



Parents have their say on cannabis: Civitas polling on the use of cannabis and the views of parents

Frank Young and Shaun Bailey

About the authors:

Frank Young is editorial director at Civitas and leads the Children and Family Unit. Frank is a trustee of a national children's charity and regularly writes on issues relating to children and families.

Shaun Bailey AM is a London Assembly Member and youth worker who stood to be Mayor of London in 2021. He is a former No.10 Special Advisor and a regular commentator on youth violence.

About Civitas: Civitas: *Institute for the Study of Civil Society* is an independent, cross-party think tank that seeks to facilitate informed public debate. We search for solutions to social and economic problems unconstrained by the short-term priorities of political parties or conventional wisdom.

Acknowledgment: Civitas is grateful to the Politics and Economics Research Trust for their support with this work.

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Civitas polling on cannabis	4
Methodology.....	4
Headlines	4
3. Polling the general public on cannabis use.....	7
4. Polling Britain’s parents	9
5. Conclusions	14
What does our polling tell us about cannabis use in the UK and the views of parents?	14
The difference between parents based on their attitude to cannabis legalisation	14
Comparing white and non-white groups in our poll.....	16
London	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1. Introduction

Cannabis is now the most consumed illegal drug in the UK¹ and even among children, almost a fifth of 15 year olds admitted to smoking cannabis in the last year². We are increasingly concerned that the case against legalising cannabis simply isn't being made and the voice of parents is not being heard.

Earlier this year we asked Deltapoll to conduct two major surveys, one large scale sample of the UK population and another of parents. Both of these surveys are representative of public opinion and the survey of the UK population is, to our knowledge, the largest ever survey of cannabis use ever undertaken.

Our large scale survey of the UK population discovers that almost 6 million people would try cannabis for the first time if it were legalised. We also uncovered a hidden crisis in parents using cannabis, with twice as many parents saying they have used cannabis 'many times' in the last ten years as non-parents. Our survey tells us legalising cannabis would lead to an extra 1.5 million parents of young children using cannabis.

Despite the almost constant argument made in favour of legalisation by well-funded lobby groups half of Britain's parents are worried about their children using cannabis and say cannabis legalisation would make their job harder. A third of parents told us that ordering cannabis was as easy as ordering a pizza.

Street dealers were clear, that if the country legalised cannabis they would simply undercut high street chemists and supermarkets and it would do nothing to stop gang violence³. Parents agree and told us that drug dealers would continue to target their children even if cannabis were legalised.

Our polling shows that one in five under 18s have been offered cannabis, according to British parents, a figure that is likely to be a significant underestimate, and these parents want to see the government and the police take tougher action on cannabis. There is overwhelming support for the police using stop and search to remove cannabis from our streets and parents support schools calling in the police if cannabis use is suspected. Non-white parents are much more supportive of schools testing and searching children for cannabis than white parents.

The potential cannabis market in the UK is estimated to be worth more than £2.5 billion to companies looking to profit from the drug.⁴ There is a lot of money to be made through a legal cannabis market and increasingly politicians are simply shrugging their shoulders and acquiescing to calls to legalise cannabis as if nothing else could be done. The results of these surveys should make us stop and think.

¹ ONS, 2021

² Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA), Joint Venture: Estimating the Size and Potential of the UK Cannabis Market, 2018

³ <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/a-raw-deal-drug-dealing-discussed-with-lived-experience>

⁴ Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA), Joint Venture: Estimating the Size and Potential of the UK Cannabis Market, 2018

2. Civitas polling on cannabis

Methodology:

Civitas commissioned Deltapoll to conduct a survey of UK parents to test their views on a range of issues related to cannabis⁵. Deltapoll surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,029 UK parents with at least one 12–18-year-old child between the 4th and 5th May 2022. The poll was segmented by age, geography and demographic grouping to provide a more detailed analysis of responses and an accurate understanding of attitudes towards cannabis.

Deltapoll also conducted a large-scale survey of the UK population to establish the extent of cannabis use among adults and its likely use if cannabis were legalised. Deltapoll surveyed a nationally representative sample of 4,451 UK adults. This survey was conducted in two waves in May 2022 and is, to our knowledge, the largest ever survey of UK adults and the possible impact of legalisation ever undertaken.

Headlines:

Polling the general public on cannabis use:

Legalisation of cannabis would lead to almost 6 million more cannabis users, with parents leading the way.

While only about one in ten UK adults say they have used cannabis many times over the last ten years, the legalisation of cannabis would result in over 6 million new cannabis users.

Parents are more than twice as likely to say they have used cannabis many times in the last ten years as non-parents.

More than 1.5 million parents of primary school-aged children, who haven't used cannabis in the last ten years, would try it if it were legalised.

Cannabis use:

- Around one in six (16%) UK adults who had not previously used cannabis in the last ten years would try it if it were legalised. Analysis of police force population data (contained in Appendix 1) shows this would mean more than 5.86 million UK adults.
- Just over a third of UK adults (36%) who say they have used cannabis recreationally over the last ten years said they would use cannabis more often if it were legalised.
- Almost a third (32%) of 18-24-year-olds who said they had not previously used cannabis in the last ten years would try it if it were legalised. This represents almost 1 million (949,000) 18-24-year-olds.
- Parents are more than twice as likely as non-parents to say they have used cannabis many times in the last ten years (14% vs 6%). Approximately four in ten parents, who say

⁵ Deltapoll is a member of the British Polling Council. Full tables can be found at: <https://deltapoll.co.uk>

they have used cannabis recreationally in the last ten years, would increase their cannabis usage if it were legalised.

- Our calculations show that approximately 1.5million parents of children under 10, who haven't used cannabis in the last ten years, would try it if it were legalised

Polling of Britain's parents:

There is little mandate for legalising cannabis among Britain's parents, with non-white parents the most opposed and Londoners not far behind.

British parents are split on the issue of legalising cannabis, about half support the idea and the other half are unsure or reject the idea. Parents of older children generally oppose legalisation and non-white parents are the least likely to support legalisation of any group.

Support for legalisation:

- Just over half (53%) of all parents support legalising cannabis.
- White parents support legalisation by 56% to 32%. Support for legalisation falls to 37% among non-white parents, with 42% of non-white parents opposing the legalisation of cannabis.

Half of Britain's parents are worried about their children using cannabis and say cannabis legalisation would make their job harder.

According to Britain's parents, 1 in 5 children aged between 12-18 have been offered cannabis.

Most parents say legalising cannabis would make it harder to prevent their children from using cannabis.

More than a third of Britain's parents think ordering cannabis is as 'easy as ordering a pizza.'

Parent's views of their children's cannabis use:

- Half of Britain's parents are worried about their children using cannabis.
- Non-white parents are the most concerned group with 70% of non-white parents saying they are worried about cannabis use among their children with one in three saying they are very worried. Only 28% of non-white parents say they are not worried about their children using cannabis.
- One in five (20%) children between the ages of 12-18 had been offered cannabis according to UK parents. A figure that jumps to a quarter of 16-18-year-olds.
- Almost one in ten (9%) of parents say they are aware of their children using cannabis. This represents potentially 500,000 young people aged 12-18 using cannabis in the UK.

- UK parents agreed 57% to 24% that the legalisation of cannabis would make it harder to prevent their children from using cannabis.
- One in three parents agree that 'ordering cannabis is as easy as ordering a pizza' than didn't (36% agree vs 34% who disagree).

Non-white parents are much more supportive of schools testing and searching children for cannabis than white parents.

White parents are generally opposed to schools taking action to reduce cannabis use, but non-white parents generally support schools testing for cannabis use, searching for cannabis and calling in the police if cannabis use is suspected.

Schools and cannabis:

- 51% of parents of sixth-form-aged students think schools and colleges should routinely test for cannabis against 41% who think they should not.
- 52% of non-white parents would favour schools and colleges routinely testing for cannabis.
- A majority (56%) of non-white parents agree with schools routinely searching for cannabis vs 38% of white parents.
- Almost half (47%) of all parents agree that schools or colleges should call the police if a pupil or student is suspected of using cannabis. Half (50%) of non-white parents support the involvement of the police if cannabis is suspected with 39% opposed.

British parents overwhelmingly support stop and search to remove drugs from our streets.

British parents want the police and government to take a much tougher approach to cannabis.

Non-white parents are the most likely to say they want the government and police to take a tough stance on cannabis.

Seven out of ten British parents back stop and search tactics to rid the streets of drugs, a figure that rises to eight in ten non-white parents.

Cannabis legalisation wouldn't stop drug dealers from targeting children according to British parents.

Parent's views on taking tougher action to reduce the availability of cannabis:

- Almost six in ten parents (58%) felt the government should be tougher on cannabis. Only three in ten (30%) felt the government shouldn't be tougher.
- More than two-thirds (68%) of non-white parents said the government should be tougher on cannabis. Only two in ten (21%) non-white parents said the government should not take a tougher approach to cannabis.
- UK parents want the *police* to take a tougher approach to cannabis by 57% to 34%. Non-white parents are even more strongly in favour of the police taking a tougher approach to cannabis, 67% to 22%.
- More than seven in ten (71%) of parents agreed that stop and search should be used to remove cannabis from the streets. Only two out of ten parents disagree. Eight in ten non-white parents support 'stop and search' to remove cannabis from the streets.
- More than half (52%) of parents believe drug dealers would continue to target under 18s if cannabis were legalised with only 8% disagreeing. Almost four in ten (38%) parents felt drug dealers would target under 18s "much more."

3. Polling the general public on cannabis use

Deltapoll conducted a representative poll of 4,451 UK adults across two waves in May 2022.

Q1: Thinking back over the last 10 years or so, have you used cannabis recreationally, that is, for your own pleasure?

- Almost one in ten (9%) UK adults said they have used cannabis on many occasions in the last 10 years. This is equivalent to 4.7million UK adults⁶.
- Men (11%) were more likely than women (7%) to say they had used cannabis very often.
- one in six (16%) adults under 34 have used cannabis very often in the last 10 years, in comparison to one in sixteen (6%) of adults over 34.
- Parents are more than twice as likely as non-parents to say they have used cannabis many times in the last ten years (14% vs 6%).
- Londoners are the most likely to say they have used cannabis very often in the last 10 years (13% compared to 8% for non-London adults).

⁶ ONS 2020: 52,890,044 UK adults (over 18), 9% = 4,760,000.

- More than seven in ten (71%) UK adults say they have not used cannabis in the last 10 years. With three-quarters of women (75%) saying this against two-thirds (67%) of men.
- Age is a significant factor with just over half of adults under 45 (54%) have not used cannabis in the last 10 years, compared to eight in ten (83%) adults over 45.

Q2: If the recreational use of cannabis was legalised, would you use it more often, less often or would it make no difference one way or the other?

- We then asked those who had used cannabis in the last ten years if the legalisation of cannabis would make a difference to their use. Just over a third (36%) said that they would use it more often and 42% said it would make no difference.
- Once again, there was a clear correlation with age, with younger adults being more likely to increase their cannabis usage than older adults.
- About four in ten parents, who had used cannabis recreationally in the last ten years, would increase their cannabis usage if it were legalised.

Q3: If the recreational use of cannabis was legalised, do you think you would try it?

- We then asked those who said they had not used cannabis in the last 10 years what difference the legalisation of cannabis would make. This representative sample of 3,148 adults found that 16% of non-users (those who had not previously used cannabis in the last 10 years) would try it if it were legalised. **This represents approximately 5.86million⁷ UK adults.**
- About one in five parents who hadn't previously used cannabis in the last 10 years would try it if it were legalised, representing approximately 2.1 million parents⁸.
- Parents of primary and pre-school-aged children, who have not used cannabis recreationally in the last ten years, are more likely than those with secondary-aged children to say they would try cannabis if it were legalised. Our calculations show that approximately 1.59 million parents of children under 10 who haven't used cannabis in the last 10 years would try it if it were legalised.⁹

⁷ See Appendix 1

⁸ 34.4% of the UK adult population are parents of under 18s according to our dataset, equivalent to 18,141,000 UK adults (ONS 2020). 57% have not used cannabis in the last 10 years, equivalent to 10,340,000 UK adults. 21% of these would try cannabis if it were legalised, equivalent to 2,171,000 parents of under 18s.

⁹ 26% of the UK adult population are parents of children under 10 according to our dataset, equivalent to 13,751,000 adults. 54% said they have not used cannabis in the last 10 years, equivalent to 7,425,000 UK adults. 21% of these parents would try cannabis if it were legalised, equivalent to 1,559,000 parents of children under 10.

- Almost a third (32%) of 18-24-year-olds who have not used cannabis in the last ten years would try it if it were legalised. This is almost 1 million 18-24-year-olds¹⁰.

4. Polling Britain's parents

Deltapoll conducted a nationally representative survey of 1,029 UK parents with at least one 12 – 18-year-old child between May 4th – 5th 2022.

Q1: Do you think that the recreational use of cannabis should or should not be legalised in the UK?

- Just over half of parents (53%) were pro legalisation, a third (33%) were against legalisation and 13% were unsure. These figures are broadly in line with other similar polling exercises which show that about half of the UK adult population would support the legalisation of cannabis, with significant minorities opposed.¹¹
- Parents with younger children were generally more pro-legalisation than parents of older children. This may be because parents of older children are more likely to be aware of cannabis being offered to their children than parents with younger children.
- White parents support legalisation by 56% to 32%. Support for the legalisation of cannabis falls to 37% among non-white parents with 42% of non-white parents opposing legalisation.

Q2: How worried, if at all, are you about your child(ren) using cannabis?

- Half of parents said they were worried about their own children using cannabis (46% said they were not worried). Almost one in five UK parents are very worried about cannabis use among their children.
- 70% of non-white parents said they were worried about cannabis use among their children, with only 28% saying they are not worried. Almost one in three (29%) non-white parents said they are very worried about cannabis use among their children.
- 47% of white parents said they were worried about cannabis use among their children, and 50% said they were not worried. 16% of white parents are very worried about cannabis use among their children.

¹⁰ ONS 2020: 5,600,000 adults aged 18-24. 53% of these have not used cannabis recreationally in the last ten years or so (2,900,000). 32% of these said they would try cannabis if it were legalised (928,000)

¹¹ *Public attitudes to drugs in the UK 2019: is the UK ready for drug policy reform?*

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bbb29273560c345fcc0fade/t/5d6d287bf37f2400019d35fd/1567434878163/Attitudinal+Survey+Report+FINAL.pdf>

Q3: Have any 12 to 18-year-old children in your household, as far as you are aware, ever been offered cannabis?

- One in five (20%) children between the ages of 12-18 had been offered cannabis according to UK parents, a figure that jumps to a quarter of 16–18-year-olds. This is very likely to underestimate the true scale of cannabis being offered and used by young people, as it accounts for only the experience that parents tell us they are *aware* of.

Q4: And again, as far as you are aware, have any 12 to 18-year-old children in your household ever used cannabis recreationally?

- Where 20% of all parents are aware of their children being offered cannabis, only 9% say that they are aware of their children using cannabis. 83% say they don't think their children have used cannabis. This represents potentially 500,000¹² young people aged 12-18 using cannabis in the UK (a likely underestimate for the same reason outlined above).
- There is a clear split between full-time working parents and non-working parents, with 12% of working parents saying they were aware of their children using cannabis and only 4% of non-working parents.

Q5: If the recreational use of cannabis was legalised, do you think any 12 to 18-year-old children in your household would, either now or in the future, be more likely to use it, less likely or would it make no difference?

- When we asked parents if legalisation would make it more or less likely that their children would use cannabis, one in five (20%) parents thought it would be more likely. 54% said it would make no difference at all.

Q6: If the recreational use of cannabis was legalised, do you think it would be easier or harder for you to prevent your child(ren) from using it?

- UK parents agreed 57% to 24% that the legalisation of cannabis would make it harder to prevent their children from using cannabis. This figure rises as the children get older, most likely because the salience of the issue rises with the age of the child.
- Mothers are more likely than fathers (62% to 53%) to say that legalisation would make parenting harder.
- Non-white parents felt that legalisation would make it easier to prevent their children from taking cannabis (40% of non-white saying it would make it easier versus 22% of white parents).

¹² ONS (2020): 5,335,000 young people aged between 12-18, 9% = 480,000.

Q7: If cannabis were legalised, do you think that companies selling it would actively market it to under-18s or not?

- Generally, UK parents felt that companies with an interest in marketing legal cannabis would not target under-18s, by 57% to 28%.
- Just over one quarter (26%) of white parents believe companies would target under-18s, against almost half (44%) of non-white parents.
- Almost one in three (31%) of parents in households with an income over £34,000 said that companies would target under-18s compared to almost 1 in 4 (23%) of parents in households with an income under £34,000.

Q8: As far as you are aware, would you say that the use of cannabis is or is not a normal part of young people's culture?

- We asked parents how far cannabis use was a normal part of young people's culture. This is hard to define but provides a sense of how acceptable cannabis is among young people and the extent to which it is seen as harmless. Just over a third of parents overall (36%) felt cannabis was a normal part of young people's culture, with just over half (52%) disagreeing.

Q9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'ordering cannabis is as easy as ordering a pizza?'

- To get a better idea of how widespread and 'normal' cannabis is we asked parents to put this into context by comparing the availability of cannabis to ordering a pizza. More parents agreed that 'ordering cannabis is as easy as ordering a pizza' than didn't (36% versus 34%), with just over one in ten (11%) parents strongly agreeing.
- Younger parents were much more likely to agree than older parents (45% of parents aged 34 or younger versus 32% of parents aged over 45).
- Four in ten London-based parents felt that ordering cannabis was as easy as ordering pizza, the joint highest of any UK region (alongside Scotland).

Q10: Do you think that schools and colleges should or should not routinely test pupils/students for cannabis use?

- Our survey moved on to look at attitudes towards cannabis and the role of public services, such as schools and the police. When we asked all parents if they felt schools (and colleges for older children) should *routinely* test their pupils or students (post-16) for cannabis, parents were split, with 46% of parents disagreeing and 42% agreeing with the proposition.
- Parents of older children, who are much more likely to be exposed to cannabis, were more strongly in favour of routine testing than parents of younger children (45% of

parents of 16- to 18-year-olds would like schools or colleges to routinely test students for cannabis versus 35% of parents of under-fives).

- Parents with children in sixth form or college were more supportive of testing than parents with children in middle or secondary school, probably reflecting the increased salience of the issue. A similar split was observed when looking at the age of parents with older parents more in favour of this measure than younger parents.
- A majority of non-white parents (52%) favour schools and colleges routinely testing for cannabis, compared to 40% of white parents. Only 35% of non-white parents felt schools and colleges should not routinely test for cannabis use compared to 47% of white parents.

Q11: Do you think that schools and colleges should or should not routinely search young people for cannabis?

- We took the line of questioning further to ask how parents felt about schools or colleges routinely searching young people for cannabis. Overall, parents were against this idea 40% to 48%.
- However a majority (56%) of non-white parents agree with schools routinely searching for cannabis (38% for white parents). Half of white parents and about a third (36%) of non-white parents are opposed to schools and colleges routinely searching for cannabis.
- Better off households are generally more supportive of young people being searched for cannabis than poorer households.

Q12: If a school or college suspects a student/pupil of using cannabis, should it call the police or not?

- Our survey moved on to asking about the involvement of the police if a student was suspected of using cannabis. On this question, parents were more supportive, with 47% agreeing that schools or colleges should call the police, against 40% who disagreed.
- Parents of older children are more supportive than parents of younger children (35% of parents of under-fives supported the measure versus 47% of parents of 16–18-year-olds).
- Half of non-white parents support the involvement of the police if cannabis is suspected.

Q13: Do you think the government should or should not take a tougher approach to cannabis use amongst under-18s?

- Almost six in ten parents (58%) felt the government should take a tougher approach to cannabis use among under-18s, indicating that parents feel disconnected from political

rhetoric in this area. Only three in ten (30%) parents felt the government shouldn't be tougher.

- Once again, parents of older children were more permissive, with 62% of parents of 16 - 18-year-olds favouring a tougher government approach than parents of under-fives (47%). This was also mirrored in the age profile of parents, with older parents favouring a tougher approach than younger parents.
- Non-white parents generally want the government to take a tougher approach to cannabis. More than two-thirds (68%) of non-white parents agree that the government should be tougher on cannabis use among under-18s compared to just over half (56%) of white parents. Only slightly more than two in 10 (21%) non-white parents felt the government should not take a tougher approach to cannabis use among under-18s.

Q14: Do you think that the police should or should not use 'stop and search' powers to help remove cannabis from being sold or used on the streets?

- Since stop and search remains one of the most discussed aspects of policing, we wanted to test parents' attitudes to stop and search as a means of ridding the streets of cannabis and avoiding it being sold or used on the streets.
- A very sizeable majority (71%) of parents agreed that stop and search should be used to remove cannabis from the streets, with only two out of ten parents disagreeing.
- There was little difference in attitude based on the age of the parents or age of the children in the household, with younger parents (under 34) being more supportive of stop and search measures than older parents.
- London parents are particularly supportive, with three-quarters (75%) supporting stop and search to remove cannabis from the streets. An even higher majority of non-white parents, eight in ten (80%), support stop and search measures to remove cannabis from the streets. White parents are largely in line with parents overall, with 70% in support.

Q15: If cannabis were legalised it would still be illegal for under-18s to purchase cannabis products. To what extent, if at all, do you think drug dealers would still target under-18s?

- More than half (52%) of parents believe that drug dealers would continue to target under-18s if cannabis were legalised, with only 8% disagreeing. A third felt a change to the legal status of cannabis would make no difference. Four in ten (38%) parents felt drug dealers would target under-18s much more.
- This was particularly pronounced in London, where six in ten parents felt drug dealers would target under-18s more.

5. Conclusions

What does our polling tell us about cannabis use in the UK and the views of parents?

Our polling highlights the risks associated with legalising cannabis. Legalising cannabis would lead to a huge increase in cannabis use, with 6 million adults saying they would try it for the first time if it were legalised.

We uncover a hidden crisis in parents using cannabis, with twice as many parents saying they have used cannabis many times in the last ten years as non-parents.

Just over one in three parents told us that ordering cannabis is as easy as ordering a pizza.

Parents felt legalising cannabis would make it harder to prevent their children from taking cannabis and according to Britain's parents, 1 in 5 British teenagers have been offered cannabis, rising to a quarter of 16-18-year-olds.

Parents are split on whether schools or colleges should routinely test for cannabis but they generally support tougher measures such as calling the police if cannabis use is suspected. On these measures, non-white parents were generally more supportive of tougher action by schools and colleges.

Generally, British parents want the police and government to talk and act 'tough' on cannabis. There is very strong support for the police using stop and search tactics to remove cannabis from the streets. Parents also felt that even if we legalised cannabis drug dealers would continue to target under-18s.

Policymakers and government ministers should be wary of any rush to legalise cannabis. British parents think it would make their job harder, would do nothing to stop the likelihood of their children being targeted by drug dealers and overwhelmingly want the police to take a tougher approach to cannabis on the streets.

The difference between parents based on their attitude to cannabis legalisation:

Our parent poll looked at the views of parents who were either 'for' or 'against' the legalisation of cannabis, to test each question against this perspective. Predictably, it uncovered stark variations based on the answer to this question.

- Parents who are against the legalisation of cannabis are more than three times as likely to say they were 'very worried' about their children taking cannabis compared to parents who were pro-legalisation (30% to 9%).
- Parents who are pro-legalisation are more likely to say that they are aware of their children being offered cannabis in comparison to parents who are against legalisation (24% to 15%). Parents holding pro-legalisation views are 2.5 times as likely to say that they were aware of their adolescent children taking cannabis (13% to 5%).

- When we asked ‘If the recreational use of cannabis was legalised, do you think it would be easier or harder for you to prevent your child(ren) from using it?’, almost two-thirds (65%) of parents who are anti-legalisation feel that it would be harder to prevent their children from using cannabis if it were legalised. Just over half (53%) of parents who are pro-legalisation agreed that it would be harder to prevent their children from using cannabis.
- It is interesting to note that parents overall agree that the job of parenting would be made harder if the law changed, even if they agreed with the law change in principle.
- Almost seven in ten (68%) parents who are pro-legalisation of cannabis feel that were cannabis legalised, companies would not market cannabis to under-18s. Four in ten (42%) parents who are anti-legalisation of cannabis think companies would not market cannabis to under 18s.
- More than twice as many parents who are pro-legalisation agree that cannabis is a normal part of youth culture as those who are anti-legalisation (49% versus 20%). Seven in ten parents who are against legalisation disagree with the statement that cannabis is a normal part of youth culture.
- 42% of parents who are pro-legalisation agree that ‘ordering cannabis is as easy as ordering a pizza’.
- One in seven parents who are pro-legalisation *strongly* agree that ‘ordering cannabis is as easy as ordering a pizza’, compared to one in fourteen parents who are against cannabis legalisation.
- Looking at our group of questions on how schools and colleges should respond to pupils or students suspected of taking cannabis, parents who are anti-legalisation are more likely to support action to tackle cannabis use. Two-thirds of parents who are anti-legalisation would support a school or college calling the police if they suspected a pupil or student of using cannabis, compared to just 36% of parents who are pro-legalisation.
- Parents who are against legalisation are much more supportive of tougher measures to prevent cannabis use, with 80% agreeing that the government should take a tougher approach, against 44% of parents who are pro-legalisation.
- Eight in ten parents who are against the legalisation of cannabis want to see the police take tougher action, compared to just over four in ten (42%) parents who are pro-legalisation of cannabis.
- When we asked about the police using stop and search powers, almost nine in ten (88%) parents who are against the legalisation of cannabis support the police using this power

to remove cannabis from the streets. However, even parents who support the legalisation of cannabis agree with almost two-thirds (62%). This shows consistently strong support for stop and search to prevent drugs from being sold and used on our streets.

- Parents very strongly agree with the view that even if cannabis were legalised drug dealers would still target under-18s. Only 8% of parents who are pro-legalisation of cannabis think that this would lead to drug dealers targeting under-18s a lot less. Almost half (45 %) of parents who are pro-legalisation think that it would lead to drug dealers targeting under-18s more (60% of anti-legalisation parents agree that drug dealers would target under-18s more).

Comparing white and non-white groups in our poll

It is important to understand the white and non-white cross break accurately. As this work was nationally representative (of the UK as a whole) non-white respondents make up approximately 14% of our sample, reflecting the composition of the UK. Likewise 86% of our respondents were white. Caution should be applied to reading too much into this cross break on this basis, especially where 'non-white' will include all ethnic and mixed ethnic groups. The demographic composition of Britain will naturally differ from locality to locality, with some areas being heavily made up of one ethnic group or many ethnic groups. It is not possible to extrapolate this detail from a national poll without a much higher initial sample size. However, it is possible to identify some broad trends and differences that are noteworthy.

Non-white Britons seem to be much less enthusiastic about legalising cannabis than white Britons and are also more worried about their children using cannabis. There is little difference between white and non-white parents in being aware of their children having taken cannabis or their children having been offered cannabis. Non-white parents are more likely to think that legalisation would make it easier to prevent their children from taking cannabis than white parents (40% to 22%).

Non-white parents are also much more likely than white parents (44% to 26%) to think that if cannabis were legalised, companies would market the product to under-18s. They are also less likely to think it is a normal part of youth culture than white parents (27% to 37%).

Perhaps the most eye-catching part of our data is the group of questions around schools, colleges and police action to tackle cannabis use. Non-white parents are consistently more supportive of action being taken, such as searching, routinely testing and bringing in the police where cannabis is suspected, than white parents. 56% of non-white parents think schools and colleges should search pupils or students for cannabis, against 38% of white parents. They similarly approve of regularly testing for cannabis, 52% versus 40%.

Non-white parents want to see the government and the police take a 'tougher' approach to cannabis. Eight in ten non-white parents even support stop and search being used to stop the use and sale of cannabis on the streets, compared to seven in ten white parents.

London

The Mayor of London has made legalising cannabis a feature of his term as mayor, consistently calling for changes to the legal status of cannabis and launching a commission to review the legal status of cannabis¹³.

Our polling looked at the views of London parents compared to parents across the UK. The sample size was small but it is possible to draw out some broad trends.

We estimate that if cannabis was legalised there would be an extra 775,000 Londoners using cannabis¹⁴.

Where a small majority exists for legalisation among parents across the UK, London parents are less enthusiastic (44% of London parents support legalisation compared to 53% of parents nationally). This might be because of the multi-ethnic make-up of London as a city, where we have already observed that non-white parents are less supportive of legalisation than white parents.

London parents are more likely to say they are very worried about their children using cannabis than the national average (23% versus 18%) but are less likely to say they are aware of their children being offered cannabis (14% to 20%).

London parents are much more likely to say it would be easier to prevent their children from taking cannabis if it were legalised than parents overall (24% to 35%).

17% of London parents *strongly* agree that ordering cannabis is as easy as ordering a pizza, compared to 11% of parents overall.

There is little difference between London parents and parents overall in their support for schools and colleges either testing or searching for cannabis. London parents are, however, slightly less keen on police involvement (43% compared to the figure of 47% for parents overall) if cannabis is suspected.

London parents are slightly less likely to say the government and/or the police should take a tougher approach to cannabis than parents overall. London parents do, however, strongly support stop and search powers being used to prevent cannabis from being sold or used on the streets.

London parents were the most likely of any region to agree that drug dealers would target under-18s more if cannabis were legalised. Just over six in ten (61%) London parents agreed with this statement, compared to about half (52%) of parents overall.

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/may/12/sadiq-khan-launches-commission-to-examine-cannabis-legality>

¹⁴ ONS 2020 figure for population of London minus the population of the City of London (which is not the responsibility of the Police and Crime Commissioner for London): 6,945,784. The proportion of people in the London area who said they had not tried cannabis in the last year was 62% (4,306,384), of those 18% (figure 775,149 would try it if legalised).

Appendix 1: Cannabis by Police Area

Police area	Adult population by police area	% of adults who would try cannabis if it were legalised	No. of adults who say they would try cannabis if it were legalised by police area	% of non cannabis users who would try it if it were legalised**
London (Metropolitan Police)	6,946,484	18%	775,228	11.1%
Scotland*	4,439,078	17%	543,343	12.2%
West Midlands	2,295,730	16%	253,449	11%
Northern Ireland*	1,454,392	19%	207,251	14.2%
Thames Valley	1,908,807	14%	205,769	10.7%
West Yorkshire	1,846,835	16%	200,936	10.8%
Greater Manchester	2,240,722	13%	198,080	8.8%
Devon and Cornwall	1,434,220	16%	176,696	12.3%
Avon and Somerset	1,389,393	16%	171,173	12.3%
Hampshire	1,569,100	14%	169,149	10.7%
Kent	1,466,357	14%	158,073	10.7%
South Wales	1,077,958	20%	155,226	14.4%
Sussex	1,348,621	14%	145,381	10.7%
Essex	1,454,517	12%	127,416	8.7%
South Yorkshire	1,114,385	16%	121,245	10.8%
Nottinghamshire	928,034	18%	118,603	12.7%
Leicestershire	878,164	18%	112,229	12.7%
West Mercia	1,013,904	16%	111,935	11%
Northumbria	1,177,703	13%	110,233	9.3%
Derbyshire	843,595	18%	107,812	12.7%
Lancashire	1,192,225	13%	105,393	8.8%
Surrey	941,806	14%	101,527	10.7%
Merseyside	1,128,346	13%	99,746	8.8%
Staffordshire	890,055	16%	98,262	11%
Hertfordshire	938,509	12%	82,213	8.7%
North Wales	563,618	20%	81,161	14.4%
Humberside	735,836	16%	80,059	10.8%
Lincolnshire	607,563	18%	77,647	12.7%
Dorset	624,042	16%	76,882	12.3%
Northamptonshire	600,348	18%	76,725	12.7%
Cheshire	841,441	13%	74,383	8.8%
Wiltshire	584,035	16%	71,953	12.3%
North Yorkshire	654,881	16%	71,251	10.8%

Gwent	479,324	20%	69,023	14.4%
Gloucestershire	514,706	16%	63,412	12.3%
Norfolk	717,402	12%	62,844	8.7%
Dyfed-Powys	418,828	20%	60,311	14.4%
Cambridgeshire	673,775	12%	59,023	8.7%
Suffolk	596,508	12%	52,254	8.7%
Warwickshire	455,882	16%	50,329	11%
Durham	513,083	13%	48,025	9.3%
Bedfordshire	534,679	12%	46,838	8.7%
Cleveland	456,376	13%	42,717	9.3%
Cumbria	393,186	13%	34,758	8.8%
City of London*	8421	18%	940	11.1%
Total			5,856,666	

**Note: Scotland, Northern Ireland and the City of London do not have Police and Crime Commissioners.*

*** Percentage of those who say they have not used cannabis in the last ten years*

Sources:

Police areas:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/methodologies/userguidetocrimestatisticsforenglandandwales>

Population figures:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2020>

First published

June 2022

© Civitas 2022

Civitas, 55 Tufton Street
London SW1P 3QL

All rights reserved

Cover credit: *gradyreese*

Independence: Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society is a registered educational charity (No. 1085494) and a company limited by guarantee (No. 04023541). Civitas is financed from a variety of private sources to avoid over-reliance on any single or small group of donors.

All the Institute's publications seek to further its objective of promoting the advancement of learning. The views expressed are those of the authors, not of the Institute.