a problem a worse problem and then puts that problem on society when they come out of jail unable to find work due to a criminal record highly stigmatised due to the way the country and government view drugs as a whole. As for weed and psychedelics, if it wasn't for them I would be dead. I've suffered with pretty bad depression and anxiety for the past 10 years. That's all just been wiped away by THC, LSD, mushrooms, DMT etc and I'm not the only one...they cause less damage to society than cigarettes and alcohol...in all honesty it genuinely blows me away that they are illegal.



Decriminalisation of drug possession for personal use and of supply to a friend.



Legislation to protect those who have a small amount of cannabis for their use as could be for medical problems.

Comments continued

- Reduced charges and penalties for possession and use.
- Lower sentences for smaller quantities.
- Harsher punishments for possession, and have a register for known dealers similar to the sex offenders register so communities know the scum live there.
- I would at the very least, lower cannabis. With possible decriminalisation of it. I think addicts need help, not criminalised.
- Legislation to protect those who have a small amount of cannabis for their use as could be for medical problems.
- Immediately legalise cannabis. Establish a regulated harmful substances regime. Encourage research and investment in all potential benefits/harms of all substances affecting mood.
- Decriminalise personal possession of small quantities drugs, Allow personal growing of minor quantities cannabis & mushrooms. Encourage uptake of safe injection rooms. Get whoever writes the legislation to look to the statistics of countries that have less draconian drug policies. And develop & tax cannabis economy as per US example.
- Legalization of marijuana and magic mushrooms, decriminalization of heroin and cocaine use, and case by case of other drugs. Make safe spaces for users and more help for addiction and mental health.
- Legalize and restrict | Legalise marijuana, it's done nothing wrong.
- Decriminalise all drugs and use the funding that would be spare for mental health/drug support services.
- I'd make cannabis legal on all levels, natural psychedelics legal on all levels, these are natural plants and part of our right to experience, I think all other drugs should be legalised with a card you collect from your doctor after completing a consultation that you understand the doses, negative effects off the drugs, helplines if you become addicted, but the power over what you put into your body should be personal not decided by a person that has never experienced the drug, let alone experienced each individual experience of the drug, like all drugs of any kind they affect us all differently.
- Make drugs legal and controlled. Create innovative ways to manage whether someone's drug use has impaired them to do certain activities such as driving (such as an attention app to assess response to stimuli to decide whether someone's drug use would diminish their ability to drive a car) my argument for this sort of thing comes from my experience that drunk and high individuals can be careful drivers and sober individuals can cause accidents. The presence of drugs has an impact but the impact needs to be better addressed rather than the taking of the drugs. Just to add, I take a prescription drug that could impair my driving, I'm still allowed to drive. If I take a drug test, my prescription voids the results as I am allowed to take it and allowed to drive. I could take any illegal stimulant that seriously impaired my driving, drive my car and potentially be a serious threat. Yet I would unlikely end up with a drug offence. nobody has ever told me what signs to look out for when taking my prescription meds just to 'take caution' leaving it pretty much down to me! With drug policies like this, what on earth is the point in the Misuse of Drugs Act?



Decriminalise people who take drugs now.

It's time to wake up and become a society based on compassion, hard data evaluation and innovation.

Additional mental health support urgently.

It would be great to move out of the dark ages and this bogus war on drugs that's done nothing to help society.

We need change, stop talking and take Action. People are dying.

Yes, we are running out of time!

Do it [drug law reform] now. To save our children. To build back better.

I don't think I know anyone over 18 that isn't a criminal under the MODA, it's a tool that is way out of date.

Families experience their loved ones being criminalised and marginalised instead of being supported with harm reduction or treatment options. Criminalising individuals can often lead them to lose touch with their family or avoid due to feeling ashamed of their use.

Need buy-in of any changes from all levels, politicians, police, general public, people with lived experience, etc.

Young people today need jobs and meaningful work, not criminalised for trying to alleviate their boredom or escape from a background of trauma or abuse

We need a massive change in attitudes towards people who use drugs.

I'd also like to see a change in drugs education in school. It stigmatises addicts and doesn't actually do anything to stop drug use or promote safety and awareness.

Interesting survey, I hope this truly makes a difference.

Scotland's drug deaths and problem drug use communities need to be supported by a national drug solution. The UK Government do not show sufficient interest in finding solutions, rather reinforce the 50-year-old MDA that has less and less relevance in today's society.

I commend you this is the first time any organisation have sought public opinion on this not just what they think/believe is right.

This is a health issue, not a criminal one. We can't support people if we criminalise the problems they are going through.

Drugs laws need to consider a variety of voices of people who are using drugs, if the state is actually serious about protecting people and really dealing with drug-related deaths.

These changes would have multifaceted benefits in society, leading to greater equity of opportunity and safety. They would help tackle drug epidemics much more effectively. Tax revenue from cannabis sales could be strongly positive in post COVID economic recovery.

Stop creating addicts and criminalizing them.

Putting an addict in prison and giving them a criminal record will not help them stay off drugs. They'll leave prison unable to find employment because of their criminal record, and they'll end up back in the same situation they started in, with the same people and fall back into the same habits. The government needs to decided whether they want to help or damn these people. Call them 'addicts' call them 'junkies' but they are still people. They are someone's mum, daughter, father or son and they matter. They have something to give to society but they need a lot of help. I believe that if we start taking care of the addicts in our society then everyone else will be better off as a result. Drug addicts are highly likely to commit crimes because they are so desperate for the drug they will do literally anything to get it. If we help drug addicts recover then crimes like prostitution, shop lifting, muggings and even murder would decrease. Everyone in society will be safer if we help these people. The war on drugs has done nothing but create more drugs, made it more unsafe for everyone and treats people with severe mental health problems like criminals. It's inhuman and it's not working. I know so many young people that have tried hard drugs, I worry for them and something drastic needs to change now if we want to solve this issue. So much good can come from just changing one thing.

Drug Law Reform

- We asked about the risks associated with taking drugs - 44% noted that their top concern is the illegality of the drug and the potential for interaction with the police or possibility of prosecution and a criminal record, while 34% were most concerned about health concerns.
- We also asked how concerned people were about the product they are buying not being the drug that they expected. The majority of people who responded were 'concerned' or 'highly concerned' about this risk. Observation of other countries and their drug policy and health initiatives, shows that we can minimise the risk of adulterants in the illicit drug market by decriminalising or legally regulating the market, as well as providing strong public health surveillance, drug checking and safer consumption facilities.
- Concerns about the criminality and negative moral associations of drug and drug use act as a barrier for people in accessing treatment and support. This is highly concerning and could mean that people delay seeking treatment and support around their drug use.
- The stigma associated drugs due to their illegal nature, prevents people from disclosing drug use to professionals with the majority of people worried about being treated differently or their access to treatment or care being restricted.

Policing

- The majority of people who responded to our survey (64%) had not had an interaction with the police related to drugs. People who had a previous interaction with the police were more concerned about the risk of police interaction (55%), than people who had not previously experienced an interaction with the police (37%).
- 67% of the people who responded to our survey were unaware of the discretionary powers that police in Scotland have when it comes to low level cannabis possession. Only 33% were aware that a Police Recorded Warning can be given instead of being charged.
- A minority (25%) were not aware that supply of a controlled drug was an offence regardless of the exchange of money. This highlights a need for improved awareness and engagement with the public on the laws that govern them. Police Scotland proclaim to police by consent so it is essential that we provide the resources for everyone to be aware of their rights and to understand the legal implications of their actions. A key place for this to happen would be in formal education and community education settings.



Looking for legal advice?

[Release.org.uk](https://www.release.org.uk)

Impact on Health

- We asked people if their "concern over interaction with the police would prevent you from accessing support, information or advice about drug use?" 56% of respondents said that they would be worried, while 32% were not concerned. It is important that more people feel safe and comfortable accessing the support they need when they need it.
- We also asked for people to explain why they might not be honest with a health professional about their drug use when visiting them about another issue (e.g. going to the dentist or accessing mental health support). 18% told us that they were worried about the potential legal consequences, 8% indicated they were worried about judgement and 3% indicated they were worried about being treated differently if the health professional knew that they took drugs. 41% were put off being honest about their drug use for a combination of those factors. That means that overall 70% would avoid being honest, and just 30% would be honest.
- We also asked if people were concerned that being honest about their drug use would mean that they were not able to access treatment (e.g. accessing mental health treatment or access to medication). 59% said that this was a concern for them.
- We need to ensure that people who take drugs feel comfortable accessing treatment and support for their drug use and also for other health conditions.
- We need to examine access to mental health support for people who take drugs to ensure that people are not blocked from treatment due to their drug use.
- There also needs to be an expansion of the treatment and services available to people with a wide range of experiences.
- A lack of flexible and wide ranging appointment times and services should be addressed.
- Reluctance from professionals to engage with the topic of drug use due to the legal and moral implications should be challenged through increased training on stigma, bias and drug awareness.
- There is a need to be better connected to other services connected to problem drug use i.e. mental health services where there exists a refusal to treat people with co-existing mental health conditions until they have addressed their drug use.
- The majority of treatment in Scotland is late intervention rather than focusing on early intervention and prevention. We need to focus on providing interventions and services as early as possible, while ensuring they are low-threshold and non-punitive.
- In areas where there are high levels of deprivation and health inequalities, there is often a higher level of problematic drug use. There is a lack of drug-focused health promotion information and often a lack of investment in the general health literacy of people who take drug i.e. widening their awareness of other determinants of health.

Families

- The Misuse of Drugs Act criminalises people who take drugs which means families are forced to engage with the criminal justice system or criminal worlds. Navigating the criminal justice system is difficult for families and can have a negative impact.
- Many people highlighted that stigma related to the criminality of drug use has a negative impact on families and recovery outcomes.
- Anecdotally we also know that a key concern for families would be their loved ones being imprisoned for lower level drug offences then led to developing addiction to other drugs whilst in prison.
- At Crew we have taken support calls from people who have entered prison having never tried drugs and while completing their sentence have developed a physical dependency on synthetic cannabinoids. For many, the result is isolation from loved ones, painful withdrawal, physical health issues and a lasting mental health impact.
- Lack of safe drug consumption spaces that are open to the public results in public drug use which leads to public injecting and drug-related litter. This leads to division in communities and perpetuates the stigma and social isolation.
- The wider general public's view of drug use and people who take drugs is undoubtedly influenced by the moral associations of its illegality. Scotland's commitment to treat drug use as a health issue is undermined by the current legal framework that controls the possession and supply of drugs. This makes it difficult to protect people against the negative social outcomes - we have a ministerial priority to provide 'a public health approach to justice for alcohol and drugs' whilst simultaneously criminalising people for possessing them.

Support for families:



- We need to remove the taboo nature of drug use which is perpetuated by drug legislation, in order to prevent stigma and discrimination that compounds the negative outcomes experienced by people who take drugs and their loved ones.
- **We should aim to prevent people who take drugs from entering the criminal justice system.**
- We need to expand the provision of safer use materials, safer smoking and safer snorting kits to reduce the overall harm of drug use and prevent the spread of infections (such as the common cold, skin infections and COVID-19) and reduce transmission of blood borne viruses.
- **Offer 'safe supply' through extended medically assisted treatment and access to drug checking. Legal regulation should be explored.**
- The Lord Advocate could provide exclusion zones for drug possession/or the possession of drugs could be decriminalised which would allow the provision of services such as safer consumption facilities and drug checking. These services would also refer into other services making referral to other agencies streamlined.
- **The Police Recorded Warning System could be expanded to all drugs, drugs could be decriminalised or depenalised or a model of legal regulation adopted. This would result in fewer people having a criminal record and therefore fewer people would experience the barriers this brings. Stigma around drugs would reduce which may help people to access support when they need it.**
- It is essential that the public are offered the opportunity to fully understand the definitions and differences between models of decriminalisation/legalisation and how drug reform might impact public health prior to sharing their views.
- **The experience of people with mental health conditions accessing treatment if they are also a person who takes drugs should be examined as a priority.**
- The experience of families affected by imprisonment related to drug possession/supply and the long-term outcomes for children and young people should also be explored.
- **The voices of people who take drugs and their loved ones are an essential part of this conversation. Crew and other organisations working directly with people who take drugs and their significant others should be utilised to encourage their participation in public consultation.**
- The process to contribute to public discussion should be accessible to people with a variety of different accessibility needs.
- **It is also important to explore the success of mental health campaigns and the work done in Scotland to reduce stigma around mental illness/suicide, and how a similar public campaign and shift in social attitudes towards people who take drugs can be achieved.**
- Read our 2019-2020 Drug Trend Report to gain a better insight into drug markets, the drivers behind drug-related deaths and the impact of COVID-19: www.crew.scot/drug-report-20