

Legalising cannabis will create more addicts, warns think tank

By **Camilla Tominey** ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LEGALISING cannabis could lead to one million more people using it, with 100,000 becoming addicted, according to a study that warns of the dangers of "sucking young people into the mayhem".

In its report, the Centre for Social Justice think tank linked cannabis use to mental health problems and found "a very real prospect" of more young people taking up the drug if it became legal.

YouGov polling cited in the report revealed that nearly a quarter of people aged between 18 and 24 who had never used cannabis before would "definitely or probably try it" if the law changed, equating to more than a million new users under the age of 25 alone. According to World Health Organisation and NHS estimates, at least 100,000 of these would become addicted.

The poll claims legalisation would also increase the frequency of use. Of

those aged 18-24 who said they had smoked cannabis before, a third admitted they would smoke it more frequently if legalised.

Andy Cook, Chief Executive of the CSJ, said: "Advocates of cannabis legalisation or decriminalisation should

100,000

Number of new cannabis users under 25 who could become addicted, according estimates from UK health organisations

think through the implications of their views. They would open the floodgates to hundreds of thousands of new users, many of whom would be young and vulnerable and so more prone to damaging physical and mental damage."

Describing how the law acts as a deterrent, the report states: "The existing law does mitigate the risk that cannabis

possesses. Despite a slight rise uplift in recent years, cannabis consumption has been falling for nearly 20 years in the UK. Many people do take the law seriously and the law continues to deter them from using a harmful substance".

The report also cast doubt over claims that legalising cannabis could improve the quality sold on the streets. Although it could initially depress the illicit trade in cannabis, evidence from the US suggested that black market operations adapted rather than disappeared.

Although legalisation would bring additional revenue to the Treasury, the costs associated with regulation and treating increased addiction were unknown.

Chula Goonewardene, a senior psychotherapist at the addiction charity Steps2Recovery, said legalisation could enable those at risk of addiction to "make informed choices and seek appropriate help".

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