

Cannabis Becomes Class B Drug

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Mark White, home affairs correspondent

Cannabis has been reclassified as a Class B drug, following a controversial decision by the Home Secretary to ignore independent medical recommendations to keep it at the less serious Class C.



The Home Office warns the average age of first-time cannabis use is 13

The reclassification places cannabis alongside amphetamines and barbiturates in the eyes of the law, and increases the maximum sentence for possession from two to five years.

[Jacqui Smith](#)'s decision comes despite last year's findings by the Advisory Council for the Misuse of Drugs which failed to establish any clear causal link between [cannabis](#) and mental illnesses like schizophrenia.

Politicians accused the Government of politicising a medical issue after their advice was ignored.

However, supporters of tougher cannabis laws have welcomed the move.



Victim Lucy Braham

Jason Braham's daughter Lucy was stabbed to death by Oxford University student William Jaggs in 2006.

Jaggs was a known drug-user and in the murder trial which followed it became clear that cannabis had played a major role.

Speaking to Sky News, Mr Braham said: "Initially the blame was put on crack until it became apparent that cannabis itself could have been the trigger that turned him psychotic or schizophrenic, as was established at the trial.

"I don't want anyone else to go through what Lucy went through; someone who never touched drugs in her life, but was butchered by someone who had."

The Government have said their decision is based on 'uncertainty' over the impact of stronger varieties of the drug.

A statement from the [Home Office](#) said: "Skunk, a much stronger version of the drug, now dominates the UK's cannabis market."

"Skunk has swept other, less potent, forms of cannabis off the market, and now accounts for 81% of cannabis available on our streets, compared to just 30% in 2002."

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Andy Cornwell, Cannabis Education Trust

Several mental health charities believe the reclassification will raise awareness of the links between cannabis use and psychotic illness.

Charity [Sane](#), which gave evidence to the government review, said it knew of hundreds of cases where heavy users of cannabis, particularly skunk, went on to suffer psychotic breakdowns, hallucinations and paranoia.

However, campaigners for greater leniency in cannabis laws have warned that the changes will not have the desired effect.

Andy Cornwell, from the Cannabis Education Trust, said: "Prohibition doesn't work, and whether cannabis is in category A, B or C, it'll make virtually no difference to the number of people using it.

"Three or four million people will use cannabis today, they are not influenced by the category."



Cannabis was downgraded in 2004

"That's what ministers are failing to address.

"They are using cannabis as a political football, ignoring the advice of the expert committee and they don't see that prohibition essentially drives the problem underground, makes the problems worse, and does nothing to protect young and vulnerable people."

Cannabis was downgraded to Class C in 2004 by then Home Secretary [David Blunkett](#) on the basis that it would reduce the amount of police time spent on dealing with those in possession of the drug.

Tim Hollis, the chief constable of Humberside and the spokesman for the Association of Chief Police Officers on drugs said: "It does send a clear message to young people that this is a dangerous drug and that if they use cannabis, there is an increased prospect of police taking firm action with regards to offences of possession."