

**Effects of the
Western Australian
Cannabis Infringement Notice
Scheme on public attitudes,
knowledge and use**

Baseline, Year 1

**Effects of the Western Australian
Cannabis Infringement Notice
Scheme on public attitudes,
knowledge and use
– Baseline, Year 1**

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This is a report of Sub-study 1 of *An evaluation of the impact of changes to cannabis law in Western Australia on cannabis use, the drug market, law enforcement, knowledge and attitudes, and cannabis-related harms - Year 1*

Like the 3 other sub-studies in this research, this sub-study comprises the pre-phase of a pre-post study of the impact of the changes to cannabis law in WA. It is envisaged that the post-phase will be conducted 18 months after the commencement of the new laws which occurred on March 22, 2004.

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OTHER REPORTS ON THIS RESEARCH

This is a list of the Year 1 Sub-study reports published as part of the *Evaluation of the impact of changes to cannabis law in Western Australia on cannabis use, the drug market, law enforcement, knowledge and attitudes, and cannabis-related harms*.

Sub-study 1

Fetherston, J. & Lenton, S. (2005) *Effects of the Western Australian Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme on public attitudes, knowledge and use – Baseline, Year 1*. Perth, National Drug Research Institute.

Sub-study 2

Chanteloup, F., Lenton, S., Barratt, M. & Fetherston, J. (2005) *Effects of the Western Australian Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme on regular cannabis users regarding attitudes, use, and drug market factors – Baseline, Year 1*. Perth, National Drug Research Institute.

Sub-study 5

Sutton, A. (2005) *Review of policy makers, police and judicial perspectives on the Western Australian Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme– Baseline, Year 1*. Perth, National Drug Research Institute.

Sub-study 7

Farrington, F. & Lenton, S. (2005) *Effects of the Western Australian Cannabis Infringement Notice Scheme on the attitudes and drug use of school children – Baseline, Year 1*. Perth, National Drug Research Institute.

Summary report

Lenton, S., Chanteloup, F., Fetherston, J., Sutton, A., Hawks, D., Barratt, M. & Farrington, F. (In press) *An evaluation of the impact of changes to cannabis law in WA - Summary of the Year 1 findings*. Canberra: National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a report on phase one of one of the seven sub-studies of a larger project funded by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund (NDLERF) to *evaluate the impact of changes to cannabis law in Western Australia on cannabis use, the drug market, law enforcement, knowledge and attitudes, and cannabis-related harms*.

This project is a pre-post evaluation of changes to legislation and regulations for minor cannabis offences as a result of recommendations of the Western Australian (WA) Community Drug Summit held by the WA Government in August 2001.

The aims of this sub-study are to investigate the likely impact on the general public of the new cannabis laws and other associated changes (such as public education, changes in police procedures, etc.) in terms of prevalence of cannabis use and attitudes and knowledge regarding cannabis and the law, and the deterrent effect of cannabis law. Other sub-studies deal with impacts on more specific populations including regular cannabis users, school children, and policy makers, police and the judiciary.

It is envisaged that phase two, the post-phase, will be conducted at least 18 months after the enactment of legislative and other changes for cannabis in WA, which came into effect on 22 March 2004.

This pre-phase component of the sub-study was conducted via randomised anonymous telephone interviews that attempted to address areas including respondents' attitudes towards cannabis, knowledge of existing WA cannabis laws, attitudes towards proposed legislative changes, general attitudes towards the law and police and their own experiences of cannabis use. The interviews were conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Calls were made during October 2002, resulting in 809 completed interviews with a response rate of 38% and a metropolitan to rural ratio that was reflective of that reported in the most recent WA population census.

The main findings of the pre-phase component were:

The sample was evenly divided between male and female respondents with an age range from 14 to 70 that was largely representative of the age distribution of the WA population described in the most recent census, albeit with a slight overrepresentation in the 61-70 years age group.

More than half (54%) of the sample reported having ever used cannabis at some point in their lives and 18% reported use of the drug in the last twelve months. Although the number of lifetime users was greater than that found by recent household surveys of the WA population, the number having used it in the last 12 months was no different. This suggests the sample was not biased towards recent users of the drug. Male respondents were more than twice as likely as females to have used cannabis recently. As expected based on previous literature, the most negative attitudes towards both cannabis and the proposed legislative changes tended to derive from those respondents who had never used the drug.

Age was seen to have considerable bearing on patterns of cannabis use with rates of use seen to decline in an inverse relationship to the age of the respondents. Preference for the use of hydroponically cultivated cannabis was only found in a minority of the recent cannabis users in the sample. However, cannabis using respondents under 25 years of age were significantly more likely to both report both the use of hydroponically cultivated cannabis and to express a preference for cannabis grown in this fashion. Similarly, although the most popular method of consumption across the entire sample was the smoking of cannabis in joints, amongst those respondents under 25 the use of a bong was more common.

More than half (54%) of respondents indicated that the reason they had never tried or had given up cannabis was that they had no desire to use the drug. Other common responses dealt with concern over health or psychological factors. The illegal nature of the drug was given as a reason for never having used by 15% of respondents and by only 8% of those who had ceased use. Education was rarely cited as a reason for having never used the drug with only 3% of respondents mentioning it and it was not mentioned at all in the context of having ceased cannabis use.

The practise of cultivating cannabis amongst this sample was relatively uncommon with only 11% of those respondents who had used the drug in the last twelve months having done so. The majority of those who did, did so for self-supply with three quarters or more of the cannabis they smoked being self grown.

There was a common perception across the sample that rates of cannabis use in WA were higher than survey data such as the National Drug Strategy Household Surveys would tend to indicate. Consistent with the literature, this tendency to overestimate was even more pronounced amongst those respondents with a history of cannabis use.

A series of attitudinal statements revealed that across the sample, cannabis was not viewed in a very positive light although, as expected, those respondents who had used cannabis and, more particularly, those who had recently consumed it (used it in the last 12 months) tended to be much less negative in their views than those who had never used it. Some 64% of the total sample disagreed that the benefits of cannabis use outweigh its harms and risks, 69% agreed that people under 18 should not use the drug and 89% believed that driving a car while affected by cannabis should be a criminal offence.

Despite these generally negative attitudes towards cannabis, 42% agreed that it should be legal for people over the age of 18 to use cannabis and nearly 49% of the sample believed that it should not be illegal for a person to give another a small quantity of cannabis. There was general agreement (84%) that cannabis could be beneficial for people with certain medical conditions.

With regards to the deterrent value of the law, just 40% of the sample agreed that many people who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility of getting a criminal conviction, a view that was not significantly affected by whether or not respondents' had used cannabis themselves. While the sample was roughly evenly divided on whether strict laws deter drug use, most believed that the chances of being apprehended for a cannabis offence were low. Only 11% of the sample believed users, and only 15% thought those growing it, were likely to get apprehended. Dealing was more commonly seen as likely to result in apprehension, but even then, only by 35% of the sample. These figures were not significantly affected by whether

or not respondents' or their families had a history of cannabis related charges. Some 77% of respondents believed police time could be better spent than on investigating minor cannabis offenders. Education was viewed by 78% of the sample as a more appropriate response to minor cannabis offences than legal sanctions that resulted in the offender receiving a criminal record.

Knowledge of penalties and police powers applicable under WA's existing cannabis laws was found to be relatively patchy. For example, while 75% of the sample were aware of the police option of issuing cautions for possession of small amounts of cannabis, 80% of respondents wrongly believed that police required a warrant to search a house where they believed cannabis to be present. Perceptions of the current laws as being '*too harsh*', '*about right*' or '*too lenient*' were approximately evenly spread across the sample. These views were significantly affected by respondents' history of cannabis use with 46% of those who had never used the drug viewing them as '*too lenient*' as opposed to just 16% of those who had ever used cannabis at some point in their lives.

Some 61% of the sample thought that possession of less than 100 grams of cannabis for personal use should be legal, 59% thought that growing up to two cannabis plants should not be a criminal offence (i.e. decriminalisation) and 53% thought that growing cannabis for an adult's personal use should be legal (i.e. no penalties).

When unaccompanied by an explanation, understanding of what was meant by the phrase *prohibition with civil penalties* was shown to be relatively poor with only 57% correctly interpreting its meaning, 30% thinking criminal penalties would apply and 8% thinking it would be legal. Once the new proposed legislation including the concept of *prohibition with civil penalties* was explained in detail to the respondents, 79% of the entire sample stated that it appeared to be '*a good idea*' and 70% of the sample indicated that they believed the severity of its penalties to be '*about right*'. These responses were found to be significantly affected not only by respondents' level of personal experience of cannabis, but also by religiosity, age, political affiliation and age of offspring. Despite this however, even within these subgroups opinion of the proposed laws was almost invariably viewed by an absolute majority as '*a good idea*' and only among respondents of 17 years or younger did the view of its strictness as being '*about right*' not hold an absolute majority.

Generally, respondents did not believe that the new laws would have any noticeable affect on the numbers of people using cannabis, the cost of the drug or the ease of obtaining it. Although 51% believed more people would cultivate cannabis, only 5% of respondents indicated that they would do this themselves. Similarly, over 90% of the sample indicated that the new legislation would be unlikely to cause any change in the amount of cannabis they personally consumed or to the frequency with which they consumed it. Alterations in their use of other drugs or alcohol was also felt to be very unlikely with 95% of the sample indicating that they did not anticipate this to change.

While 48% of the sample agreed that hydroponic cultivation of cannabis should be excluded from the infringement notice scheme, 44% did not. Some 77% of respondents supported the idea that police should have powers to deal with suppliers of hydroponic equipment who engaged in criminal activity such as commercial cannabis production. It was agreed by 70% of the sample that police should be equipped with discretionary powers to prevent people exploiting loopholes within the new laws, such as engaging in supply under the infringement notice limits.

These high levels of public support for the proposed model should be of interest to the general public, to policy makers, and to legislators on both sides of the political spectrum. The levels of knowledge about cannabis, health and the law, and rates of cannabis use in the sample will provide a good baseline for comparing with the post change evaluation results. The results will likely also be of use to those developing public education campaigns on these issues.

BACKGROUND

THE LARGER STUDY

This is a report on the first phase of one of the seven sub-studies of a larger project funded by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund (NDLERF) to *evaluate the impact of changes to cannabis law in Western Australia on cannabis use, the drug market, law enforcement, knowledge and attitudes, and cannabis-related harms*. NDLERF agreed to initially fund Year 1 of this 2 year study to be conducted over 3 years.

The cannabis law changes in WA

This larger project is a pre-post evaluation of changes to legislation and regulations for minor cannabis offences as a result of recommendations of the WA Community Drug Summit held by the WA Government in August 2001. The WA Government endorsed the Summit's recommendations on 27 November 2001 and, as a result, set up a *Ministerial Working Party on Drug Law Reform* to provide advice on how the recommended cannabis and other drug law reforms could be implemented. The Working Party presented its report (Prior, Swensen, Migro et al., 2002) to the Minister of Health in March 2002. As a consequence the *Cannabis Control Bill 2003* was introduced into the WA Parliament on 20 March 2003 and passed both houses of Parliament on 23 September 2003. The *Cannabis Control Act 2003* came into effect on 22 March 2004. The main features of the changes to cannabis law exemplified in the Bill and the accompanying initiatives are summarised in the box below.

The Cannabis Infringement Notice (CIN) Scheme

Principles and Goals:

The scheme recognises that cannabis, like other drugs has the capacity to cause harm.

The scheme should:

- Not encourage use, nor patterns of use which may increase harm;
- Reduce the adverse social costs of being apprehended for a minor cannabis offence;
- Move cannabis supply away from large-scale, criminal, commercial suppliers;
- Free up the police and the courts to deal with more serious crimes.

Key Features^[1]:

- The possession of cannabis for personal use remains illegal.
- An adult possessing up to 15 grams of cannabis is eligible for an infringement notice with a penalty of \$100.
- An adult possessing more than 15 but not more than 30 grams of cannabis is eligible for an infringement notice with a penalty of \$150.
- Possession by an adult of a used smoking implement attracts a penalty of \$100.
- Cultivation by an adult of not more than 2 non-hydroponic cannabis plants is eligible for an infringement notice with a penalty of \$200. Adults in households where there are more than 2 plants are not eligible for an infringement notice. Persons cultivating cannabis hydroponically are not eligible for an infringement notice but are subject to criminal prosecution.
- Offenders are required to pay the penalty in full within 28 days or complete a specified cannabis education session.
- Those receiving more than two infringement notices across more than two separate days within a three-year period do not have the option of paying a fine. They must complete the education session or face a criminal charge.
- Juveniles are not eligible for an infringement notice under the CIN scheme but can be cautioned and directed to intervention programs.
- Police will lay criminal charges against persons who attempt to flout the intention of the scheme, for example by engaging in cannabis supply, even if they are only in possession of amounts otherwise eligible for an infringement notice.
- Where those otherwise eligible for an infringement notice face more serious charges for other concurrent offences police will issue criminal charges for the cannabis matters, rather than issue a CIN.
- Thresholds for dealing have been reduced from 100 grams or 25 plants to 100 grams or 10 plants.
- Persons possessing hash, or hash oil are not eligible for an infringement notice.
- Implementation of the scheme has been accompanied by a public education campaign on the harms of cannabis and the laws that apply.
- 'Head shops' (cannabis paraphernalia retailers) and hydroponic equipment suppliers now are subject to regulation.
- The scheme will be subject to ongoing monitoring and review.

[1] After the data collection for this sub-study was conducted in October 2002 the Government made two changes to the scheme proposed by the Working Party. Given the timing of these changes it was not possible to evaluate public attitudes to these as part of this sub-study. These changes involved: (1) Making possession of a used smoking implement an offence under the CIN scheme attracting a \$100 fine. (2) In response to an Upper House amendment moved by the Opposition, The Government decided to cap the number of notices so that those receiving more than 2 infringement notices across more than 2 separate days within a 3 year period will not have the option of paying a fine. They will have to complete the education session or face a criminal charge.

Aims and Objectives

The evaluation investigates: police implementation of the changes; drug market effects; impact on regular cannabis users, population prevalence, knowledge and attitudes regarding cannabis and the law; effect on school children; effect on apprehended cannabis users; and population impact on health problems associated with cannabis use.

The specific objectives of the project are to look at the impact of the changes to cannabis legislation and regulation introduced in WA as a consequence of the recommendations of the WA Community Drug Summit on:

- population based prevalence of cannabis use, attitudes, knowledge regarding cannabis and the law, and deterrent effect of cannabis law.
- rates of cannabis and other drug use and attitudes re cannabis and the law among regular cannabis users.
- drug market issues: price, availability, source (user-growers Vs large scale criminal suppliers etc.), cannabis supplying, income from supplying cannabis, perceived risk of apprehension for supplying.
- attitudes, and practices of members of the law enforcement and magistracy regarding expectations of the legislative changes and their effects on the drug market.
- school students: knowledge of law, attitudes to cannabis, cannabis use and experience of the drug market.
- perceptions of school teachers regarding the influence on students and drug education in schools and judicial sectors involved in enforcing the new legislation and regulations for minor cannabis offences.
- perceptions of law enforcement personnel on the influence of the new legislation and regulations for minor cannabis offences on the drug market and its dynamics.
- police attitudes (re cannabis, law, goals of the scheme etc.) and practices (discretion, net-widening etc.)
- individuals apprehended under the existing cannabis cautioning scheme and the new scheme in terms of cannabis use, attitudes to the law and social impacts
- trends in law enforcement activity in relation to minor cannabis offences including the number of apprehensions (arrests, cautions and infringement notices issued), and comparison with cautioning and arrest data prior to the legislative change in order to determine the extent of net-widening, and the burden or savings on the criminal justice system.
- numbers of people seeking treatment for cannabis-related problems
- serious road and other injuries, and psychosis and violence and related hospital admissions among the population in general, and young males in particular.

Study design

The study consists of seven sub-studies, four of which entail data collection before, and 18 months after, the proposed changes are implemented. This time frame should allow for lags in implementing components of the proposed changes and the bedding

down of these. The sub-studies with no year one component will largely be retrospective studies of existing data or retrospective reports from subjects. A summary of the sub-studies follows.

Sub-studies with a year one component

- *A study of the effects of changes in cannabis law in WA on general population prevalence of cannabis use, attitudes, knowledge regarding cannabis and the law* – A primarily quantitative study involving a pre-post telephone survey (n=approx. 800 per wave) and additional analysis of existing population survey data during the post change phase.
- *A study of regular (at least weekly) cannabis users regarding rates of cannabis and other drug use, drug market factors, and attitudes re cannabis and the law* – Comprising an in-depth qualitative and quantitative interview with (n=approx. 100 per wave) investigating both impacts on patterns of use and drug market factors (especially original source of cannabis).
- *A study of impact of legislative change on attitudes and drug use behaviour of school children* – A qualitative and quantitative survey of Year 9 and Year 12 students (n=approx. 2600 per wave).
- *A study of police, policy makers and judicial attitudes (regarding cannabis, law, goals of the scheme etc.) and practices (discretion, net widening etc.)*. Involving primarily qualitative interviews (n= approx 30) and possibly some focus groups (n=3).

Sub-studies with no year one component

- *A study of individuals apprehended under the new scheme in terms of cannabis use, attitudes to the law and police, and social impacts* – This is a descriptive interview study with approx. 80 ex-piators and 80 non-ex-piators.
- *An analysis of law enforcement data for individuals apprehended under new scheme and comparison of that with those apprehended under the existing cannabis cautioning scheme* - Involving retrospective analysis of existing data.
- *A study of existing treatment seeking and cannabis related morbidity and mortality indicator data* – Involving retrospective analysis of using time series data on treatment utilization and health indicators.

WHY STUDY PUBLIC ATTITUDES?

Research in criminology suggests that public opinion is crucial in determining the effectiveness of laws (e.g. Sarat, 1977; Silberman, 1976; Tyler, 1990). Additionally, individual's 'moral commitment' to a particular law is one of the most powerful predictors of whether they will obey that law (Paternoster & Piquero, 1995; Tittle, 1977).

Attempts to reform drug laws often generate considerable controversy and public debate. This was certainly true in the WA case (Lenton, in press). However, views expressed in public forums, such as letters to the editor of newspapers or calls to talkback radio, probably represent the views of people at the extremes of opinion, but not necessarily the 'silent majority'. For that reason, if it is important to gauge public

acceptance of particular laws, as the above research suggests, then it is crucial attempt to access members of the public directly, such as was attempted in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prevalence of cannabis use

Cannabis is the most widely used illicit drug in Australia as it is in most other industrialised nations (Hall, Johnston, & Donnelly, 1999; Miller & Draper, 2001; United Nations International Drug Control Programme, 1997). Since 1985 self report data concerning drug and alcohol use has been collected nationally in Australia in household surveys conducted as part of the National Drug Strategy (formerly the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse). Surveys were conducted in 1985, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2001 and 2004. In the most recent of these surveys, 33% of all respondents aged 14 or over reported ever having used cannabis (lifetime use), with about 11% having used the drug in the past year (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005). Based on data from the 1998 survey 46% percent of Australians who had ever used cannabis continued to do so, having used in the past 12 months (Maxwell, 2001). In 1998, 17% of those Australians who used cannabis in the past 12 months used the drug every day, 25% smoked it at least once a week, but not daily, 16% smoked it once a month 12% every few months, 16% once or twice a year, and 9% less often (Adhikari & Summerill, 2000).

The National Drug Strategy Household Survey indicated that use of cannabis in the last year by 14-19 year olds increased from 29% to 35% between 1995 and 1998 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 1999). Young women evidenced a particularly marked increase in use over this period. More recent surveys however, suggest there may be a downturn in this trend with 25% of 14 – 19 year olds reporting recent use of the drug in 2001. This decrease however has not altered cannabis' status in Australia as the most commonly used illicit drug (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002). A recent survey of drug use by Australian students confirmed that cannabis is the illicit drug most commonly used by secondary students, with 36% of this group reporting use at some time in their life (Letcher & White, 1998). Some 34% of 14 year olds (year 9) had ever used cannabis while 11% used the drug in the last week. By age 17 (year 12) 55% had ever used the drug and 16% had used in the last week (Letcher & White, 1998).

The public health effects of cannabis

Like any legal or illegal drug, cannabis has the capacity to cause harm. The public health significance of cannabis use is affected by the severity of the health effects experienced by individual users as well as the prevalence of cannabis use in the population. While most cannabis use is experimental and intermittent, the major health risks are more likely to be experienced among those using the drug regularly (daily or near daily) over several years or more (Martin & Hall, 1997,1998). The current public health burden of cannabis at current population use rates, is probably low, and far less than that associated with alcohol and tobacco (Hall, 1995; Hall & Babor, 2000). However, as the prevalence of heavy cannabis use increases and the age of initiation declines, the public health burden is likely to increase (Hall, 1995) and, as such, it has been argued that more attention should be paid to the public health impact of the drug, especially on Western societies where use among young people is

gradually increasing (Hall & Babor, 2000). The major public health burden associated with cannabis is likely to be associated morbidity rather than mortality (Hall, 1995).

The health effects of cannabis on users

Although the public health burden of cannabis use is currently small, people who use cannabis, particularly long-term heavy users, can experience significant adverse health effects. The most probable health effects have been identified in recent authoritative systematic reviews of the literature (eg. Hall & Solowij, 1998; Hall, Solowij, & Lemon, 1994; Kalant, Corrigall, Hall, & Smart, 1999; Martin & Hall, 1997,1998). These are summarised as follows.

The acute effects of cannabis include: (1) *Negative psychological effects*, including anxiety, dysphoria, panic and paranoia, which are most common in naive users and can lead to panic attacks (Hall, 1995); (2) *Disruption of cognitive function*, including memory learning and processing of time, (Beardsley & Kelly, 1999; Smiley, 1999); (3) *Increased risk of psychotic symptoms amongst vulnerable individuals* (Hall & Degenhardt, 1999); (4) *Psychomotor impairment* including slowed reaction time, information processing, impaired perceptual-motor coordination and motor performance, impaired short term memory, attention and signal detection and tracking behaviour and slowed time perception (Martin & Hall, 1997,1998). There is general agreement that this psychomotor impairment has the capacity to impair driving performance (Robbe, 1994; Smiley, 1999), but the extent to which cannabis use contributes to road crashes is controversial (Hall & Solowij, 1998). Nevertheless there has been a large body of evidence linking cannabis with such accidents and some observers have suggested that the effects may be underestimated (Ashton, 1999; Tutt, Bauer, Arms, & Perera, 2001).

The most probable effects of daily, or near daily, use of cannabis over several years include: (1) *Cannabis dependence*, (Hall & Solowij, 1998; Hall et al., 1994; Johns, 2001); (2) *Subtle cognitive impairment*, (Solowij, 1998) and (3) *Adverse respiratory effects*, (Hall, 1995; Hall & Solowij, 1998; Martin & Hall, 1997,1998).

High risk groups for cannabis related harm include: *Adolescents; People with a co-morbid mental health or substance use problem; Pregnant women; and People with pre-existing respiratory or cardio-vascular problems* (Swift, Copeland & Lenton, 2000).

Public opinion research on the legal status of cannabis possession and use

Both the theoretical and research literature on deterrence emphasises the importance of public attitudes to the law in determining the effectiveness of the law in regulating behaviour. It suggests that measuring public attitudes to cannabis laws is likely to be important in understanding the success of applying criminal or civil penalties to cannabis possession and use offences.

Most published public opinion surveys on the legal status of cannabis have been conducted in the USA and Australia (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher, 1994). In both countries these surveys have routinely canvassed attitudes to the legalisation of cannabis, but public opinion surveys including the question of *civil* versus *criminal*

penalties (i.e. the ‘decriminalisation’ question) have been less consistently conducted. The following section discusses methodological and definitional concerns with such research and summarises the results of public opinion research on the legal status of cannabis possession and use.

Knowledge about cannabis law and confusion about terminology

There is considerable evidence that many members of the public are unaware of the laws which apply to cannabis use in their jurisdiction and that there is a great deal of confusion among the general public as to the meaning of terms such as ‘decriminalisation’ and ‘legalisation’ when applied to cannabis (Single, 1989). Furthermore, where civil rather than criminal penalties apply, respondents are more likely to incorrectly state that cannabis possession and use is legal (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher, 1994; Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 1996; Fitzsimmons & Cooper-Stanbury, 2000; Heale, Hawks & Lenton, 2000).

In the 1998 NDSHS this confusion of terms was measured directly as respondents were asked to choose the statement that most closely corresponded to their understanding of the term ‘decriminalised’. Overall, 53% of the sample incorrectly believed it meant ‘legal, no penalty applies’, only 36% said correctly that it was ‘illegal and only a caution or a small fine applies’, and 11% were unsure. Interestingly residents in two of the three jurisdictions where civil penalties applied were more likely (49% in the ACT and 50% in the NT) to identify the correct definition for ‘decriminalisation’ although, even in these places, half the respondents were incorrect or unsure (Fitzsimmons & Cooper-Stanbury, 2000, p. 31).

Australian attitudes towards cannabis legislation

Legalisation

Recent National Drug Strategy Household Surveys put support by Australians aged 14 years and over for legalising cannabis for personal use at 29% in 2001 and 27% in 2004 (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2002, 2005), slightly down from the 30% in 1998 (Adhikari & Summerill, 2000) and 42% in 1995 (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, unpublished). In the 1995 survey, support was greatest among those aged 20-34 (52%) compared to those 55 or older (27%), and among those who had tried cannabis (70%) (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, 1996). In the 1998 survey support was highest among males (34%) rather than females (25%). Except for those in the youngest age group (14-19 years) where 37% supported legalisation, support for legalisation decreased with age from a high of 44% in the 20-29 year old group down to 11% among the over 60 year olds. (Adhikari & Summerill, 2000). Another variable predicting support for legalisation is whether or not respondents had tried the drug, with those who had tried it being significantly more likely to oppose prohibition than those who had not used it (Makkai & McAllister, 1993). Age and lifetime use are strongly correlated (Makkai & McAllister, 1998) with for example, in 1995 64% of those in the 18-24 year old age group reporting lifetime use, compared to just 4% of those aged 55 and more. In 1993 and 1995 between 6 and 7 out of 10 of those who supported legalisation had used the drug at least once compared to less than one in five of those who held the opposite view (Makkai & McAllister, 1998, pp. 31-2).

Significant differences in public opinion have often been found between the various Australian states and territories (e.g. Bowman & Sanson-Fisher, 1994; Fitzsimmons & Cooper-Stanbury, 2000; Makkai & McAllister, 1993; Roy Morgan Research Centre Pty. Ltd., 1998). For example, in the 1998 NDSHS support for the legalisation of cannabis was highest in the Northern Territory (44%) and WA (32%). The states and territories with prohibition with civil penalties in place for minor cannabis offences had higher rates of support for legalisation of cannabis for personal use (SA 32%, ACT 34%, NT 44%) than other jurisdictions which maintained criminal penalties, except for WA (Fitzsimmons & Cooper-Stanbury, 2000).

Roy Morgan Research polls suggest that the proportion of the adult Australian community believing that smoking of cannabis should be made legal increased from about 24% in the late 1970's to 31% in 1984, after which it decreased to 25% in 1987 and steadily increased to 33% in 1993 where it remained until 2001 when it reduced to 31% (Roy Morgan Research Centre Pty. Ltd., 1998, 2002) According to Makkai and McAllister (1997) the decline in support for legalisation in the mid 1980's is similar to that observed in the USA where the decline began in the late 1970's and was probably due to a more conservative economic situation, increasing youth unemployment and a general weakening of interest in illicit drug use generally. They speculate that the increase in support for cannabis law reform in the 1990's may be due to generational change. They suggest that, as the proportion of the general population who have tried cannabis – a major predictor of support for reform – grows, so does the overall level of support for reform (Makkai & McAllister, 1997). They examine data on support for cannabis legalisation in various Australian jurisdictions and for different age cohorts and conclude that the generational hypothesis is more likely to be valid than the alternative hypothesis which holds that debates in the media surrounding the legal status of the drug, especially in South Australia were responsible for increasing support for legalisation.

Data from the 1998 Morgan poll suggest the highest levels of support for legalising cannabis among the Australian community come from those aged 18 to 24 years (42%) and 25 to 34 years (41%), followed by those aged 35 to 49 years (36%). Lowest levels of support come from Australians aged 14 to 17 years (28%) and Australians aged 50 or over (24%). Among those looking for work, nearly half (48%) support the legalisation of cannabis. In comparison, 37% of those who are employed and 27% of those who are not looking for work support the legalisation of the drug. There was no difference in opinions regarding legalisation of cannabis between white collar (37%) or blue collar (37%) workers. Support for legalisation was highest among more educated Australians and gradually declined with lower levels of education. Among those who had completed at least some tertiary education, support for the legalisation of cannabis was 39%. Support fell to 34% for those who had completed years 11 or 12, 32% for those who had completed year 10 and 28% for those who had some secondary education. Only 18% of those who had only completed primary school believed cannabis should be legalised (Roy Morgan Research Centre Pty. Ltd., 1998).

In a national telephone survey Bowman and Sanson-Fisher (1994) found that between 52% and 55% of respondents believed that growing cannabis for personal use, possessing cannabis for personal use, using cannabis and possessing implements for its use should be legal, which reflected greater support for this option than had previously been found in opinion surveys. Males were more likely than females to support legalisation of activities associated with the use of small amounts.

Furthermore, support for cannabis legalisation generally was strongest among younger (aged 18 – 34) respondents, and those who had ever used the drug compared to those who had never used it (77% versus 37%). However, the vast majority (between 75% and 85%) of those surveyed believed activities involving large amounts or supply of cannabis should be illegal.

In a WA study conducted at the same time as Bowman & Sanson-Fisher (1994) Lenton and Ovenden (1996) found only 37% of the sample believed that cannabis 'should be as legal as alcohol'.

Political affiliation has also been linked to attitudes to cannabis law in Australia as it has in the USA. Makkai and McAllister (1993) analysed the results of a 1990 Electoral survey, and reported 60% of Liberal-National (right wing) voters favoured prohibition compared with only 41% of Labor and Democrat (left wing) voters.

Civil penalties

In Australia, attitudes to civil penalties for cannabis have been measured by Roy Morgan Research polls and recently through the National Drug Strategy Household Surveys. Data from Morgan polls indicate that support for the application of civil penalties to minor cannabis offences has remained at between 45% and 49% over the five surveys conducted from 1979 to 1987 (Advisory Committee on Illicit Drugs, 1993; Roy Morgan Research Centre Pty. Ltd., 1998). In a national survey conducted for the National Task force on Cannabis, Bowman and Sanson-Fisher (1994) found that approximately 75% of the sample in their 1993 Australian survey believed that 'growing or possessing cannabis for personal use' and 'using cannabis' should not be criminal offences. In this survey, unlike others, considerable effort was taken to explain the terms used including 'criminal' vs. 'non-criminal' in order to reduce definitional confusion. The authors believed that the high level of support they found for civil penalties compared to other surveys was largely a function of the terms having been explained to respondents (Bowman & Sanson-Fisher, 1994, pp. 55-6). There were no significant differences between males and females in terms of support for cannabis use not being a criminal offence (51% Vs 47%, $p=.219$), but younger respondents (aged 18 - 34) were more likely than those older to support non criminal penalties for cannabis possession and use ($p=.000$). Interestingly, when asked what sort of penalties should apply if the offences were illegal, males were significantly more likely to say that they should be criminal as opposed to non criminal. For example if possession of cannabis for personal use were illegal, 34% of males as compared to 48% of females thought it should be a non criminal offence ($p=.000$).

In the 1995 NDSHS respondents were asked 'Do you think that the possession of small amounts of marijuana for personal use should be a criminal offence, that is, should offenders get a criminal record?' Some 26% said that it should be illegal, but not a criminal offence, and 26% said it should be illegal and a criminal offence (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, unpublished).

In a Western Australian study Lenton and Ovenden (1996) found that when the term prohibition with civil penalties was not explained, 64% believed possession of cannabis for personal use should not be a criminal offence explained, however, when the term was explained 'much like speeding in a motor vehicle, they should get a fine, but not a criminal record', 72% of the sample supported the idea. These authors found

that when the term was not explained left wing voters were more likely to be in favour of 'decriminalisation' than right wing voters, but when the term was explained these differences disappeared. Lenton (1994) found that when decriminalisation was not explained people with strong religious convictions (said religion was 'very important' in their lives) were less likely to be in favour of it than those without such strong convictions. However, when the term was explained religiosity failed to predict attitudes to decriminalisation. Lenton argued this suggested that in the absence of information people appeared to make judgements based on broader constructs which may be closely related to religious affiliations, however, when they are presented with information they make judgements on the facts as presented and whether or not they hold strong religious positions becomes less important (Lenton, 1994; Lenton & Ovenden, 1996)

In the 1998 NDSHS respondents were asked what should happen to anyone found in possession of small amounts of cannabis for personal use. Compulsory drug education was the preferred penalty option in all states and territories (36%), followed by in order: a fine similar to a parking fine up to \$200 (21%); a substantial fine of about \$1000 (16%); and a caution or warning only (12%). Other options such as a community service order, weekend detention, jail or 'other' were endorsed by 5% or less of the sample (Fitzsimmons & Cooper-Stanbury, 2000, p. 30). However, this forced choice question on what should happen to people found in possession of small quantities of cannabis for personal use did not include options consistent with 'legalisation' such as 'no penalty', although elsewhere in the survey 29% of respondents thought that personal use of cannabis should be 'made legal'.

Conclusions from public opinion research on the legal status of cannabis possession and use

This review of the literature on the public opinion research on the legal status of cannabis possession and use suggests the following conclusions: (1) Many members of the public are unaware of the laws which apply to cannabis and many misunderstand terms such as 'decriminalisation' and 'legalisation' when applied to cannabis; (2) Australian research finds that where civil rather than criminal penalties apply, between 28% and 55% of respondents incorrectly state that cannabis possession and use is legal; (3) Support for legalisation of cannabis has fluctuated over time in both the USA and Australia. The reasons for these changes are unclear but some have suggested that where support has waned this may be due to macro economic downturns and associated youth conservatism; (4) In Australia, national opinion poll support for legalisation of possession and use of cannabis declined from an early peak of 31% in 1984 to 25% in 1987 and then steadily climbed to a peak of 33% in 1993 where it remained until 2001 when it declined to 31%, and the recent national drug survey puts support at about 27% in 2004; (5) Highest levels of support for legalising cannabis among the Australian community come from those who have used cannabis, the young (18 - 34), males, those looking for work, those with higher levels of education, and voters on the left of the political spectrum; (6) In Australia, public opinion polls indicate that support for the application of civil penalties to minor cannabis offences has remained at between 45% and 49% between 1979 and 1987; (7) In the few Australian public opinion surveys where the terms 'criminal' and 'non-criminal' penalties have been explained up to 75% of the general public thought civil penalties should apply to cannabis possession and use offences.

METHOD

A questionnaire was drafted with items specifically examining the domains of respondents' attitudes towards cannabis, knowledge of existing WA cannabis laws, attitudes towards proposed legislative changes, general attitudes towards the law and police, their own experiences of cannabis use and demographic data. The proposed instrument was examined for inherent bias by four independent respondents from the alcohol and drug field, two of whom identified themselves as being in favour of the legislative changes, and two others who were not supportive of the proposed model. The feedback received from these four individuals was taken into consideration and used to inform the content and wording of the final draft of the questionnaire.

The finalised questionnaire was then supplied to a market research company (Hides Consulting Group Pty Ltd) where it was transformed into a Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) format. The survey was administered over the telephone to 809 respondents whose phone numbers were randomly selected from the electronic white pages with a city to country ratio reflecting the actual population distribution (approximately 75:25). Three call backs were made to obtain a contact at each residence and up to five call backs where the respondent was a permanent resident. The respondent at each household was required to be over 14 years of age and in situations where more than one person was resident in the contacted household, the respondent was selected by the nearest birthday method. The entire survey was conducted throughout October 2002, prior to the draft legislation going before state parliament. Results from the phone survey were analysed using SPSS v.11 software (SPSS inc., 2001).

RESPONSE RATE

Reasons for non-response are given in Table 1. Response rates were calculated using a denominator which was the sum of those contacts with eligible respondents that did not result in a complete interview (that is, 'refused to participate', 'soft appointment', 'hard appointment') and those who had a complete interview. The response rate for the city sample was 36.4% and for the country was 44.1% and for the sample as a whole was 38.1%.

Table 1: Response and failure rate of phone interviews

Reason	Metro sample		Country sample	
	f	%	f	%
Complete interview	599	12.7	210	11.6
Virgin ^[1]	348	7.4	275	15.2
Disconnected	590	12.6	207	11.4
Language	75	1.6	5	0.2
Refused	1622	34.6	459	25.4
Engaged / busy	11	0.2	4	0.2
No Answer / Answering machine	209	4.4	314	17.4
Soft appointment ^[2]	22	0.4	17	0.9
Hard appointment ^[3]	1	0.0	0	0.0
Not eligible ^[4]	660	14.0	210	11.6
Away	33	0.7	14	0.7
Business number	74	1.5	31	1.7
Dead number ^[5]	438	9.3	56	3.1
TOTAL	4682	100.0	1802	100.0

[1]“virgin” refers to phone numbers identified but were not called by the time the full sample was reached.

[2] “soft appointment” refers to calls where a tentative appointment was made to participate at a future date.

[3] “hard appointment” refers to calls where a definite appointment was made to participate at a set time.

[4] “not eligible” refers to the situation where the person contacted was excluded from participation by the sub-study’s screening criteria.

[5] “dead number” refers to phone numbers where there was no answer after three call attempts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Significant differences were found in the in the age distribution in the phone survey compared to those reported for the WA population in the 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) particularly in regard to overrepresentation of the 61-70 years age group ($\chi^2=23.804$, $df=7$, $p=.001$). This is not surprising and it is hypothesised that this may be attributable to older people being more likely to have a phone, be home, and have more free time to participate in a relatively lengthy phone survey. These differences are shown in Table 2 below.

Despite these differences, a decision was made not to weight the data on this variable. The primary reason for this was that a weighting was done on a trial basis and frequencies inspected. This revealed negligible differences (0-2%) with the unweighted data. Secondly, the unweighted data was, if anything, slightly less favourable to the proposed legislation so if there is any bias in the unweighted data it would be in that direction. Finally, for simplicity, as with a sample of this size

weighting can lead to weighted values for 'n' which are greater than the true sample size.

For the purposes of chi-square calculations, all responses of 'don't know' and 'refused to answer' were classified as missing data and were excluded from the analysis.

AIM

The data collection described in this report comprises the pre-phase of a two phase data collection to examine the possible effect of introducing new cannabis laws and other associated changes (such as public education, changes in police procedures, etc.) on prevalence of cannabis use and attitudes and knowledge regarding cannabis and the law, and the deterrent effect of cannabis law.

It is envisaged that phase two, the post-phase, will be conducted at least 18 months after the proposed legislative and other changes for cannabis are enacted in WA, which is expected to happen in the second half of 2003.

ETHICAL ISSUES

The study was approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HR 48/2002). No information was collected in the survey which could identify respondents. Potential respondents had the project explained to them and they were told they were free to decline participation, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the telephone interview at any stage.

RESULTS

A total of 809 interviews were conducted by phone throughout October 2002. Of these, 74% (n=599) of respondents were residing in suburbs of metropolitan Perth while the remainder resided in other areas of Western Australia. As described above, the sample was stratified on this variable. Thus the sample was not significantly different from the last population census conducted (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) in terms of residency in the city and country ($\chi^2=0.228$, $df=1$, $p=.633$).

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Age and Gender

The interviewees were approximately evenly split by gender with 401 male respondents and 408 females which was not significantly different from the ratio reported in the last population census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) ($\chi^2=0.026$, $df=1$, $p=.872$). The pattern of age distribution included respondents representing all age groups between 14 years of age and 70 years of age. This distribution is displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Distribution of age by gender

Gender	Age Group								Total
	≤17	18-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-50	51-60	≥61	
Male	32	58	30	35	47	79	60	60	401
Female	16	47	41	43	47	88	74	52	408
Total	48	105	71	78	94	167	134	112	809

Table 3 shows that differences were observed in the proportions of certain age groups in the phone survey from those reported for the WA population in the 2001 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) particularly in regard to overrepresentation of the 61-70 years age group. Overall, these differences were shown to be significant ($\chi^2=23.804$, $df=7$, $p=.001$). Despite this, a decision was made not to weight the data on this variable. Reasons for this are explained in the Methods section above.

Table 3: Comparison of sample age distribution with results of last population census

Age group	% of respondents	% of WA population in 2001 Census
14-17	5.9	8.3
18-25	13.0	15.1
26-30	8.8	10.0
31-35	9.6	10.2
36-40	11.6	10.8
41-50	20.6	20.4
51-60	16.6	15.5
61-70	13.8	9.8
Total	100.0	100.0

Ethnicity and Language

The vast majority of respondents (97.9%, n=792) reported that English was the main language that they spoke at home. A further 1.3% (n=14) indicated that they spoke some other language and 0.4% (n=3) declined to provide demographic information of this nature.

There were 21 individuals who stated that they considered themselves to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait origin. Making up 2.6% of the sample, this proportion is just slightly less than the 3.2% of Western Australia's population consisting of indigenous people as reported in the 2001 census. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) This difference however was found not to be significant ($\chi^2=0.920$, df=1, p=.338).

More than two thirds (70.2%, n=568) of the sample reported that their country of birth had been Australia. This was followed by the number of respondents born in the United Kingdom (15.8%, n=128) and then by 13.4% (n=109) who had been born across a wide range of various countries, primarily New Zealand, South Africa and the United States. There were four respondents who declined to provide this data. This proportion of respondents born overseas (29.8%) is not dissimilar to that reported by the 2001 census of 26.75% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002) and the small differences were not found to be of statistical significance ($\chi^2=2.975$, df=1, p=.085).

Education and Employment

When asked about the highest level of education attained, it was revealed that slightly over half (53%, n=431) of all respondents had obtained some form of additional education post secondary school. The most common single response (23.7%, n=192) was that respondents' highest level of education attained was five to six years of secondary school (i.e. typically years 11 and 12). However, given that more than half (52.6%, n=30) of those respondents who described their employment status as 'student' (see below) were over 18 years of age and seven of these being 26 or older,

it is likely that a number of these respondents would have been engaged in continuing post secondary studies at the time of survey. The full breakdown of highest level of education attained by respondents is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4: Highest Levels of education attained by respondents

Highest education attained	Frequency (n=809)	Percent
Primary school only	3	0.4
Secondary school 1-2 yrs	36	4.4
Secondary school 3-4 yrs	141	17.4
Secondary school 5-6 yrs	192	23.7
Trade qualifications	72	8.9
Tertiary qualifications other than uni (e.g. tech college)	134	16.6
University undergraduate degree	151	18.7
Post-graduate university qualifications	74	9.1
Refused to answer	6	0.7
Total	809	100.0

Respondents were also asked to indicate which description best described their current employment situation, with almost half (43.8%, n=354) indicating that they were employed on a full-time basis. This was followed by 15.3% (n=124) who were in receipt of some form of benefit or pension (not including unemployment benefits) and 13.6% (n=110) who were involved in employment part-time. In all, 63.2% (n=511) of respondents indicated that their current employment situation was paid work of some kind. The full breakdown of these responses is provided in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Employment status of respondents

Employment status	Frequency (n=809)	Percent
Full-time employment	354	43.8
Part-time employment	110	13.6
Casual employment	47	5.8
Unemployed	47	5.8
Benefits or pension	124	15.3
Student	57	7.0
Home duties	66	8.2
Refused to answer	3	0.4
Missing data	1	0.1
Total	809	100.0

Marital Status and Offspring

With regards to their current marital status, more than half of respondents (57.2%, n=463) indicated that they were currently married or in a de facto relationship. There were a further 227 (28.1%) who had never married, 90 (11.1%) who were divorced or separated, 20 (2.5%) who were widowed and four (0.4%) who indicated that they were in a relationship. There were also five individuals who refused to answer this question. The very low proportion indicating that they were in a relationship may suggest that a number of respondents who may in fact have been involved in some form of relationship, may have chosen to describe themselves as 'never married', 'divorced or separated' or 'widowed' due to the wording of this item (See Appendix I, Item F4).

Almost two thirds (64.9%, n=525) of respondents reported having at least one child. There were 132 respondents with children six years and under, 80 with children between seven and nine years, 65 with children between ten and twelve, 77 with children between thirteen and fifteen, 57 with children between sixteen and eighteen, 66 with children between nineteen and twenty-one and 251 respondents with adult children twenty-two years and over.

Religious and Political Alignment

Almost a full third (32%, n=259) of the sample reported that they did not adhere to any religious beliefs. Unsurprisingly, the two most common religious denominations subscribed to by respondents were Roman Catholic (20.6%, n=167) and Anglican or Church of England (19.5%, n=158). A further 24.4% (n=197) indicated that they belonged to various other Christian faiths and 2.6% (n=21) stated that they held beliefs associated with non-Christian doctrines, primarily Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. There were seven respondents who declined to answer questions about their religion.

Of the 543 who did adhere to a system of religious beliefs, 24.7% stated that their beliefs were 'very important', 36.4% that they were 'somewhat important', 28.9% that they were 'not very important' and 9.9% that they were 'not at all important'.

When asked which party they had voted for in the Legislative Assembly at the last state election, 27.8% had voted Liberal, 26.7% for the Australian Labor Party, 6.7% for the Greens, 3.5% for the Democrats and 1.1% had voted for the National Party. There were 248 who either didn't vote, couldn't remember or refused to answer. Of those who didn't vote, 32.2% (n=47) were 17 years old or less, and a further 21.2% (n=31) were 18-25 years old at the time of the survey. This would naturally tend to imply that a sizable proportion of subjects in these age groups can have their not having voted at the last WA State election in 2001 attributed to their having been below the legal voting age or not registered to vote at the time. The remaining 3.6% of respondents voted for either independent candidates or various minor parties.

For the purpose of analysis political affiliation was dichotomised with those respondents who had voted Liberal, National, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, Christian Democrats or Liberals for Forests classified as 'right wing' voters (31.3%, n=253) and those who voted Labor, Australian Democrat or Greens parties classified as 'left wing' voters (36.9%, n=298). Those respondents who voted for independent candidates, couldn't remember who they had voted for, refused to answer or didn't

vote were excluded from the analysis (31.8%, n=258). There was no significant difference between the dichotomised voting patterns found in this study with actual results from the Legislative Assembly in the 2001 WA election ($\chi^2=1.853$, df=1, p=.173).

CANNABIS USE HISTORY

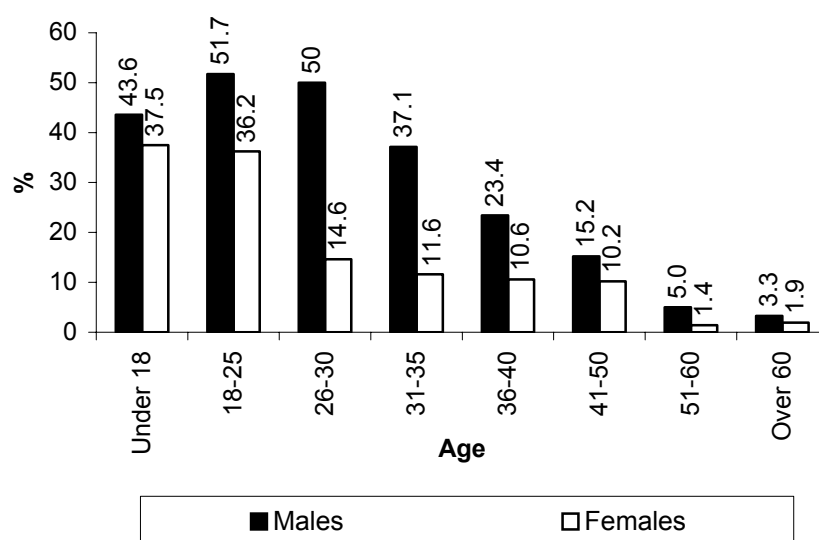
Prevalence of cannabis use

More than half (54.0%, n=437) of the sample reported that they had tried cannabis at some point in their lives. This was significantly higher than the lifetime use figures reported for WA in the National Drug Strategy Household Surveys in 2001 (38.8%, $\chi^2=80.089$, df=1, p=.000) (Drug and Alcohol Office, 2003) and 1998 (44.8%, $\chi^2=28.536$, df=1, p=.000) (Fitzsimmons & Cooper-Stanbury, 2000). It is possible that this difference may be attributed to those potential respondents with some experience of cannabis being more willing to participate in a relatively lengthy phone survey by virtue of possessing some interest in the subject. When asked if they had used cannabis in the last twelve months 18.5% (n=150) agreed that they had done so. This figure for prevalence of recent cannabis use closely compares and is not significantly different from that of 17.5% reported for WA in the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002) ($\chi^2=0.608$, df=1, p=.436). Given the similarity of the regular use figures found in the current study with the population figure, the decision was made not to weight the sample in terms of prevalence of cannabis use.

While numbers of males and females who had ever used cannabis were relatively similar (57.6% vs 50.7% respectively), this difference nevertheless carried some level of statistical significance ($\chi^2=3.878$, df=1, p=.049). More considerable gender differences were seen to exist with regards to recent use of the drug with males more than twice as likely to have used cannabis in the last twelve months as females (24.9% vs 12.3%) ($\chi^2=21.538$, df=1, p=.000). Interestingly, when compared to WA figures obtained from the 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002), males who had recently used cannabis were found to be significantly over represented compared to the NDSHS statistic of 20.6% ($\chi^2=4.613$, df=1, p=.032). Conversely, females who had recently used cannabis were somewhat under represented compared to the NDSHS figure of 14.5%, however, this was not found to be significant ($\chi^2=1.659$, df=1, p=.198). Unsurprisingly, significant differences in rates of use were seen to exist across age brackets, with downturns in the prevalence of recent use in persons over 25 years of age ($\chi^2=64.613$, df=7, p=.000) Significant differences were also noted across ages in percentages who had ever used cannabis with a peak of 80.3 in the 26 to 30 year old bracket and decreasing thereafter ($\chi^2=172.467$, df=7, p=.000). These patterns of use are displayed in Table 6 and Figure 1.

Table 6: Prevalence of cannabis use by age and gender

Age	Lifetime use %			Recent use %		
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons
<=17	59.4	50.0	56.3	43.6	37.5	41.7
18-25	77.6	70.2	74.3	51.7	36.2	44.8
26-30	83.3	78.0	80.3	50.0	14.6	29.6
31-35	77.1	72.1	74.4	37.1	11.6	23.1
36-40	76.6	63.8	70.2	23.4	10.6	17.0
41-50	58.2	56.8	57.5	15.2	10.2	12.6
51-60	43.3	23.0	32.1	5.0	1.4	3.0
>=61	10.0	11.5	10.7	3.3	1.9	2.7
All Ages	57.4	50.7	54.0	24.9	12.3	18.5

**Figure 1: Recent cannabis use by age and gender**

There was a trend for respondents of indigenous descent to be more likely than others to have both ever used cannabis (71.4% vs 53.8%) and to have used the drug within the last twelve months (38.1% vs 18.1%). Neither of these differences however was found to be significant. Cannabis use was also found to be affected by employment status with those identifying themselves as students being the most likely to have recently used the drug (75.0%, n=24) and those citing 'home duties' as the least likely (12.1%, n=4). Those in any form of paid employment at all were significantly more likely to have ever used cannabis (61.7% vs 41.8%) ($\chi^2=29.612$, df=1, p=.000). However, this situation was reversed with regards to recent use with 30.0% of employed having used the drug within the last 12 months vs 44.7% of those not in paid employment ($\chi^2=8.198$, df=1, p=.004). There was little difference in patterns of cannabis use between respondents possessing a tertiary education and those who did

not. There was no significant difference between respondents with a tertiary qualification and those without in terms of ever, or recently using the drug.

It was found that 11.5% (n=93) of all respondents, had either personally been charged or had a family member who had been charged with a cannabis related offence. There were four respondents who refused to answer this question.

With regards to problems associated with cannabis, 1.6% (n=13) of respondents reported that they had ever sought help for problems they personally were experiencing from cannabis use. Also, 7.7% (n=62) indicated that a family member had sought help for problems caused by that family members' use of cannabis.

Frequency of cannabis use

Of the 150 respondents who reported that they had used cannabis in the past twelve months, it was found that the most common pattern of cannabis use was weekly or more, but not daily reported by 17.3% (n=26). This was followed by 15.3% (n=23) who used relatively infrequently once or twice a year, and by 14.7% (n=22) who used cannabis on a daily basis. A breakdown of these patterns of use is given in table 7.

Table 7: Frequency of cannabis use for respondents who had used in the past 12 months

Frequency of use	n	%
Everyday	22	14.7
Once a week or more, but not daily	26	17.3
2 or 3 times a month	18	12.0
About once a month	19	12.7
Every 2 or 3 months	16	10.7
Every 4 or 5 months	12	8.0
Once or twice a year	23	15.3
Less often	4	2.7
No longer use	10	6.7
Total	150	100.0

Preferred route of administration

Those 140 respondents who had indicated that they continued to be current consumers of cannabis at the time of the survey were asked how they would typically consume their cannabis. The most popular method was revealed to be a cannabis cigarette or 'joint', nominated by 41.4% (n=58) of the sample as being their preferred means of administration. This was followed by 32.9% (n=46) who indicated that they preferred to smoke their cannabis through a water pipe or 'bong'.

The preferred means of consumption appeared to be influenced to some degree by the age of the respondent. Among respondents under 26, smoking via bongs was the most popular method (45.9%, n=28), but in older categories there appeared to be a clear

preference for smoking via joints (e.g. 42.1% amongst 26-30 year olds and rising to 75.0% among recent cannabis smokers in the 41-50 year age group). The relatively commonplace use of bucket bong among respondents under 26 as the main means of delivery (16.4%, n=10) appeared almost unknown among older respondents with only two individuals (2.5%) over 25 reporting these devices as their preferred means of smoking. Unfortunately the age distribution amongst these methods of consumption did not permit more detailed statistical analysis. Other means of administration were relatively uncommon and are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Preferred means of consuming cannabis for respondents who had used the drug in the past 12 months?

Method	n	%
Smoked in joints	58	41.4
Smoked from a bong	46	32.9
Smoked from a pipe	19	13.6
Smoked from a bucket bong	12	8.6
Eaten	2	1.4
Missing	3	2.1
Total	140	100.0

Typical type of cannabis used

When asked about the type of cannabis they would typically use, 46.4% (n=65) of those who had used the drug in the past 12 months said that it had been grown naturally (i.e. 'bushies') and 42.1% (n=59) indicated that their cannabis supply had been hydroponically cultivated. These differences were not found to be significant ($\chi^2=0.290$, df=1, p=.590). A further 11.4% (n=16) said that they didn't know how the cannabis they typically used had been grown.

Age, however, was found to significantly affect the type of cannabis typically used with respondents under 26 being more likely to use hydroponically cultivated cannabis than older respondents (69.1% vs 30.4%, $\chi^2=18.336$, df=1, p=.000).

Preferred type of cannabis

With regards to whether these current users of cannabis would prefer to use hydroponically grown cannabis, 32.9% (n=46) indicated that that was not usually the case, and a further 22.1% (n=31) stated that they didn't care. There were 17.8% (n=25) who said that they would always prefer to use hydroponics and a further 22.9% (n=32) who said they would mostly prefer to use hydroponic cannabis. This preference was also found to be significantly affected by age with respondents under 26 being significantly more likely to favour hydroponic cannabis than older respondents (71.2%, vs 35.1%, $\chi^2=14.178$, df=1, p=.000).

Form of cannabis typically used

These respondents were also questioned about the forms of cannabis that they would most frequently use. By far the most common response was the female flowering buds or 'heads' of the cannabis plant, this form being nominated by 70.7% (n=99) of respondents who were currently smokers of cannabis. There were also 17.9% (n=25) of respondents who reported that they mainly smoked leaf. Other forms of cannabis most commonly used were nominated relatively rarely. There were 2.1% (n=3) who specified that they usually used the reputedly more potent sinsemilla or 'skunk buds' form of the drug, and hash oil and hash resin were each nominated by single individuals. There were five (3.6%) of respondents who didn't know what kind of cannabis they typically used and six respondents did not provide data for this question.

PERSONAL CANNABIS CULTIVATION

Of those 140 respondents who were current cannabis smokers, the vast majority (88.6%, n=124) indicated that they had not cultivated any cannabis for their own use.

Some 11.4% (n=16) of the sample who had used cannabis in the last 12 months indicated that they were actively cultivating the drug, i.e. they were current growers.

Of the 140 who had used cannabis in the last 12 months, 5.7% (n=8) stated that more than three quarters of the cannabis they had used was from plants that they had cultivated themselves. There were three individuals (2.1%) who said they grew up to a quarter of their own cannabis and a similar number who had personally grown between one quarter and half of the cannabis that they used. There were just two individuals (1.4%) who grew between half and three quarters of the cannabis they used. These results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Proportion of cannabis cultivated for person use by respondents who used the drug in the last 12 months

Proportion	n	%
None	124	88.6
Up to 25%	3	2.1
26-50%	3	2.1
51-75%	2	1.4
76-100%	8	5.7
Total	140	100.0

The age of respondents was found to significantly affect their likelihood of cultivating cannabis with respondents over 25 being more likely to do so (16.5% vs 4.9%, $\chi^2=4.527$, $df=1$, $p=.033$).

Motivating factors in decisions not to use or cease using cannabis.

Reasons for never having used cannabis

Respondents who reported having never used cannabis were asked why they had made this choice. The most common answer given by 53.8% (n=199) of these respondents was that they had never used the drug through a lack of desire to do so. Concern over health effects was mentioned by 26.8% (n=99) of these respondents and concern about psychological effects mentioned by 16.8% (n=62) of those who never used the drug. The illicit status of cannabis as a reason for not having used the drug accounted for 14.6% (n=54) of these respondents, yet actual concern over being caught was given as a response by only a negligible number of these respondents (0.8%, n=3). This data including a range of less common responses are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Motivations for having never used cannabis

Reason for never using	Frequency n=370	% of responses	% of cases
No desire to use	199	29.7	53.8
Concerned about health effects	99	14.8	26.8
Concerned about psychological effects	62	9.2	16.8
It's illegal	54	8.0	14.6
Lack of opportunity	26	3.9	7.0
Don't need it	26	3.9	7.0
Concern about becoming addicted	24	3.6	6.5
Friends don't use it	16	2.4	4.3
Never been offered it	16	2.4	4.3
Don't like / against smoking	15	2.2	4.1
Don't like effects witnessed in others	14	2.1	3.8
Can have a good time without it	14	2.1	3.8
Too old to use cannabis	13	1.9	3.5
Concerned about moving on to more dangerous drugs	12	1.8	3.2
Education	10	1.5	2.7
Concerns about losing control	9	1.3	2.4
Religious / moral concerns	8	1.2	2.2
Concerned my parents might find out	5	0.7	1.4
Prefer to use alcohol	5	0.7	1.4
Cost / Can't afford it	5	0.7	1.4
It stuffs up your / others' lives	5	0.7	1.4
Concern about work issues	5	0.7	1.4
Can't obtain it	4	0.6	1.1
Concern over family issues (children etc.)	4	0.6	1.1
Concern about being caught	3	0.4	0.8
Prefer to use other drugs	1	0.1	0.3
Other	15	2.2	4.1
Don't know / refused to answer	2	0.3	0.5
Total	671*	100.0	181.4*

* Responses collated from 370 interviewees who could provide multiple answers.

Reasons for no longer using cannabis

Similarly, reasons were sought from those respondents who had used cannabis in the past, but were not currently doing so to explain their motivations behind discontinuing their use. Once again, a lack of desire to use was the predominant reason given noted by 54.0% (n=155) of respondents who had discontinued cannabis use. This was followed by 26.5% (n=76) of these respondents stating that they had '*grown out of it*' or were '*too old*'. Concerns over health (16.7%, n=48) and psychological (10.8%, n=31) effects of cannabis use again featured strongly, as did a number of respondents who stated that they '*didn't need it*' (10.1%, n=29) or similarly, '*could have a good time without it.*' (6.3%, n=20). Eight percent (n=23) respondents who cited the drugs illegality as amongst their reasons for having discontinued use although once again, actual concern over being caught was rarely mentioned with only 1.0% (n=3) of those

who had discontinued use citing this reason. Other motivations were relatively uncommon and are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Motivations for having discontinued cannabis use

Reason for ceasing use	Frequency	% of responses	% of cases
No desire to use	155	33.6	54.0
Grew out of it / too old	76	16.5	26.5
Concern over health effects	48	10.4	16.7
Concern over psychological effects	31	6.7	10.8
Don't need it	29	6.3	10.1
It's illegal	23	5.0	8.0
Can have a good time without it	20	4.3	7.0
Concern over family issues (children etc)	11	2.4	3.8
Prefer to use alcohol	9	2.0	3.1
Lack of opportunity	9	2.0	3.1
Cost / Can't afford it	8	1.7	2.8
Don't like effects on others / self	8	1.7	2.8
My friends don't use it	7	1.5	2.4
Concern about becoming addicted	4	0.9	1.4
Can't obtain it	4	0.9	1.4
Concern about work issues	4	0.9	1.4
Concern about being caught	3	0.7	1.0
Concern about moving on to more dangerous drugs	2	0.4	0.7
Stuffs up your / others' lives	2	0.4	0.7
Concerned parents might find out	1	0.2	0.3
Prefer to use other drugs	1	0.2	0.3
Not been offered it	1	0.2	0.3
Other	4	0.9	1.4
Don't know / refused to answer	1	0.2	0.3
Total*	461*	100.0	160.6*

* Responses collated from 287 interviewees who could provide multiple answers.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS CANNABIS

Estimates of prevalence use

Lifetime Use

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the levels of cannabis use in the community. Answers to the question 'What percent of adults have tried cannabis?' ranged from one percent to 100% with a median of 60.0%. The mean answer provided by the 779 respondents who attempted to answer this question was 58.4%, which was found to be significantly higher than either the 44.8% who had ever used the drug reported in the 1998 WA Drug Household Survey (AIHW, 1999) ($t=17.665$, $df=778$, $p=.000$) or the 54.0% of this survey's own sample who said they had ever used cannabis ($t=5.714$, $df=778$, $p=.000$).

This perception appeared to be significantly affected by respondents' own degree of experience with cannabis. Thus, respondents who had never used the drug returned a mean estimate of 50.3% while those respondents who had ever used the drug gave a higher mean estimate of 64.8% ($t=9.938$, $df=775$, $sig=0.000$). Such significant differences were not evident however, between those respondents who had ever used the drug but not recently (mean=64.9%) and those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months (mean=64.8%).

Use in the last 12 months

Similarly, respondents were also asked what percent of adults had used cannabis in the last twelve months. The 762 respondents who attempted to answer this question produced a range of estimates spanning from zero to 100%. The median estimate was 40.0% and the mean was 39.0%. This also was revealed to be significantly higher than the 17.5% reported in the 2001 Drug Household Survey (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002) ($t=30.532$, $df=761$, $p=.000$) or the 18.5% rate of recent use amongst this survey's own sample ($t=29.112$, $df=761$, $p=.000$). Once again, respondents' estimates were seen to be significantly affected by their own level of experience with cannabis, those who had never tried the drug returning a mean estimate of 36.1%, and those who had ever tried it producing a mean estimate of 41.1% ($t=3.537$, $df=758$, $sig=0.000$). There was however, no such significant difference between the estimates provided by those who had ever used cannabis but not recently (mean=40.8%) and those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months (mean=41.8%).

Attitudes to cannabis

Respondents were asked a series of attitudinal questions based upon a Likert scale format. These could be loosely broken down into overall attitudes to cannabis, attitudes to cannabis and health, and attitudes to cannabis and the law. These are presented in Tables 11 through 13 below.

It was noted that many of the negative perceptions towards cannabis were stronger from that portion of the sample (45.7%, $n=370$) who reported that they had never used cannabis. These respondents consistently provided data that was more negative in attitude towards cannabis than those respondents who had ever tried cannabis and markedly more negative than those respondents in the subset who had used cannabis

in the last twelve months. These comparisons are displayed for each attitudinal item in the series of figures (2 through 21) below. All chi square calculations have been computed following transformation of the Likert scale into a dichotomous variable of agree vs disagree.

A summary table of agreement with the attitudinal statements by cannabis use status is presented in Appendix B.

Overall attitudes to cannabis

Despite 56.7% (n=459) of respondents agreeing that people usually have a good time when they use cannabis, overall attitudes amongst the sample towards cannabis were seen to be relatively negative. This was reflected in the 62.6% (n=507) who agreed that cannabis was a dangerous drug, 69.0% (n=558) who agreed that cannabis use was a problem in our community, and 67.2% (n=544) who indicated that they would be concerned if a friend or relative was using cannabis. These results are shown in Table 12 and each item is discussed separately thereafter. Frequencies discussed were derived after variables have been modified into an agree / disagree dichotomy and the full data range is displayed in the accompanying figures.

Table 12: Overall attitudes towards cannabis related issues – Percent of respondents

Attitude	% of Respondents					
	Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
People usually have a good time when they use cannabis	17.8	38.9	10.0	16.7	7.8	8.8
Cannabis is a dangerous drug	31.6	31.0	7.4	19.5	9.3	1.1
Cannabis use is a problem in our community	39.1	29.9	4.2	16.4	9.0	1.4
You would be concerned if friends or family were using cannabis	45.1	22.1	6.7	15.9	9.9	0.2
You would use cannabis if a friend offered it to you	7.9	10.6	1.9	12.7	66.5	0.4
You would use cannabis if someone you didn't know offered it to you at a party	3.3	5.2	1.5	8.0	81.8	0.1

With regards to the item '*people usually have a good time when they use cannabis*' differences between respondents who had never used and those who had ever used cannabis were not found to be significant, ($\chi^2=0.001$, $df=1$, $p=.971$). Significant differences were identified between those who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last twelve months, and those who had used the drug in the last 12 months ($\chi^2=16.847$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). It is interesting to note that while 69.9% (n=195) of those

who had never used cannabis agreed with this statement, those least likely to agree were the respondents who had ever tried the drug but not recently. This group was also the most likely to disagree ('somewhat disagree'=21.6% and 'strongly disagree'=10.1%) and it is likely that this may indicate that some of these respondents may have personally experienced, or witnessed, some forms of negative effects from cannabis use and that this may in part explain their current non-use.

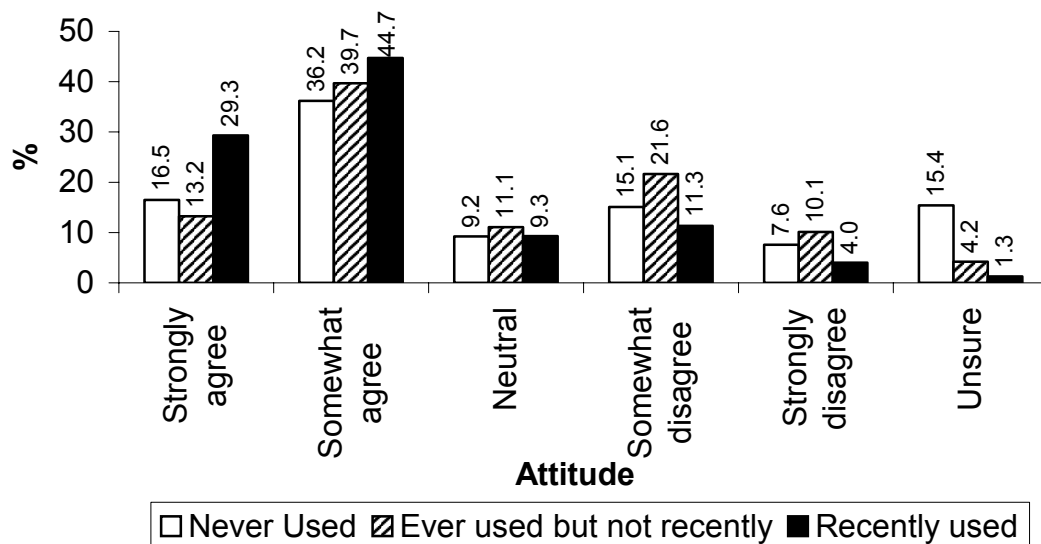


Figure 2: 'People usually have a good time when they use cannabis' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Figure 3 shows that the statement '*cannabis is a dangerous drug*' was very strongly supported by those who had never used the drug with 85.3% (n=236) in agreement. This was significantly different from those who had ever tried cannabis of whom just 54.0% (n=211) agreed ($\chi^2=83.965$, df=1, p=.000). This difference was even more marked between those who had ever used the drug, but not in the last 12 months, with 66.7% (n=172) in agreement and those who had recently used the drug with only 29.3% (n=39) actually agreeing with the statement ($\chi^2=49.263$, df=1, p=.000).

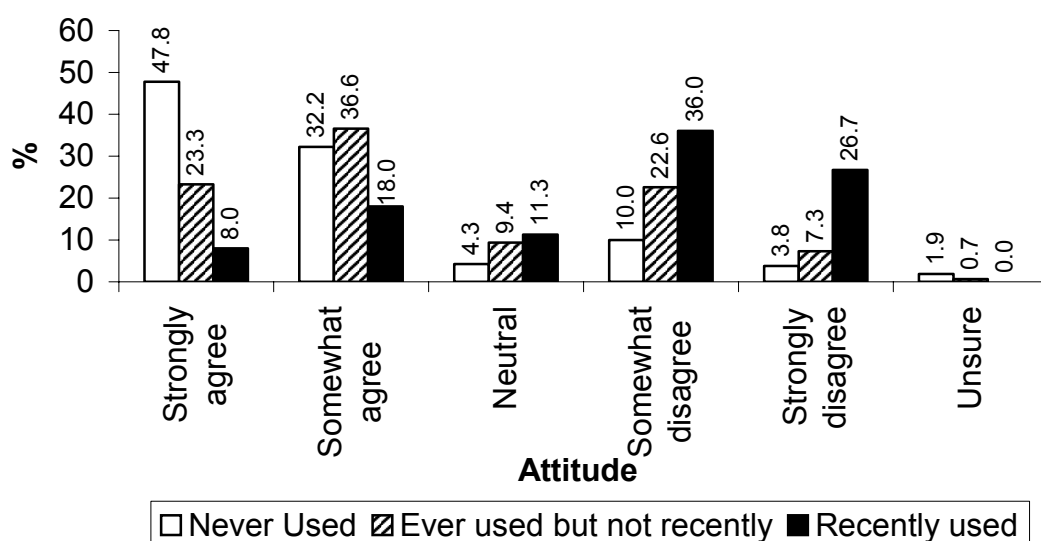


Figure 3: 'Cannabis is a dangerous drug' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Figure 4 shows that similar patterns were observed in the responses to the item 'Cannabis use is a problem in our community' with 89.4% (n=319) of those who had never used cannabis in agreement, vs. 58.5% (n=237) of those who had ever used the drug ($\chi^2=91.472$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). Likewise, the statement found support from 70.3% (n=185) of those respondents who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, compared to just 30.6% (n=52) of respondents who had used cannabis within the last 12 months. This difference too was found to be significant ($\chi^2=43.200$, $df=1$, $p=.000$).

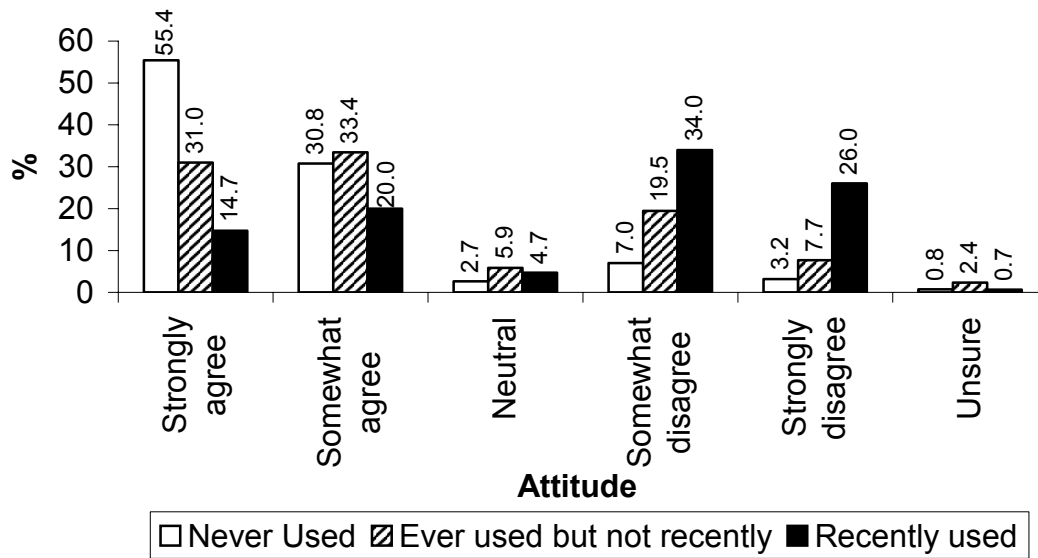


Figure 4: 'Cannabis use is a problem in our community' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Respondents who had never used cannabis were revealed to be vastly more likely to be 'concerned if friends or family were using cannabis' with 92.7% (n=331) in agreement as opposed to 53.8% (n=212) of those respondents who had ever used cannabis. Unsurprisingly, this difference proved to be statistically significant ($\chi^2=141.600$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). Similar differences of opinion on this issue were also observed between respondents who had ever, but not in the last 12 months, used cannabis, of whom 69.0% (n=176) agreed with this statement vs. just 25.9% (n=36) of respondents who had used cannabis in the last 12 months ($\chi^2=67.299$, $df=1$, $p=.000$).

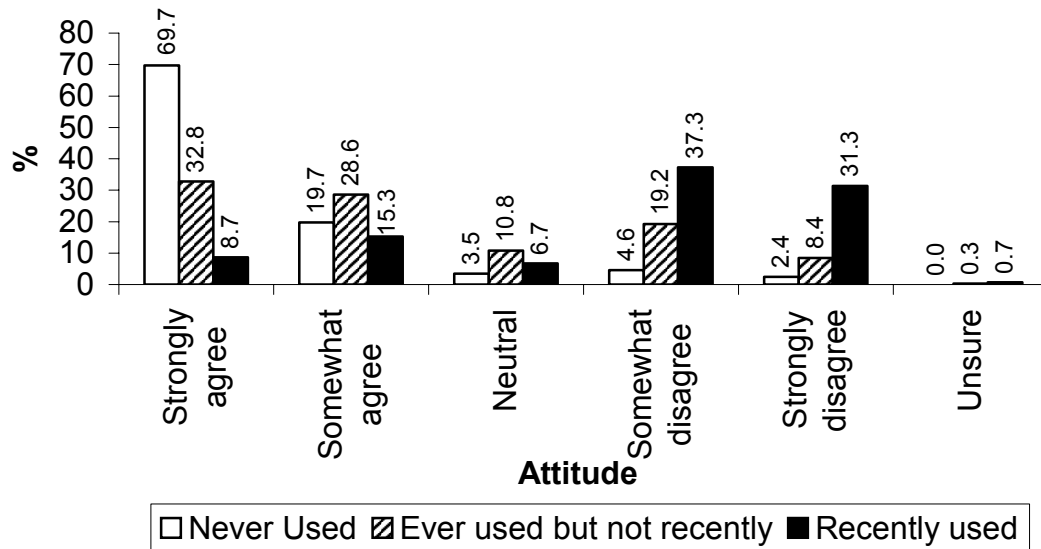


Figure 5: ‘You would be concerned if friends or family were using cannabis’ by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Again unsurprisingly, respondents’ willingness to ‘*use cannabis if a friend offered it*’ was seen to be profoundly affected by their degree of experience using the drug. Of respondents who had never used cannabis, only 2.2% (n=8) agreed with this statement. With respondents who had ever tried cannabis at some point in their lives however, this figure was seen to increase significantly to 33.7% (n=142) ($\chi^2=126.987$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). An even larger difference was seen between those who had ever, but not in the last 12 months, used the drug (10.1%, n=28) and those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months (79.2%, n=114) ($\chi^2=202.146$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). These results are presented in Figure 6.

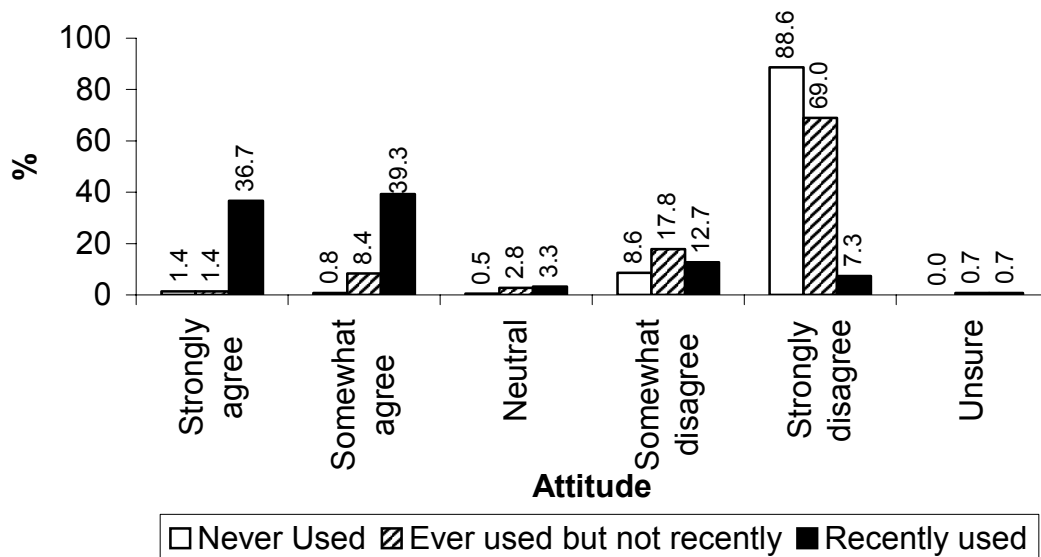


Figure 6 ‘You would use cannabis if a friend offered it to you’ by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Figure 7 shows that the statement 'You would use cannabis if someone you didn't know offered it to you at a party' produced similar but somewhat less marked results with 1.6% (n=6) of those who had never used cannabis in agreement, rising to 14.8% (n=63) of those who had ever used it. Nevertheless, this difference was also found to be significant (χ^2 43.081, df=1, p=.000). Significant differences were also seen to exist between those who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, with just 2.8% (n=8) in agreement as opposed to 39.0% (n=55) of those who had used the drug during the last year (χ^2 =98.095, df=1, p=.000).

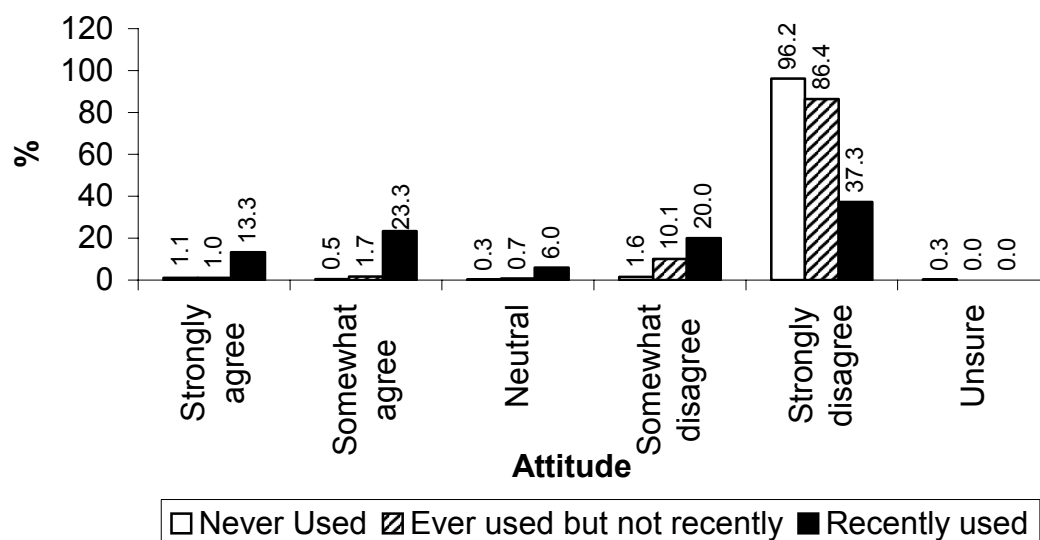


Figure 7: 'You would use cannabis if someone you didn't know offered it to you at a party' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Cannabis and health

Table 13 shows it was agreed by 68.8% (n=556) of respondents that a clear link existed between cannabis and mental health problems, that cannabis use could result in dependence (76.5%, n=619) and that cannabis use had the potential to lead to social isolation (69.4%, n=561). Almost two thirds, (64.7% n=523) disagreed that the benefits of cannabis use outweighed the risks and just over half (50.1%, n=405) disagreed that use of cannabis once a month was safe. These results are presented for the sample as a whole in Table 13, and then as figures, item, by item for comparisons by experience of cannabis use. Frequencies discussed were derived after variables have been modified into an agree / disagree dichotomy and the full data range is displayed in the accompanying figures.

Table 13: Attitudes towards cannabis and health – Percent of respondents

Attitude	% of Respondents					
	Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Using cannabis once a month is not dangerous	17.4	22.9	5.9	17.7	32.4	3.7
People under 18 years old should not use cannabis	70.2	13.5	4.1	6.9	4.9	0.4
Cannabis use may result in dependence	48.8	27.7	4.3	8.5	7.8	2.8
There is a clear link between cannabis and mental health problems	43.8	25.0	6.9	11.7	5.8	6.8
Cannabis can be beneficial for people with certain medical conditions	53.3	31.0	4.1	3.6	3.5	4.6
Most people who use cannabis will go on to use more dangerous drugs	22.4	23.1	7.0	25.1	19.4	3.0
The benefits of using cannabis outweigh the harms and risks associated with its use	7.2	12.9	10.3	27.7	37.0	5.1
Use of cannabis can lead to people becoming socially isolated	34.9	34.5	4.6	14.2	8.9	3.0

The perception of cannabis as a dangerous drug was also seen to be affected by respondents' degree of experience with cannabis. Only 23.4% (n=79) of respondents who had never tried cannabis were in agreement with the statement '*using cannabis once a month is not dangerous*', but this idea found significantly greater levels of support from respondents who had ever tried cannabis with 62.5% (n=245) agreeing with this statement ($\chi^2=111.959$, df=1, p=.000). Of those who had ever used cannabis albeit not in the last 12 months, 55.3% (n=141) were in agreement, a figure seen to rise significantly amongst those recent users of the drug (75.9%, n=104) ($\chi^2=16.16$, df=1, p=.000).

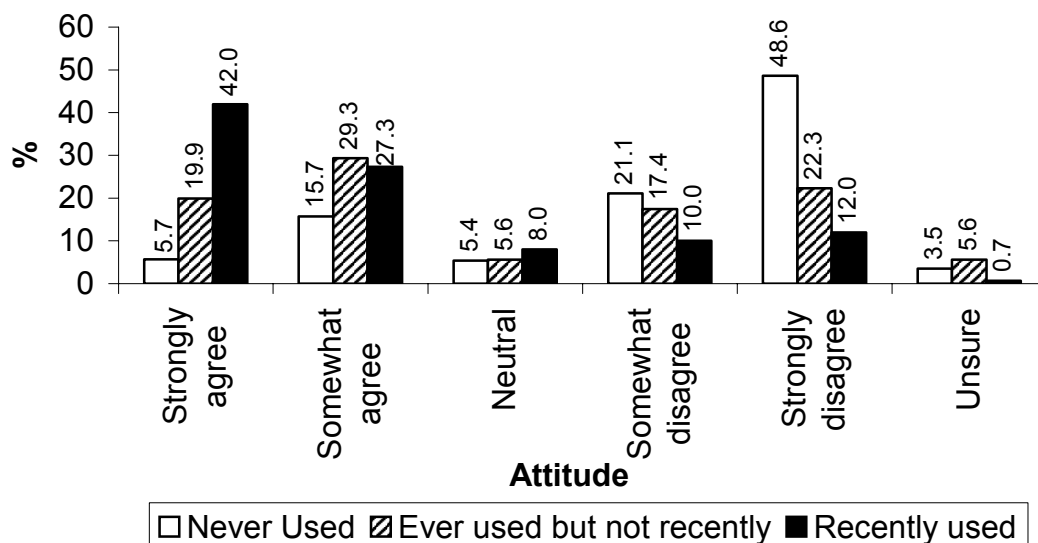


Figure 8: 'Monthly use of cannabis is not dangerous' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

The statement that *'people under 18 years old should not smoke cannabis'* proved less controversial with clear majorities in all groups in agreement. Despite this, however, differences between the respondents with varying levels of exposure to cannabis proved significant. While 93.6% (n=338) of those who had never used cannabis agreed, this figure fell to 82.2% (n=337) amongst those who had ever tried cannabis ($\chi^2=23.022$, df=1, p=.000). Likewise, 89.0% (n=243) of those who had ever tried cannabis, although not in the last 12 months, supported the statement as opposed to 68.6% (n=94) of those who had used cannabis in the last twelve months ($\chi^2=25.935$, df=1, p=.000).

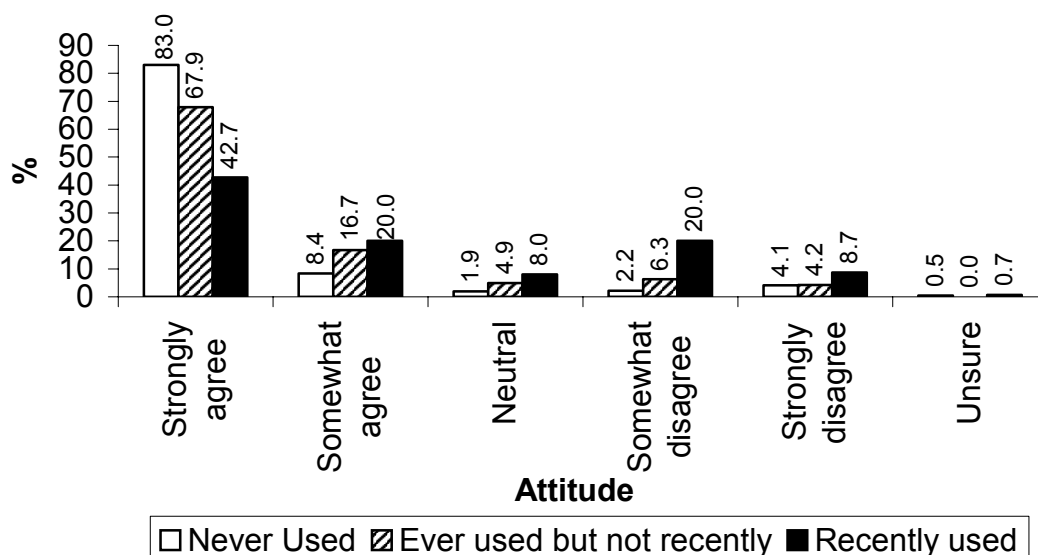


Figure 9: 'People under 18 should not use cannabis' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Also, whilst it was generally accepted across all respondents that '*cannabis use may result in dependence*', again significant differences were seen to exist between respondents whose level of experience with cannabis use differed. Amongst those who had never used the drug, 88.8% (n=309) agreed, but this figure fell to 76.8% (n=308) amongst those who had ever tried it ($\chi^2=18.434$, df=1, p=.000). Agreement was found amongst 83.1% (n=222) of those who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, but this fell to a somewhat more modest 64.2% (n=86) among those who had used the drug within the last twelve months ($\chi^2=18.019$, df=1, p=.000).

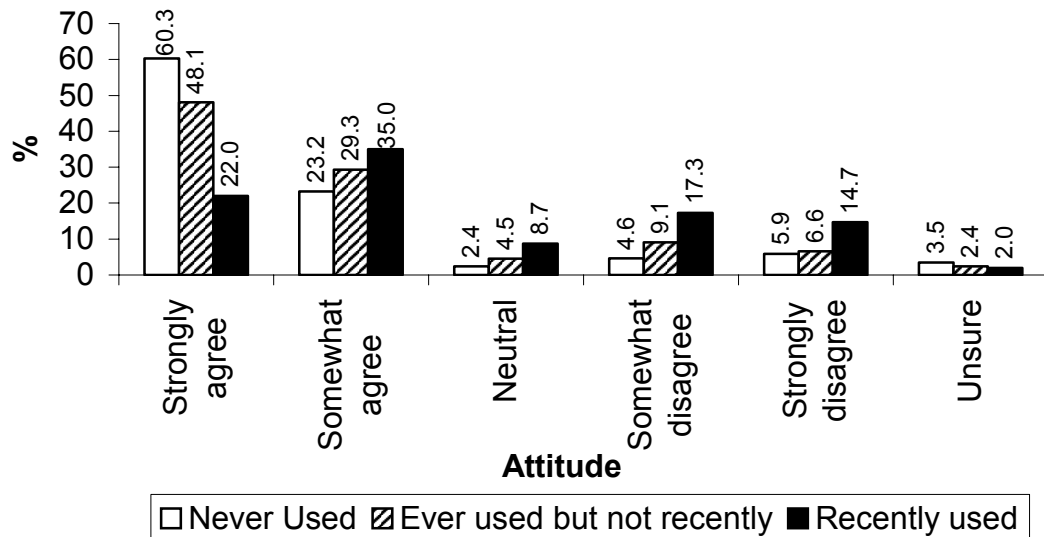


Figure 10: 'Cannabis use may result in dependence' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

A similar pattern was also observed with the statement ‘*There is a clear link between cannabis and mental health problems*’ with 88.4% (n=289) of respondents who had never used cannabis in agreement versus 72.0% (n=267) of those who had ever used cannabis ($\chi^2=28.888$, df=1, p=.000). In the case of respondents who had ever used cannabis but not in the last 12 months, 80.0% (n=196) agreed as opposed to 56.4% (n=71) of those who had recently used the drug ($\chi^2=23.071$, df=1, p=.000).

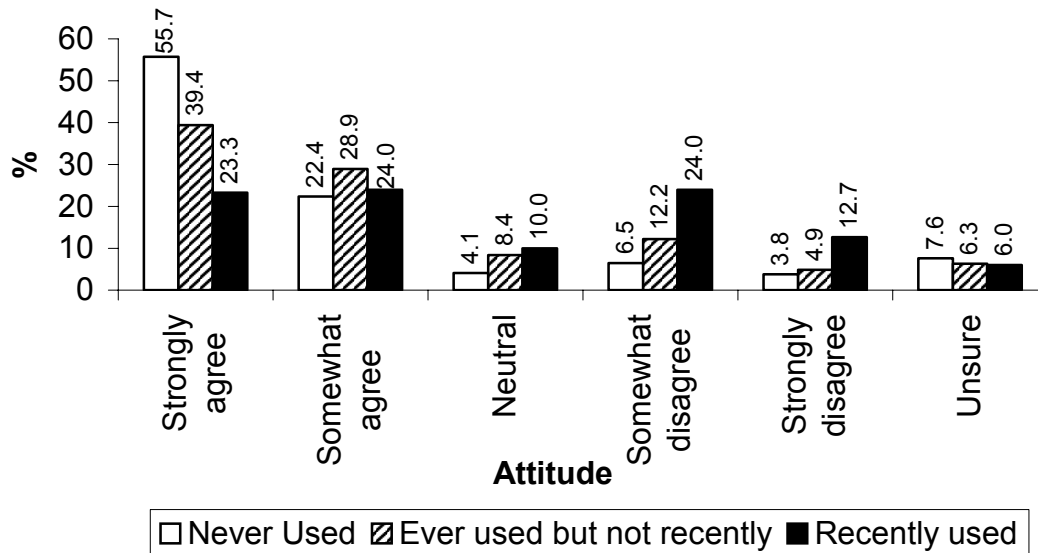


Figure 11: ‘There is a clear link between cannabis and mental health problems’ by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

The concept that ‘*Cannabis can be beneficial for people with certain medical conditions*’ was seen to have widespread acceptance with those respondents who had never used the drug being least likely to agree at 86.7% (n=281). This figure rose significantly among respondents who had ever tried the drug to 96.6% (n=399) ($\chi^2=24.846$, df=1, p=.000). There was little observable difference amongst those who had used the drug, but not in the last 12 months, with 95.8% (n=253) in agreement and those who had used the drug within the last twelve months with 98.0% (n=146) in agreement. This small difference was not found to be significant ($\chi^2=1.348$, df=1, p=.246).

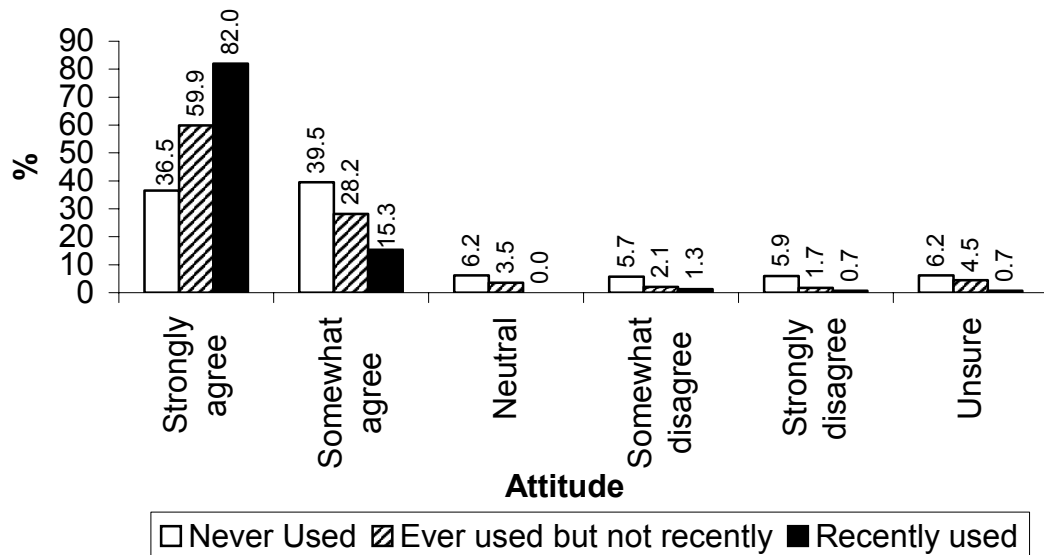


Figure 12: ‘Cannabis can be beneficial for people with certain medical conditions’ by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

The idea that ‘most people who use cannabis will go on to use more dangerous drugs’ was supported by a minority of respondents except amongst those who had never tried cannabis with 68.6% (n=223) agreeing as opposed to just 36.1% (n=145) of those respondents who had ever used cannabis. This difference was found to be significant ($\chi^2=76.153$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). Amongst those who had ever used cannabis but not in the last 12 months, 42.0% (n=111) agreed, a figure falling significantly to 24.6% (n=34) among respondents who had used cannabis in the last twelve months ($\chi^2=11.910$, $df=1$, $p=.001$).

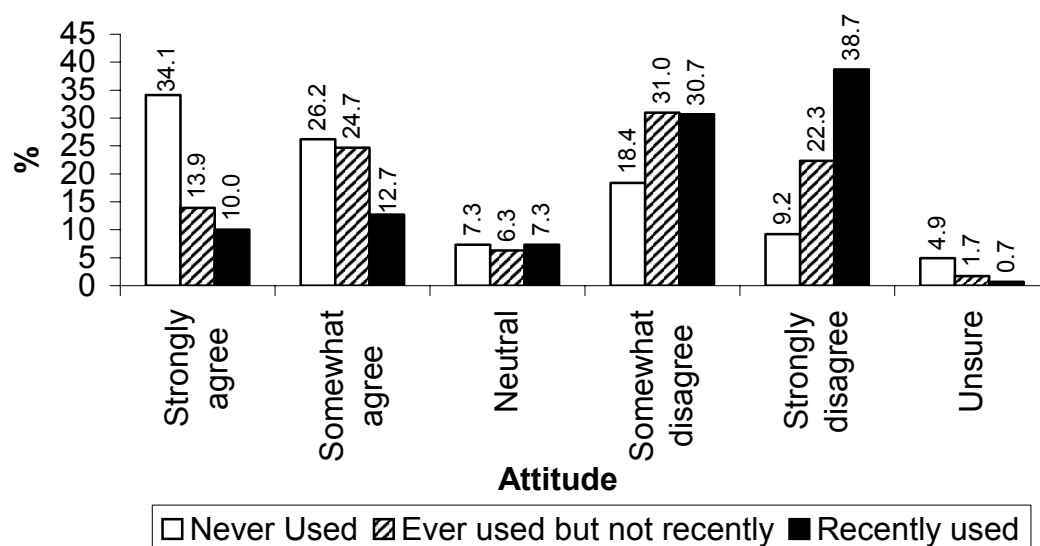


Figure 13: ‘Most people who use cannabis will go on to use more dangerous drugs’ by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

The idea that *'the benefits of cannabis outweigh the harms and risks associated with its use'* was not shown to be particularly well supported by any of the subgroups of respondents. Only 16.0% (n=52) of those who had never used the drug were in agreement and just 30.6% (n=110) of those who had ever tried it agreed. This difference was however shown to be significant ($\chi^2=19.853, df=1, p=.000$). Of respondents who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, agreement was found amongst 23.7% (n=57) a rate which rose significantly to 44.5% (n=53) amongst those who had used the drug within the last year ($\chi^2=16.378, df=1, p=.000$).

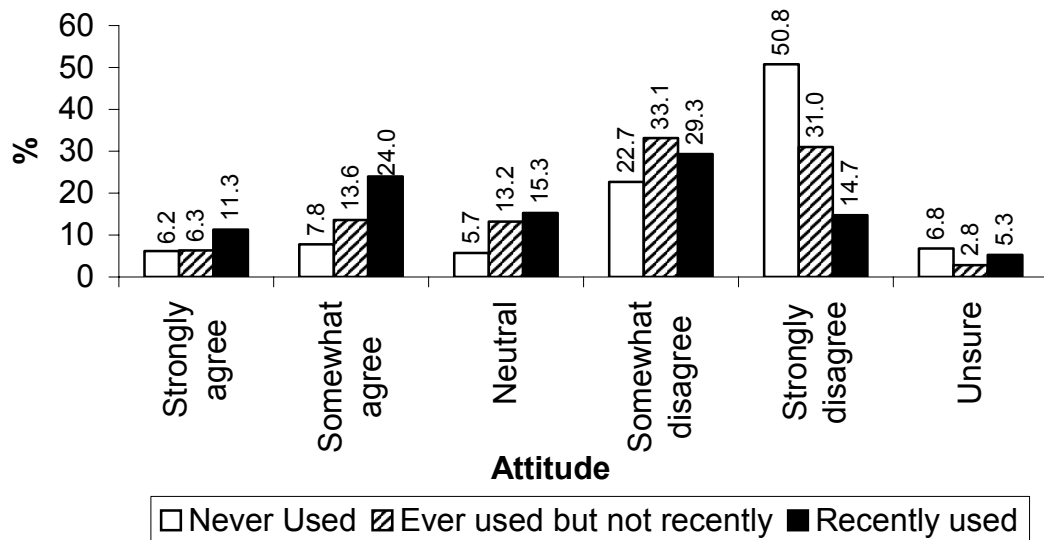


Figure 14: The benefits of cannabis outweigh the harms and risks associated with its use' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

That ‘*use of cannabis can lead to people becoming socially isolated*’ was also widely supported with those who had never used the drug being the most likely to concur with 82.0% (n=274) in agreement versus 69.2% (n=286) of those who had ever used the drug, a difference shown to be statistically significant ($\chi^2=16.088$, df=1, p=.000). Of those who had ever, but not in the last 12 months, used cannabis 72.1%(n=194) agreed, a figure which decreased significantly to 63.9% (n=92) among those who had used cannabis recently ($\chi^2=2.983$, df=1, p=.084).

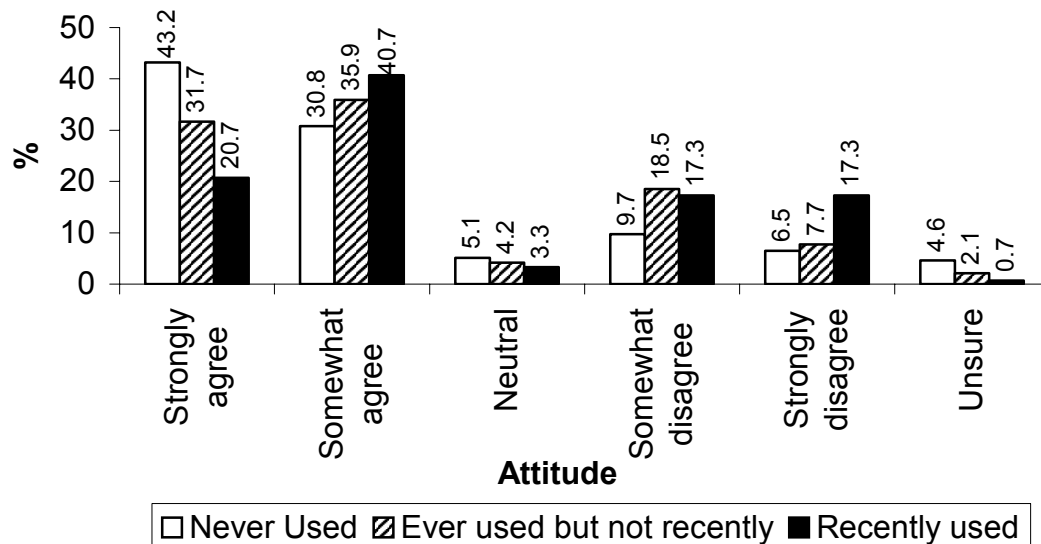


Figure 15: ‘Use of cannabis can lead to people becoming socially isolated’ by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Cannabis and the law

Prior to being given any explanation about the law, 41.9% (n=339) of the sample agreed that it should be legal for people over the age of 18 to use cannabis. An overwhelming majority of respondents (88.9%, n=720) agreed that driving a vehicle whilst affected by cannabis should be a criminal offence, and just over half the sample (50.7%, n=410) agreed that the sale of small amounts of cannabis from one adult to another should attract criminal penalties. Interestingly, 55.5% (n=449) did not agree that many people who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility getting a criminal conviction. Despite these negative perceptions however, it would seem that the concept of 'medical marijuana' has found widespread acceptance in the community with 84.5% (n=368) of the sample agreeing that cannabis can be beneficial for people with certain medical conditions. The results from the total sample are displayed in table 14 below and are dealt with on an item-by-item basis thereafter. Frequencies discussed were derived after variables have been modified into an agree/disagree dichotomy and the full data range is displayed in the accompanying figures.

Table 14: Attitudes towards cannabis and the law – Percent of respondents

Attitude	% of Respondents					
	Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
It should be legal for people over 18 to use cannabis	20.8	21.1	4.8	16.8	35.2	1.2
Many people who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility getting a criminal conviction	17.7	21.8	3.7	27.1	28.4	1.4
The sale of a small amount of cannabis from one adult to another should be a criminal offence	31.5	19.2	4.7	22.9	20.4	1.4
It should not be illegal for a person to give another a small quantity of cannabis	25.5	23.2	4.2	17.6	28.6	1.0
Driving a car while affected by cannabis should be a criminal offence	75.6	13.3	2.6	4.4	3.1	70.9
There has been a lot in the media recently about cannabis law	12.2	25.2	7.3	26.9	19.8	8.5

Significant differences were once again observed in response to the statement *'It should be legal for people over 18 to use cannabis'*. Only 23.8% (n=82) of respondents who had never used cannabis supported this statement as opposed to 62.0% (n=256) of those who had ever used it ($\chi^2=111.120$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). Agreement was also found amongst 50.6% (n=135) of those who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, rising to 82.9% (n=121) amongst those who had used cannabis in the previous 12 months ($\chi^2=41.829$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). This information is displayed in figure 16.

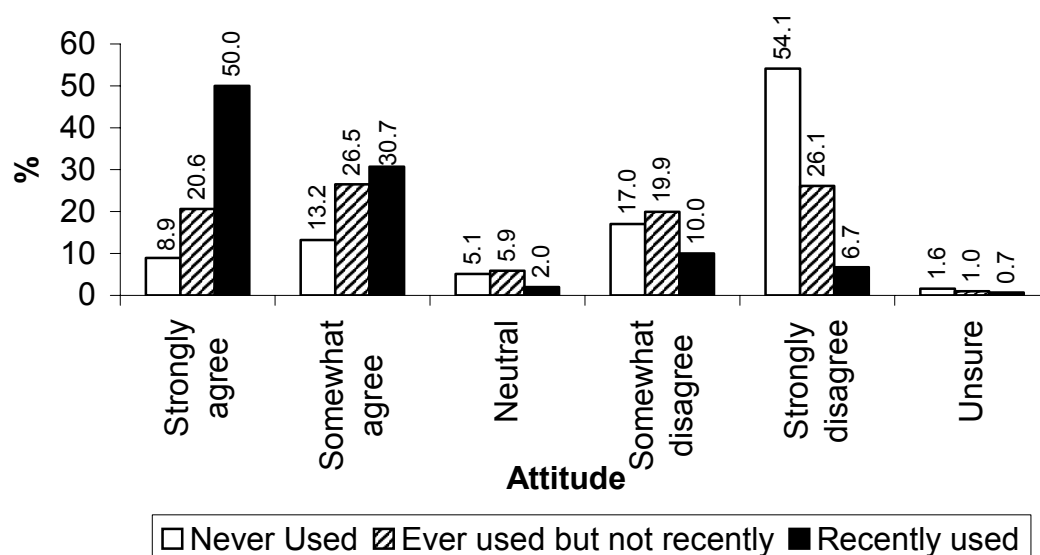


Figure 16: 'It should be legal for people over 18 to use cannabis' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

The idea that *'People who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility of getting a criminal conviction'* was not particularly well supported by any group of respondents and experience of cannabis in this case did not generate any significant differences. Amongst respondents who had never used the drug, 40.7% (n=142) agreed with the statement, a figure which rose slightly to 41.1% (n=171) among those who had ever used the drug ($\chi^2=0.180$, $df=1$, $p=.671$). Similarly low levels of support were also witnessed amongst those who had ever, but not in the last 12 months, used the drug with 40.4% (n=111) in agreement and amongst those who had used the drug recently with 45.8% (n=65) in agreement ($\chi^2=1.124$, $df=1$, $p=.289$).

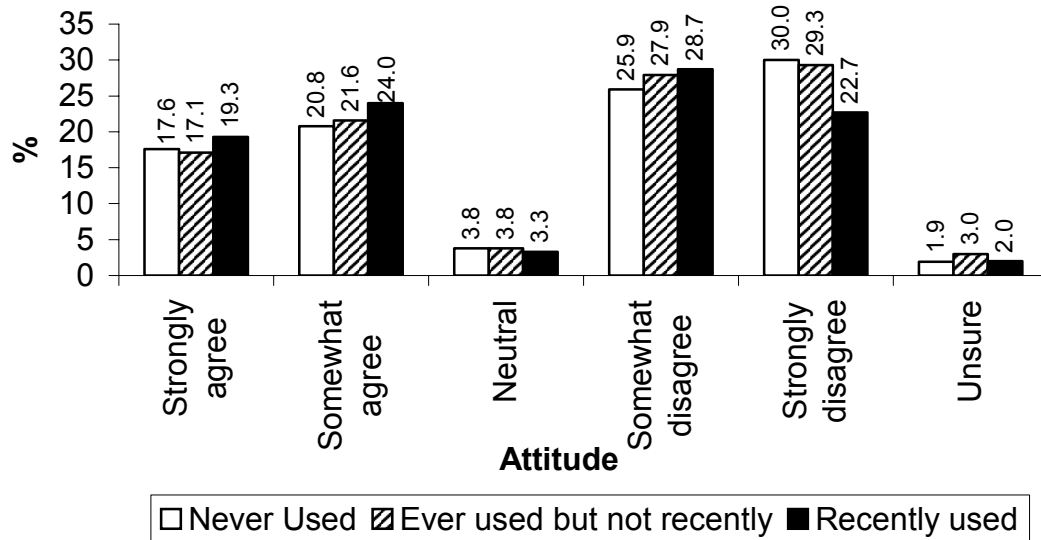


Figure 17: ‘People who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility of getting a criminal conviction’ by exposure to cannabis - percent of respondents

Respondents who had never used cannabis were the only group among whom a majority (69.9%, n=239) agreed that *‘the sale of a small amount of cannabis from one adult to another should be a criminal offence’*. Among respondents who had ever tried cannabis, support for this statement fell significantly to 41.1% (n=171) ($\chi^2=62.593$, df=1, p=.000). Respondents who had ever, but not in the last 12 months, used cannabis were found to be 48.4% (n=132) in favour and this figure also fell significantly to just 27.3% (n=39) amongst respondents who had used cannabis in the last 12 months ($\chi^2=17.224$, df=1, p=.000).

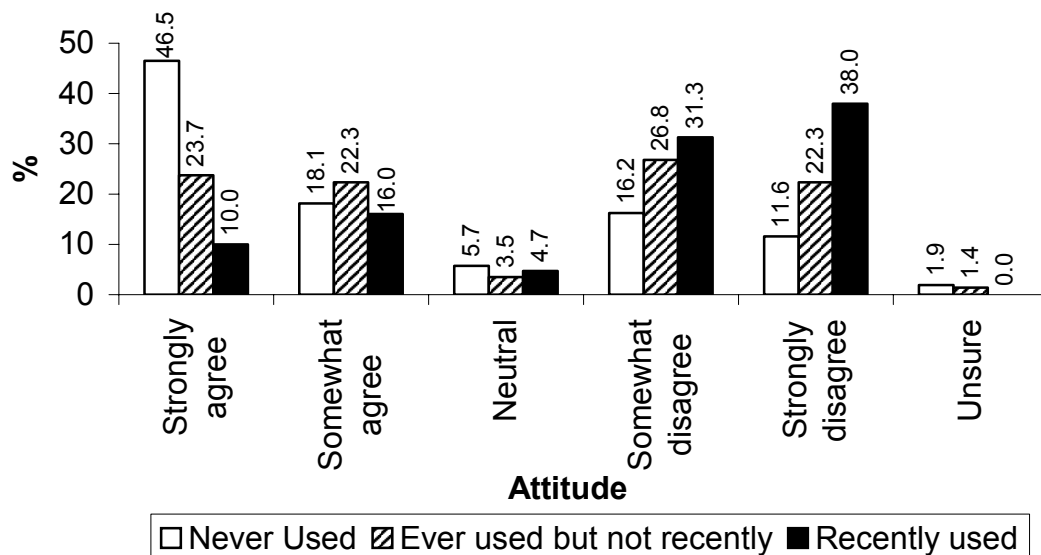


Figure 18: ‘The sale of a small amount of cannabis from one adult to another should be a criminal offence’ by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

Conversely, respondents who had never tried cannabis were the only group who did not have a majority in agreement with the statement *'It should not be illegal for a person to give another a small quantity of cannabis'* with only 34.2% (n=118) in favour. This rose significantly to 65.3% (n=275) amongst those who had ever tried it ($\chi^2=73.493$, df=1, p=.000). Amongst those who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, this was supported by 56.3% (n=157) of respondents, a figure which rose significantly to 83.1% (n=118) amongst respondents who had used the drug within the last 12 months ($\chi^2=29.896$, df=1, p=.000).

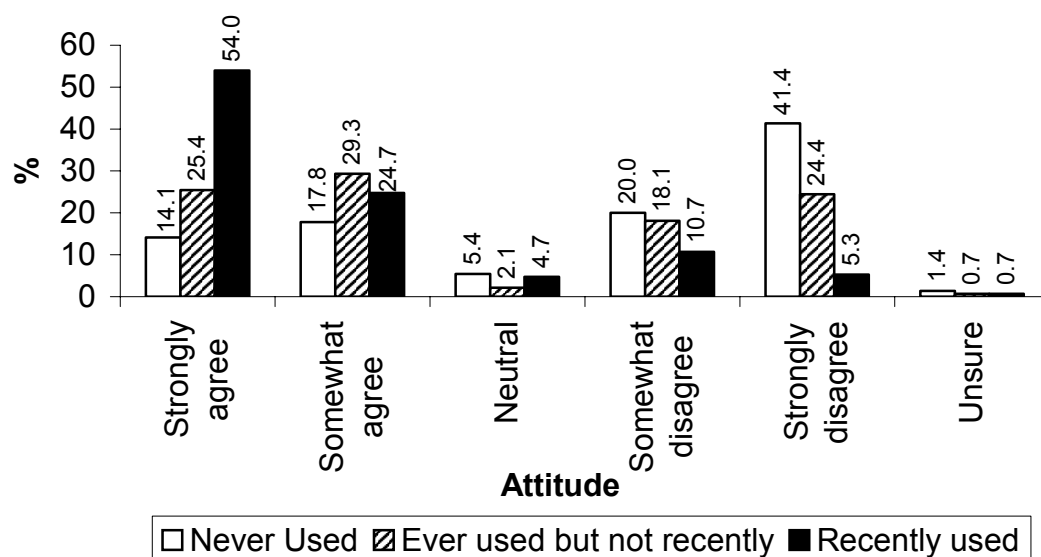


Figure 19: 'It should not be illegal for a person to give another a small quantity of cannabis' by exposure to cannabis - percent of respondents

The item *'Driving a car while affected by cannabis should be a criminal offence'* was one that had widespread support across the board regardless of cannabis use. This saw 95.6% (n=344) of those who had never used cannabis agreeing with this and 89.5% (n=375) agreement amongst those who had ever used it. This difference was nevertheless found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2=9.992$, df=1, p=.002). High levels of support were also found amongst respondents who had ever used cannabis, albeit not in the last 12 months, with 94.2% (n=261) in agreement a figure which fell significantly to 80.3% (n=114) amongst respondents who had used the drug in the previous twelve months ($\chi^2=19.416$, df=1, p=.000).

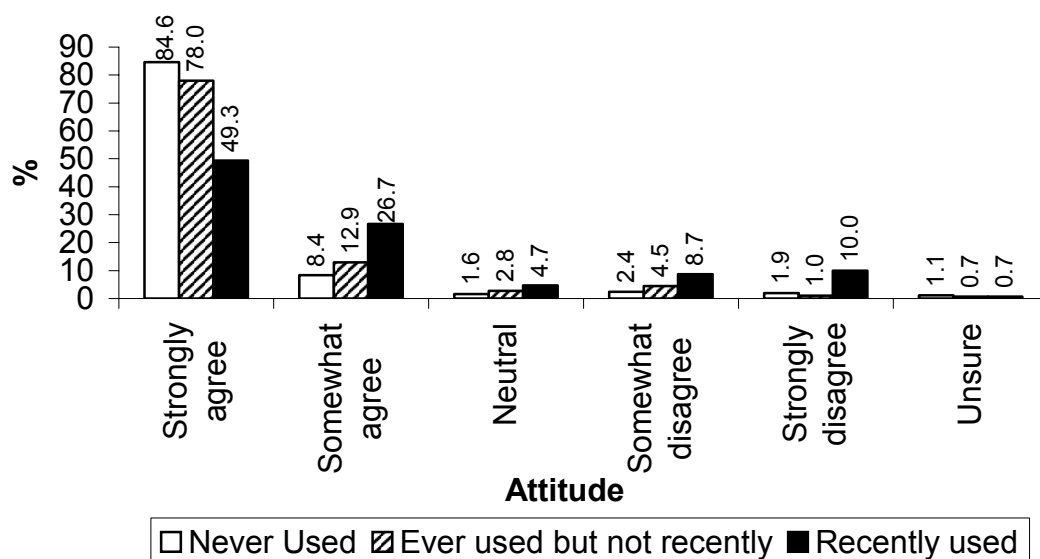


Figure 20: 'Driving a car while affected by cannabis should be a criminal offence' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

In response to the item 'There has been a lot in the media recently about cannabis law' there was interestingly no significant difference found in levels of agreement between those who had never used cannabis (48.3%, n=152) and those who had ever used it (41.4%, n=151) ($\chi^2=3.244$, df=1, p=.072). Significant differences were found to exist however between respondents who had ever used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, with 36.7% (n=88) in agreement and those who had used the drug within the last year with 50.4% (n=63) agreeing with this ($\chi^2=6.391$, df=1, p=.011).

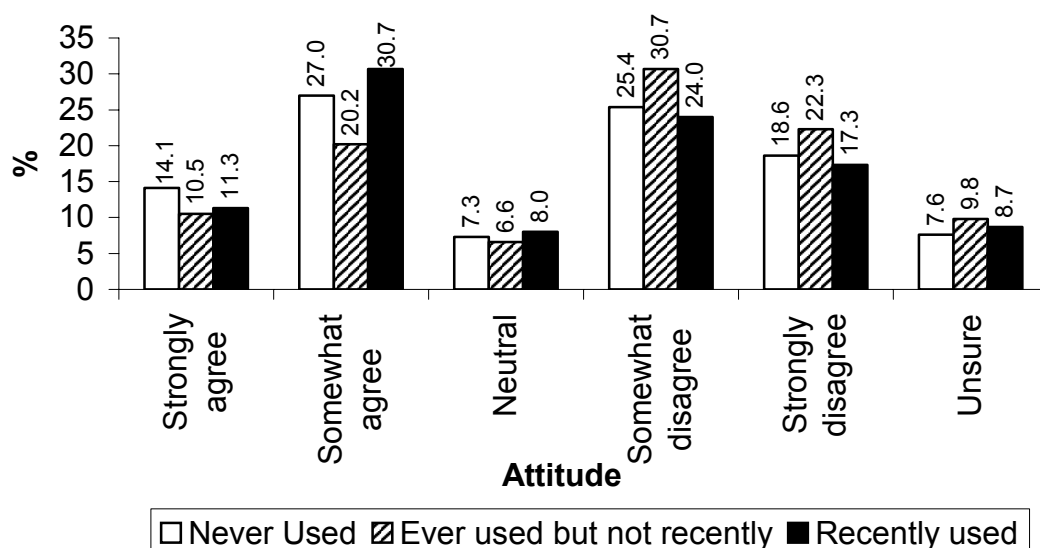


Figure 21: There has been a lot in the media recently about cannabis law' by exposure to cannabis – percent of respondents

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LAW AND POLICE

Overall, the total sample was seen to perceive itself as overwhelmingly law abiding and having a deep level of respect for both the law in general and the police officers enforcing it. In contrast there was less support for laws regarding drug use in general and cannabis use in particular.

Virtually all the sample (97.2%, n=786) agreed to at least some degree with the statement that they were *'a law abiding citizen'* and a similarly large proportion (97.3%, n=787) agreed that *'most laws were worth obeying'*. Conversely, 91.6% of the sample (n=741) disagreed with the statement that *'people should break laws they disagree with'*. There was also seen to be generally strong support for the police force with 92.2% of the sample (n=746) agreeing that *'police deserved respect for their role in maintaining law and order'*.

Despite this, however, views held on legal items related to drug use and cannabis use were often much more polarised. Whilst nearly half the sample (49.3%, n=399) agreed that strong laws deter drug use, a very similar percentage (47.2%, n=382) indicated that they disagreed with it. Similarly, while 35.0% (n=283) agreed that police generally treat cannabis users with respect, 34.2% (n=277) disagreed. A narrow majority of respondents (55.6%, n=450) agreed that *'police should be given more powers to address cannabis laws in the community'*, but the fact that more than one third (35.6%, n=288) disagreed with this can not be ignored, especially in light of the 76.5% of the sample (n=619) who agreed that *'police time could be better spent than on investigating minor cannabis offenders'*. This data is presented in detail in Table 15.

Table 15: Respondents attitudes towards the law and police

Attitude	% of Respondents					
	Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
You are a law abiding citizen	85.7	11.5	0.5	1.4	1.0	-
Most laws are worth obeying	79.7	17.6	0.5	1.6	0.2	0.4
People should break laws they disagree with	1.4	3.7	2.7	15.3	76.3	0.6
Strict laws deter drug use	23.1	26.2	2.2	19.0	28.2	1.2
Police deserve respect for their role in maintaining law and order	68.7	23.5	3.0	2.2	2.3	0.2
Police generally treat cannabis users with respect	10.5	24.5	7.2	16.9	17.3	23.6
Police should be given more power to address cannabis laws in the community	29.0	26.6	6.4	17.8	17.8	2.3
Police time could be better spent than on investigating minor cannabis offenders	56.1	20.4	3.3	12.2	7.3	0.6

Table 16 below shows that when these attitudes are examined with reference to respondents' history of cannabis exposure those who had recently used cannabis in the last 12 months were seen to be consistently less respectful of the law and police than those who had not recently used cannabis or those who had never used the drug. That said however, 91.2% (n=135) of these recent cannabis users considered themselves to be '*law abiding citizens*'. Nevertheless, this needs to be compared with 98.9%, (n=282) of those who had ever used the drug albeit not recently ($\chi^2=16.362$, df=1, p=.000). A similar though less marked pattern was also observed with 96.3% (n=417) of those who had ever used the drug seeing themselves as '*law abiding citizens*' vs 99.2% (n=784) of those who had never tried cannabis ($\chi^2=7.185$, df=1, p=.007).

The statement that '*most laws are worth obeying*' was also agreed to by 97.3% (n=144) of these recent users, a figure not significantly less than the 98.2% (n=279) of respondents who had ever but not recently used or the 98.4% (n=362) of those who had never used. Although a willingness to '*break laws they disagreed with*' was significantly affected by respondents' history of cannabis use, even those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months were quite unlikely to agree with this (12.1%, n=17). This can be compared with the somewhat smaller 4.3% (n=12) of respondents who had ever, but not in the last 12 months, used the drug ($\chi^2=8.571$, df=1, p=.003) with smaller differences seen between those who had ever used cannabis in their life with 7.0% (n=29) agreeing as opposed to 3.3% (n=12) of those who had never used the drug ($\chi^2=5.188$, df=1, p=.023).

Similarly, whilst these recent users of cannabis were least likely to agree that '*police deserved respect for their role in maintaining law and order*', they nevertheless had an absolute majority (88.8%, n=127) who did agree with this statement. However, this did constitute a significant difference from those users of the drug who had not used in the last 12 months, amongst whom 95.2% (n=259) agreed with the statement ($\chi^2=5.924$, df=1, p=.015). Similar differences in levels of agreement were also found between those who had ever used cannabis (93.0% (n=386) and those who never had (97.8%, n=358) ($\chi^2=9.938$, df=1, p=.002).

There was no significant difference between the proportion of recent users of cannabis and those who had ever used, but not in the last 12 months, who agreed that '*strict laws deter drug use*' (43.1%, n=62 vs 50.7%, n=142). Significant differences were found, however, in responses to the question of whether '*police generally treat cannabis users with respect*'. Only 36.9%, (n=45) of those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months agreed with this compared to 48.7% (n=96) of people who had used the drug but not in the last year ($\chi^2=4.286$, df=1, p=.038). This difference was also seen between those who had never used cannabis, with 59.0% (n=141) agreeing, as opposed to just 44.2% (n=141) of those who had ever used the drug ($\chi^2=11.965$, df=1, p=.001).

Differences were also observed with regards to the issue of if '*police should be given more power to address cannabis laws in the community*'. Of recent cannabis users, 34.1%, (n=45) agreed as opposed to 57.4% (n=152) of those who had used cannabis but not in the last twelve months ($\chi^2=19.082$, df=1, p=.000). Similarly, while 49.6% (n=197) of those respondents who had ever tried cannabis agreed, 74.3% (n=252) of those who had never tried the drug were in agreement ($\chi^2=46.949$, df=1, p=.000).

There was no significant difference between those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months and those who had ever done so, but not in the last year, in agreeing that '*police time could be better spent than on investigating minor cannabis offenders*' (90.3%, n=131) vs 87.5% (n=244). However, the difference in agreement between those who had ever used the drug (88.4%, n=375) and those who had never used cannabis (68.9%, n=2422) was significant ($\chi^2=44.977$, df=1, p=.000). Regardless of these differences however, this concept was largely embraced throughout the sample regardless of respondents' exposure to cannabis use. This data is presented in detail in Table 16.

Table 16: Agreement with statements regarding the police and the law in general by cannabis use status - Percentage of respondents

Overall Attitudes	% Respondents in agreement			Sig	% Respondents in agreement		Sig
	Total Sample	Never Used	Ever Used		Used but not recently	Recently used	
You are a law abiding citizen	97.2	99.2	96.3	N.S.	98.9	91.2	.000
Most laws are worth obeying	97.3	98.4	97.9	N.S.	98.2	97.3	N.S.
People should break laws they disagree with	5.1	3.3	7.0	.023	4.3	12.1	.003
Strict laws deter drug use	49.3	54.4	48.1	N.S.	50.7	43.1	N.S.
Police deserve respect for their role in maintaining law and order	92.2	97.8	93.0	.002	95.2	88.8	.015
Police generally treat cannabis users with respect	35.0	59.0	44.2	.001	48.7	36.9	.038
Police should be given more power to address cannabis laws in the community	55.6	74.3	49.6	.000	57.4	34.1	.000
Police time could be better spent than on investigating minor cannabis offenders	76.5	68.9	88.4	.000	87.5	90.3	N.S.

NB. Agreement is calculated by the recoding of the original Likert scale into a dichotomous variable of strongly agree / somewhat agree vs strongly disagree / somewhat disagree. Neutral and 'don't know' answers were excluded from the analysis.

Knowledge and Understanding of Existing Legislation Relating to Cannabis

Table 17 shows that responses provided in response to a series of 'true or false' items revealed knowledge of current cannabis law in WA to be extremely variable across the sample. Reasonable levels of awareness were found with 72.3% (n=585) of the entire sample aware that 'Anyone caught with 100grams or more of cannabis will be considered a dealer', and 75.5% (n=610) were aware of the existence of the cannabis cautioning scheme. A smaller majority (61.8%, n=500) knew that failure to pay fines received for minor cannabis offences could result in suspension of drivers licences or gaol terms. Knowledge of other areas of cannabis law, however, was found to be much poorer. There was an especially low level of awareness of the potential severity of criminal sanctions that could be received for relatively minor cannabis offences. Just 28.1% (n=227) of the sample were aware that the maximum penalty for possession of a smoking implement such as a bong or pipe containing traces of cannabis is three years gaol and / or a fine of \$3000. Similarly, only 34.7% (n=281) of the sample knew that the maximum penalty for possession of less than 100 grams

of cannabis is two years gaol and / or a fine of \$2000. This is perhaps not surprising given that these penalties are maximum amounts specified in law but are rarely given as actual punishments. Also not commonly realised (15.2%, n=123) was that police did not require a search warrant to search a house where they have reason to believe cannabis may be present. On average, the sample achieved 2.88 correct answers out of the six items dealing with knowledge of the current laws pertaining to cannabis. Interestingly, those members of the sample with personal experience of cannabis law (i.e. those who had themselves been charged with a cannabis related offence or had a relative who had) did not perform significantly better in this regard, these respondents achieving an average score of 2.91 correct items as opposed to respondents with no such experience of the law who averaged 2.87 (t=.293, df=803, N.S.).

Table 17: Respondents' knowledge of existing WA legislation relating to cannabis (n=809)

	% of Respondents		
	True	False	Unsure
Anyone caught with 100grams or more of cannabis will be considered a dealer	72.3	16.2	11.5
The maximum penalty for possession of a smoking implement such as a bong or a pipe containing traces of cannabis is three years gaol and / or a fine of \$3000	28.1	50.7	21.3
The maximum penalty for possession of less than 100 grams of cannabis is two years gaol and / or a fine of \$2000	34.7	40.5	24.7
Police require a search warrant to search a house where they have reason to believe cannabis may be present	80.1	15.2	4.7
People found guilty of minor cannabis offences and who fail to pay their fines face suspension of their driving / vehicle licenses or gaol	61.8	27.6	10.6
Police have the option of issuing a caution to adults instead of arresting them if found in possession of small amounts of cannabis	75.5	16.3	8.3

NB: Correct responses are printed in bold typeface

The finding that the level of knowledge of existing laws pertaining to cannabis amongst the sample was relatively poor, especially concerning the potential severity of existing criminal sanctions for minor cannabis offences, was also shown when respondents were asked what penalties might be incurred for specific offences. This finding highlights the need for the implementation of the new cannabis legislation to be complemented by community drug education and public advertising programs detailing what offences are and are not covered under the new laws.

Table 18 shows that in answer to what possible legal consequences might be incurred by an adult found in possession of cannabis for the first time, 82% (n=666) of the sample were aware that it was possible to receive a formal caution and 83.3% (n=674) understood that a fine was possible. The possibility that they could be mandated to attend a cannabis education session was also acknowledged by 65.9% (n=533) of respondents and 54.5% (n=441) were aware that they could have to appear in drug

court. Only 35.8% (n=290) were aware that this situation could have no penalty attached, but interestingly 60.0% (n=485) were aware that compulsory drug treatment was not an option currently employed by the WA justice system for this type of offence.

However, awareness of more serious potential legal consequences was found to be much less common. Only 55.1% (n=446) believed that a charge of simple cannabis possession could result in a court summons, and only 41.0% (n=332) thought it could result in a criminal conviction being recorded. Of more concern perhaps is that just 21.0% (n=170) of respondents appeared to know that this possession scenario could result in a six month gaol sentence (although in practise maximum penalties are rarely handed down) and conversely, 60.4% (n=489) erroneously believed that such a possession case could result in an infringement notice similar to a parking ticket.

Table 18: Respondents knowledge of penalties applicable to adults found in possession of cannabis for the first time.(n=809)

Response	% of Respondents		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Formal caution by a police officer	82.3	14.5	3.2
Must attend a cannabis education session	65.9	28.2	5.9
Criminal conviction recorded	41.0	55.3	3.7
Summons to appear in court	55.1	41.5	3.3
Six months gaol sentence	21.0	73.9	5.1
A fine	83.3	14.1	2.6
Receive an infringement notice similar to a speeding ticket	60.4	32.3	7.3
Must appear at drug court	54.5	36.8	8.7
No penalty	35.8	59.1	5.1
Compulsory drug treatment	34.5	60.0	5.6

NB: Correct responses are printed in bold typeface

When addressing the scenario of possible consequences that could arise under existing legislation where an adult was found growing a cannabis plant, an appreciation of the more serious charges was noticeable. These results are presented in Table 19.

Some 85.9% (n=695) of the sample acknowledged that a fine was possible, 71.6% (n=579) were aware of the potential for a summons to appear in court to be issued, and 62.2% (n=503) were aware that having a criminal conviction recorded was a real possibility. The potential for an appearance at drug court was also acknowledged by 68.6% (n=555) of the sample. In other areas however, respondents were often seen to be less well informed. It was incorrectly assumed by 69.6% (n=563) of respondents that police in this scenario had the discretion to issue a formal caution and 68.2% held the mistaken belief that such an offence could result in mandatory attendance at a cannabis education session. Only 38.2% (n=309) were aware of the potential for a six month gaol sentence, and more than half (53.3%, n=431) were under the inaccurate

impression that infringement notices could be handed out for charges of cannabis cultivation. There were just 23.5% (n=190) who were aware that it was possible for no penalty to be handed down and just over half (55.4%, n=448) were aware that there was no option available for mandatory drug treatment in this case.

Table 19: Respondents knowledge of penalties applicable to adults found growing a cannabis plant. (n=809)

Response	% of Respondents		
	Yes	No	Don't know
Formal caution by a police officer	69.6	25.8	4.6
Must attend a cannabis education session	68.2	25.7	6.1
Criminal conviction recorded	62.2	33.9	4.0
Summons to appear in court	71.6	25.6	2.8
Six months gaol sentence	38.2	54.9	6.9
A fine	85.9	11.4	2.7
Receive an infringement notice similar to a speeding ticket	53.3	40.3	6.4
Must appear at drug court	68.6	25.0	6.4
No penalty	23.5	71.8	4.7
Compulsory drug treatment	37.1	55.4	7.5

NB: Correct responses are printed in bold typeface

ATTITUDES TO LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

All 809 respondents were asked a series of questions concerning both their attitudes to laws relating to cannabis and the proposed legislative changes.

Respondent's opinions on the legal status of cannabis

It was believed by slightly over half of all respondents (53.4%, n=432) that it should be legal for an adult to grow cannabis for their own personal use. This was significantly higher than the figure reported by Lenton (1994) that 50.7% of his sample from the WA population disagreed either 'strongly' or 'somewhat' with the statement '*It would be a bad thing for our community if people were able to grow small amounts of cannabis for their own personal use*' ($\chi^2=20.643$, df=2, p=.000). That it should be illegal was supported by 45% (n=364) of all respondents and 1.6% (n=13) said they didn't know.

These opinions on the appropriate legality of adults growing cannabis was seen to be affected by the respondents' experience of cannabis use with only 30.0% (n=111) of respondents who had never used cannabis supporting it's legality, compared to 73.2% (n=320) amongst those who had ever used the drug. This difference was found to be significant ($\chi^2=147.739$, df=1, p=.000). Further differences of opinion were also manifest between those who had ever used the drug, albeit not recently and those who

had used it in the last twelve months with 66.2% and 86.7% respectively favouring legalising of cultivation for personal use. This difference was also found to be significant ($\chi^2=22.639$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). This data is displayed in detail in Table 20.

Opinions on the legality of growing cannabis for personal use was also found to be significantly affected by political affiliation, with legalisation favoured by 62.0% (181) of respondents who voted for parties at the left of the political spectrum last state election, but by only 45.8% ($n=115$) of respondents who voted for right wing parties ($\chi^2=14.232$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). It was also noted that respondents from metropolitan Perth were more significantly more likely to favour legalisation of cannabis cultivation than those from rural WA (56.5% vs. 47.8%, $\chi^2=4.683$, $df=1$, $p=.030$).

Table 20: Respondents' perception on appropriate legality of adults growing cannabis for personal use by exposure to cannabis use

Cannabis use status	n	% of Respondents			Sig
		Legal	Illegal	Don't know	
Never used	370	30.0	67.6	2.4	
Ever used	437	73.2	25.9	0.9	.000
Used, but not in last 12 mths	287	66.2	33.1	0.7	
Used in the last 12 mths	150	86.7	12.0	1.3	.000
Refused to answer	2	50.0	50.0	0.0	

Religiosity was also identified as a factor affecting respondents' beliefs as to whether growing small numbers of cannabis plants for personal use should be legal, with those respondents whose religious beliefs were 'very important' being less likely to support this legal cultivation. Accordingly, while only 30.6% ($n=41$) of respondents to whom religion was 'very important' supported legalising the cultivation of cannabis for personal use, this figure was seen to rise to 47.5% ($n=94$) for those whom religion was 'somewhat important' and to 61.4% ($n=97$) for those who said their religion was 'not very important'. These differences were found to be significant ($\chi^2=32.251$, $df=3$, $p=.000$) These results are displayed in Table 21.

Table 21: Respondents' perception on appropriate legality of growing cannabis by importance of religious beliefs

	% Respondents					
	Total Sample	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	Refused to say
Legal	48.4	30.6	47.5	61.4	60.0	33.3
Illegal	50.0	68.7	51.5	36.7	38.2	50.0
Don't know	1.4	0.7	1.0	1.9	1.8	16.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Some 61.1% (n=494) of respondents believed that possession by an adult of less than 100g of cannabis for personal should be legal, whereas 37.6%, (n=304) felt that it should remain illegal. As was the case with the question of the legality of growing cannabis, the level of support for the legality of possession was also significantly affected by respondents' experience of cannabis use. While 79.4% (n=347) of those who had ever used the drug supported legalisation, just 39.2% (n=145) of those who had never tried it did so ($\chi^2=135.140$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). A further significant difference was noted between those who had ever used the drug, but not in the last 12 months, and those who had used it in the last 12 months with 73.5% and 90.7% respectively believing that possession of small quantities of cannabis for personal use should be legal ($\chi^2=17.701$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). These results are shown in detail in Table 22.

The question of whether possession of cannabis should be legal was also found to be significantly affected by political affiliation with 52.6% (n=131) of respondents who voted 'right wing' at the last State election agreeing, as opposed to 70.1% (n=206) of respondents who voted for 'left wing' candidates ($\chi^2=17.451$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). There was no significant difference between respondents dwelling in metro areas or rural areas (63.7% vs. 56.9%).

Table 22: Respondents' perceptions of appropriate legality of adults possessing <100g cannabis for personal use by cannabis use status

Cannabis use status	n	% of Respondents			Sig
		Legal	Illegal	Don't know	
Never used	370	39.2	58.9	1.9	
Ever used	437	79.4	19.7	0.9	.000
Used, but not in last 12 mths	287	73.5	25.4	1.0	
Used in the last 12 mths	150	90.7	8.7	0.7	.000
Refused to answer	2	100	-	-	

As with cultivation of cannabis for personal use, views on possession of small quantities was also found to be significantly affected by the importance respondents placed upon religion in their lives, with those respondents rating their beliefs as 'very

important' being much less likely to support the idea that such possession should be legal ($\chi^2=28.476$, $df=3$, $p=.000$). This data is displayed in detail in Table 23.

Table 23: Respondents' perception on appropriate legality of possessing cannabis by importance of religious beliefs

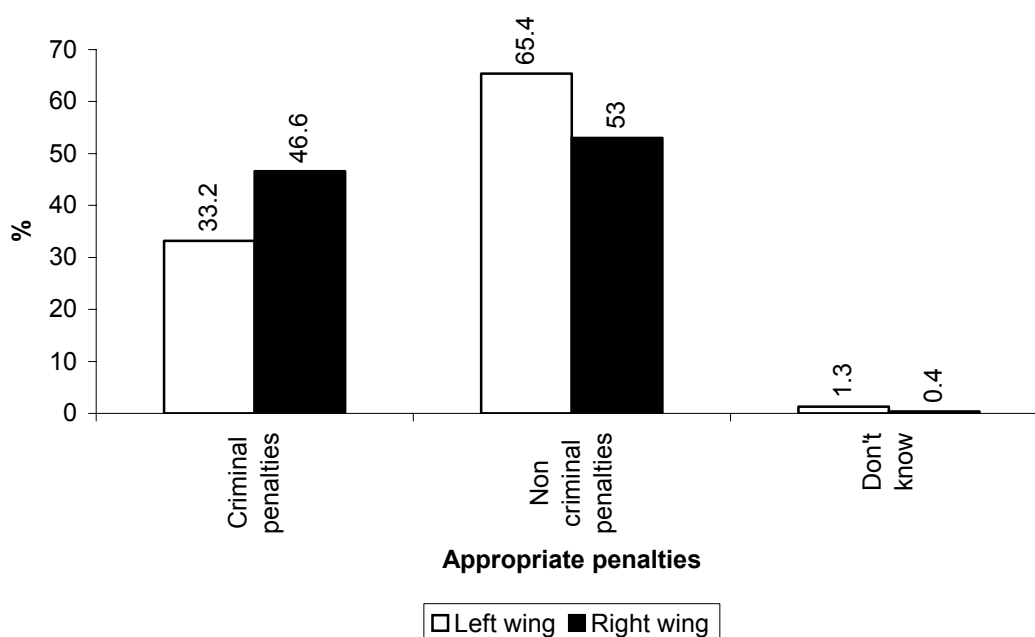
	% Respondents					
	Total Sample	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	Refused to say
Legal	55.9	39.6	55.6	68.4	63.6	33.3
Illegal	42.3	60.4	41.9	29.1	36.4	50.0
Don't know	1.8	0.0	2.5	2.5	0.0	16.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Overall, 59.2% (n=479) of all respondents believed that growing up to two cannabis plants should not be classified as a criminal offence. Just 39.8% (n=322) felt that this should remain an offence with conviction resulting in a criminal record and one percent (n=8) stated that they didn't know. Unsurprisingly, respondents' experience of cannabis use significantly affected opinions on this question. Amongst those who had never used cannabis, 55.7% (n=206) believed that this should remain an offence attracting criminal sanctions, but this figure fell to 26.5% (n=116) amongst those who had ever used the drug ($\chi^2=72.739$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). Further significant differences were also observed between those respondents who had ever used cannabis, though not in the last 12 months, and those who had used the drug in the last 12 months amongst whom just 13.3% (n=20) believed that growing up to two cannabis plants should remain a criminal offence ($\chi^2=20.510$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). This information is displayed in Table 24. Differences in opinion on this matter were observed between metropolitan and rural dwelling respondents, with 44.3% of rural respondents favouring criminal sanctions as opposed to 38.2% of metropolitan dwelling respondents however, these differences were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 24: Perceptions of appropriate legal status of low quantity cannabis cultivation by respondents' cannabis use status

Cannabis use status	% of Respondents				Sig
	n	Legal	Illegal	Don't know	
Never used	370	55.7	43.0	1.4	
Ever used	437	26.5	72.8	0.7	.000
Ever used, but not in last 12 mths	287	33.4	65.9	0.7	
Used in the last 12 months	150	13.3	86.0	0.7	.000
Refused to answer	2	-	100.0-	-	

Regardless of political affiliation, the majority of both left and right wing voting respondents did not believe that the cultivation of up to two cannabis plants should be an offence attracting criminal sanctions. However, support was higher among those who voted for 'left wing' candidates (65.4%, n=195) at the last State election compared to those who voted for right wing candidates (53.0%, n=134). This difference was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2=9.801$, df=1, p=.002).

**Figure 22: Appropriateness of criminal sanctions for cannabis cultivation of up to 2 plants by respondents' political affiliation**

The importance placed on religious beliefs by respondents was also found to be a significant factor in determining their views as to whether low level cannabis cultivation should attract criminal penalties. Those respondents who placed a high degree of importance upon their religious beliefs were the most likely group to believe that these activities should remain criminal ($\chi^2=13.827$, df=3, p=.003). This data is presented in detail in Table 25.

Table 25: Perceived appropriateness of legal sanctions for low level cannabis cultivation by importance of respondents' religious beliefs

	% Respondents					
	Total Sample	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	Refused to say
Legal	42.8	53.0	46.0	32.9	38.2	0.0
Illegal	56.0	46.3	51.5	66.5	61.8	100.0
Don't know	1.3	0.7	2.5	0.6	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Opinion on the degree of leniency of current laws regarding cannabis was somewhat more polarised, with 31.1% (n=252) of all respondents describing them as *'too harsh'*, 29.8% (n=241) stating that they were *'about right'* and 26.8% (n=217) believing them to be *'too lenient'*. A sizable proportion (12.2%, n=99) indicated that they didn't know.

This perception of the current laws was unsurprisingly found to be significantly affected by respondents' experience with cannabis use. Just 15.1% (n=56) of those who had never tried the drug saw the current laws regarding possession and cultivation of cannabis as being *'too harsh'* as opposed to 44.9% (196) of those who had ever used the drug. A near reversal of this situation was observed with regards to the laws' leniency, with 40.3% (n=149) of those who had never used cannabis and 15.6% (n=68) of those who had ever used it believing the current laws to be too lenient ($\chi^2=102.769$, df=2, p=.000). Significant differences were also found between the 62.7% (n=94) of those who had used the drug within the last 12 months who believed the current laws were *'too harsh'*, compared to the 35.5% (n=102) of those who had ever used, but not in the last 12 months ($\chi^2=28.133$, df=2, p=.000).

Table 26: Perceptions of the severity of current laws for cannabis possession and cultivation by respondents' experience of cannabis use.

Cannabis use status	n	% Respondents				Sig
		Too harsh	About right	Too lenient	Don't know	
Never used	370	15.1	31.1	40.3	13.5	
Ever used	437	44.9	28.4	15.6	11.2	.000
Used, but not in last 12 mths.	287	35.5	30.7	20.2	13.6	
Used last 12 mths.	150	62.7	24.0	6.7	6.7	.000
Refused to answer	2	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	

There was less variation with regards to the perceived leniency of laws specific to the dealing or selling of cannabis. Just 13.7% (n=111) of the entire sample thought that these laws were *'too harsh'* and in fact, 37.8% (n=306) felt them to be *'too lenient'* and 35.6% (n=288) thought that the severity of current laws regarding the selling or

dealing of cannabis was *'about right'*. As with laws involving possession and cultivation, the respondents' experience of cannabis use once again generated significant differences in opinion with just 6.5% (n=24) of respondents who had never used cannabis believed the laws pertaining to dealing and selling of cannabis were *'too harsh'* as opposed to 19.9% (n=87) of those who had ever used cannabis who adhered to this viewpoint. Conversely, nearly half (49.7%, n=184) of those who had never used the drug saw the existing laws as being *'too lenient'*, a perspective that was held by 29.9% (n=122) of those who had ever used cannabis ($\chi^2=54.546$, df=2, p=.00). Significant differences were also observed between those who had used cannabis at some point in their lifetime, but not in that last 12 months, and those who had recently used it, with those who had used the drug in the last 12 months being the most likely (29.3%, n=44) to see the existing laws specific to the dealing or selling of cannabis as *'too harsh'* and the least likely (16.0%, n=24) to see them as *'too lenient'* ($\chi^2=22.002$, df=2, p=.00). These findings are displayed in Table 27.

Table 27: Perceptions of the severity of current laws for cannabis dealing or selling by respondents' experience of cannabis use.

Cannabis use status	% Respondents					Sig
	n	Too harsh	About right	Too lenient	Don't know	
Never used	370	6.5	31.4	49.7	12.4	
Ever used	437	19.9	38.9	29.9	13.3	.000
Used, but not in last 12 mths.	287	15.0	38.3	34.1	12.5	
Used last 12 mths.	150	29.3	40.0	16.0	14.7	.000
Refused to answer	2	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	

Respondent's opinions on effectiveness of current cannabis laws

All respondents were asked to rate their perceived effectiveness of existing cannabis laws and policies. With regards to the likelihood both of someone being caught in possession of cannabis or growing cannabis for their own personal use, two thirds or more of the sample (71.6% and 66% respectively) believed the prospect of apprehension to be either *'quite unlikely'* or *'very unlikely'*. In the case of being caught dealing or selling cannabis, responses were seen to be somewhat more confident of the law's effectiveness, but even here just over one third of the sample (35.2%) perceived that it was either *'quite likely'* or *'very likely'* that the offender would be caught. These results are presented in Table 28.

Table 28: Respondents perceived likelihood of apprehension for cannabis offences

	% Respondents (n=809)					
	Very Likely	Quite Likely	Possibly	Quite Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Don't Know
Likelihood of being caught in possession of cannabis	3.3	8.3	14.8	37.7	33.9	2.0
Likelihood of being caught growing cannabis for personal use	4.4	11.0	16.9	42.0	24.0	1.6
Likelihood of being caught dealing or selling cannabis	9.9	25.3	27.2	26.0	10.3	1.4

Respondents were also asked if they felt that *'people would be less likely to reuse cannabis if given education rather than a criminal record'*. This was perceived as *'very likely'* to be the case by 22.1% (n=179) of respondents, *'quite likely'* by 25.3% (n=205) of respondents, *'possibly'* by 13.7% (n=111), *'quite unlikely'* by 21.8% (n=176), *'very unlikely'* by 13.8% (n=112) and 3.2% (n=26) said they didn't know. This would appear to suggest that almost half of all respondents thought that education programs had superior potential to reduce cannabis use than criminal sanctions. However, the poor wording of this item (C8 – see Appendix I) may have constituted a double negative resulting in a level of ambiguity that necessitates caution in interpreting these results.

RESPONDENT'S OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS PROPOSED MODEL FOR CANNABIS LAW REFORMS

Understanding of 'prohibition with criminal penalties'

Prior to having the details of the proposed legislative model explained to them, all respondents were asked what they thought it would mean if the law regarding cannabis was *'prohibition with civil penalties'*. Only 56.7% (n=459) correctly answered that this would mean cannabis *'would be illegal and a fine would apply but no criminal conviction'*. Generally, however, understanding of this terminology was poor. Some 29.9% (n=242) of the sample thought this would mean that cannabis *'would remain illegal with a criminal conviction recorded'* for violations of the law, and a further 7.8% (n=63), thought that this mean cannabis *'would be legal and no penalties would apply'*. Furthermore 5.6% (n=45) said that they were unsure what this meant. Understanding of this concept was found to be significantly increased amongst respondents possessing a tertiary level education of whom 63.5% (n=228) answered correctly as opposed to 51.4% (n=228) of those respondents who did not ($\chi^2=11.958$, df=1, p=.001).

Support for the proposed model once explained

Once the respondents had provided what they thought was meant by the term ‘prohibition with civil penalties’, the details of ‘prohibition with civil penalties’ and the proposed legislative changes was explained to the respondents by the interviewer reading from a standardised script outlining the proposed model for cannabis law reform. The respondents were then all asked if they thought the proposed changes to the cannabis law seemed like a good idea.

Overall levels of support

Overwhelmingly, 79.0% (n=639) indicated that they thought prohibition with civil penalties would be ‘a good idea’. Only 18.5% (n=150) believed it was ‘a bad idea’ and 2.5% (n=20) were ‘unsure’.

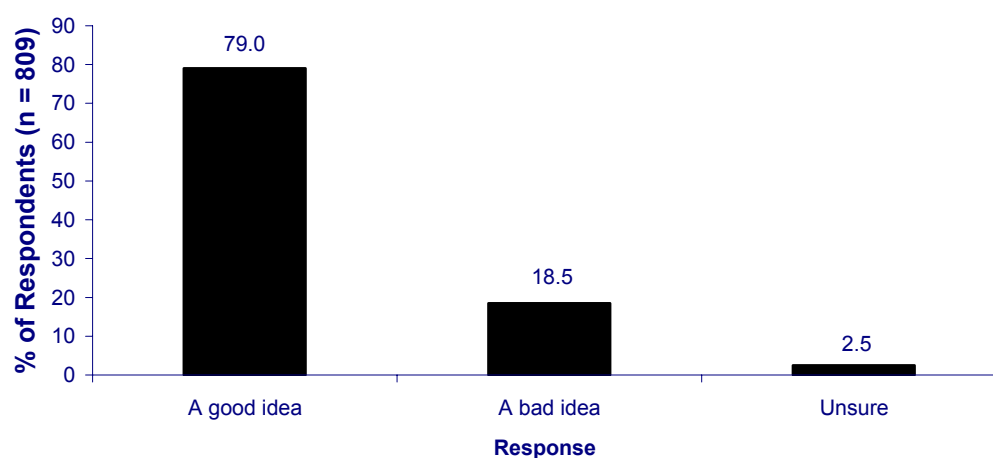


Figure 23: Overall levels of support for the proposed model once explained – Percent of respondents

Support by experience of cannabis use

The proportion viewing the legislative changes favourably, that is as ‘a good idea’, was significantly higher amongst those respondents who had ever used cannabis (85.6%, n=374 in favour) than those who had never tried the drug (71.4%, n=264 in favour) ($\chi^2=26.316$, $df=4$, $p=.000$). This effect was also apparent amongst those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months with 91.3% (n=137) in favour vs 82.6% (n=237) in favour amongst those who had used cannabis, but not in the last 12 months, a difference which was also found to be significant ($\chi^2=6.132$, $df=2$, $p=.047$).

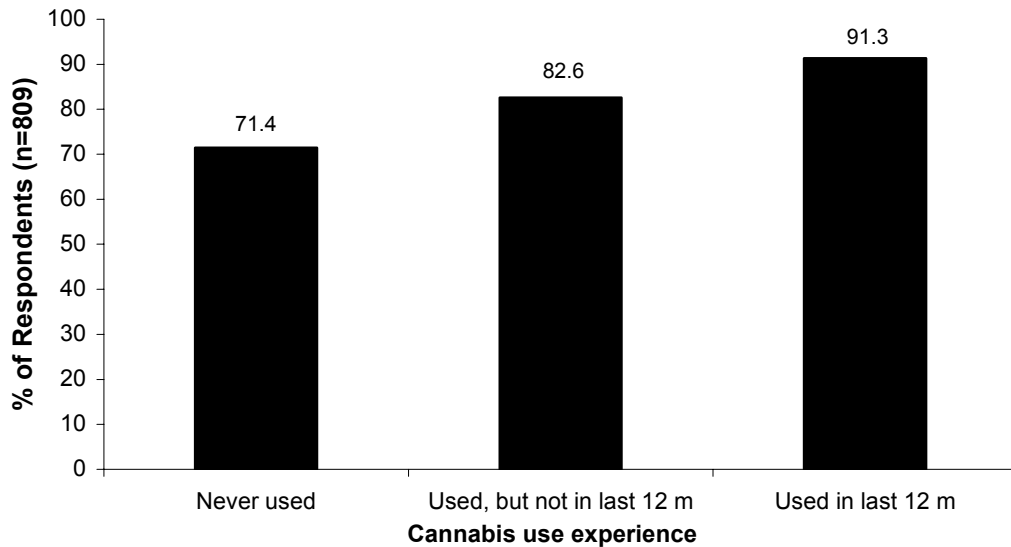


Figure 24: Percent viewing proposed model once explained as 'a good idea' by cannabis use experience

Support by age

Although a slight decline in this acceptance was observed as the age of respondents increased, age was not found to be significant ($\chi^2=8.377$, $df=7$, $p=.301$), and on the whole, the legislative change was embraced by large majorities in all age categories as displayed in Figure 25. However, small but significant differences were observed when age of respondents was dichotomised into those of 30 years or younger, and those respondents who were older, the older respondents tending to have slightly less support for the proposed model. ($\chi^2=3.952$, $df=1$, $p=.047$).

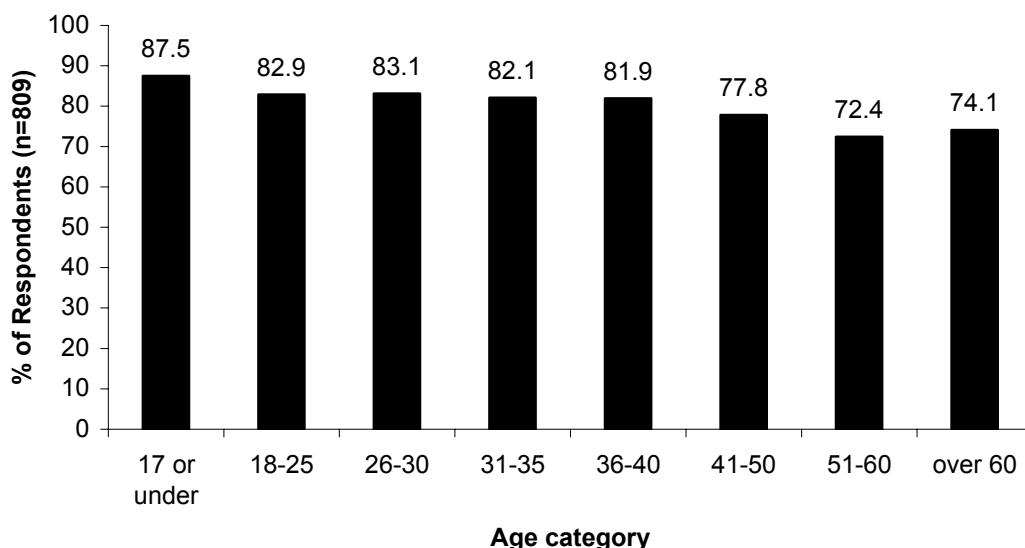


Figure 25: Percent viewing proposed model once explained as 'a good idea' by age group

Support by parenthood

It was hypothesised that respondents who were the parents of children in certain age groups would tend to take a less positive view of the proposed laws. Certainly, being parents of children of any age did appear to have a significant effect on how favourable the new proposed legislative model was perceived as being with 76.0% (n=399) of those respondents with children being in favour of the reforms, but 84.0% (n=236) of those without children reporting that they thought these reforms to be a good idea ($\chi^2=7.476$, df= 1, p=.006). Evidently, however, respondent's parental status did not prevent large majorities of respondents from favouring the proposed changes. It should also be considered that this difference in opinions may also be affected by the natural tendency for respondents with children to be older. Indeed, examination of this possibility using a three way cross tabulation between respondents older / younger than 30, by with / without children and by their view of the new laws revealed that these differences were not significant once age of respondents was controlled for. This suggests that the differences in opinion by whether respondents had children, or not, were likely a function of the age of respondents, rather than their parental status as such.

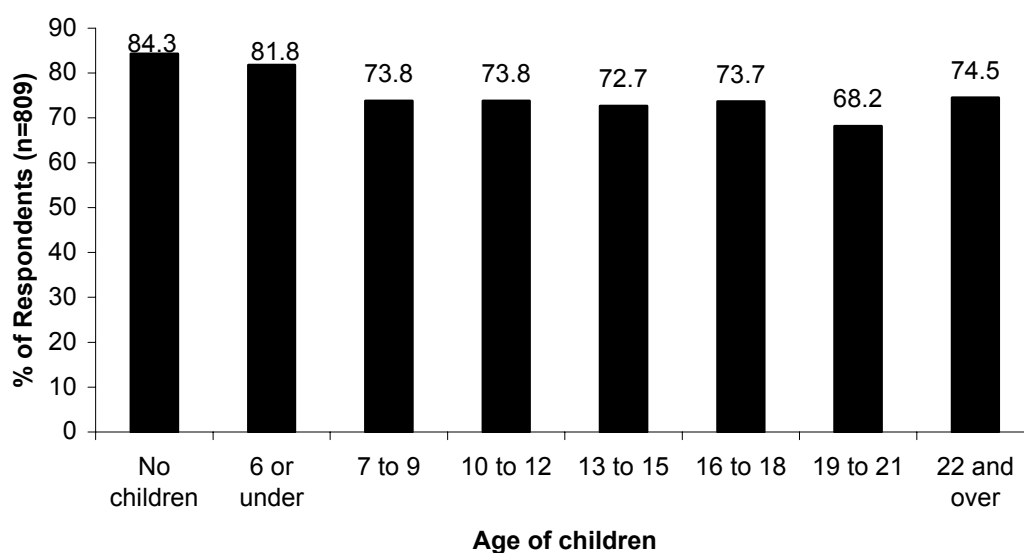


Figure 26: Percent viewing proposed model once explained as 'a good idea' by age of children

Support by religiosity

The degree to which religion was considered important by respondents was another area that was conjectured could have some bearing on the degree to which respondents found the proposed modifications to cannabis law acceptable. Unsurprisingly perhaps, those respondents who considered their religious beliefs to be 'very important' were much less inclined to view the proposed changes to cannabis law favourably with only 67.9% in favour as opposed to those respondents to whom religion was of less importance whose percentages in favour ranged between 78.2% and 82.3%. This difference was found to be significant ($\chi^2=10.478$, df=3, p=.015). Despite this, however, once again, for no group did the amount of respondents in

favour of the proposed legislation fall below two thirds. These results are displayed in Figure 27.

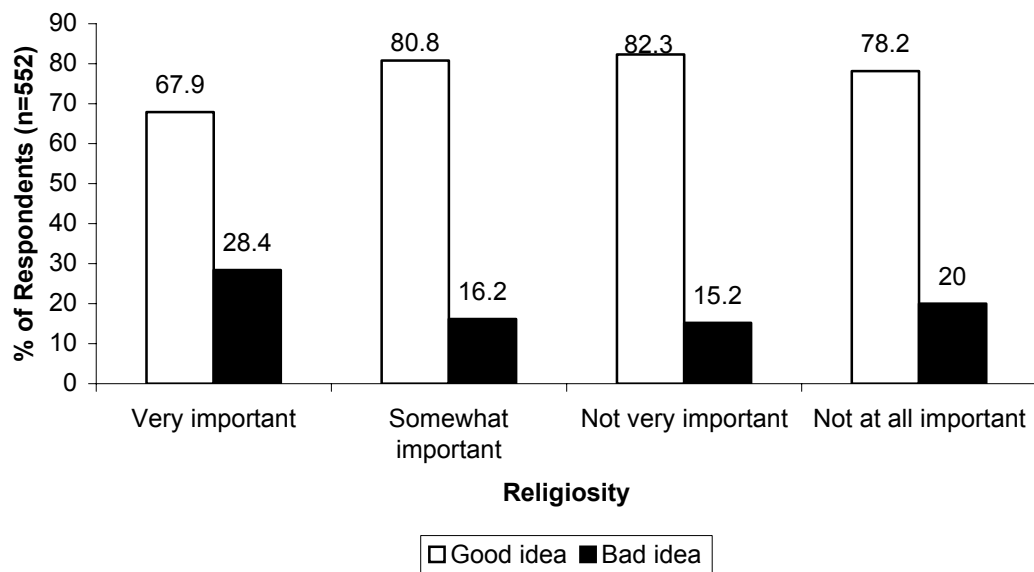


Figure 27: Support for proposed model once explained by religiosity

Support by political affiliation

Political affiliation was also looked into. Respondents were asked which party they had voted for in the lower house at the last State election. These voting choices were then classified as being either politically 'left wing' or 'right wing'. Respondents who indicated that they had cast their vote for independent candidates (1.2%, n=10) were not counted in this analysis. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those respondents who had voted for 'left wing' parties (Labour, Greens, Australian Democrats) tended to be slightly more in favour of the proposed reforms (81.5%) than those of the sample whose affiliations lay more with parties to the 'right' of the political spectrum (Liberal, National, One Nation, Christian Democrats, Liberals For Forests). These differences were found to be significant ($\chi^2=3.944$, $df=1$, $p=.047$) although in each case more than three-quarters of the respondents thought the proposed changes were 'a good idea'. These results are seen in Figure 28.

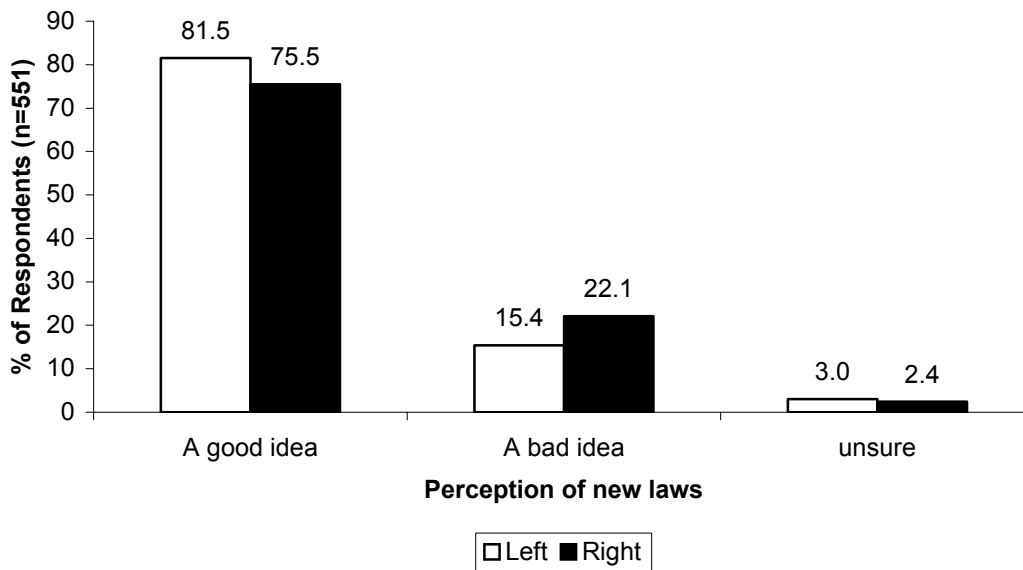


Figure 28 Support for proposed model once explained by political affiliation

Perceived severity of the proposed model once explained

Overall ratings of severity

Respondents were asked 'In general, do you think the proposed laws for minor cannabis offenders seem too soft, about right, or too strict?' Some 70.0% (n=566) of all respondents thought that they sounded 'about right', just 18.9% (n=153) thought they were 'too soft', and 11.1% (n=90) saw them as being 'too harsh'. These results are presented in Figure 29.

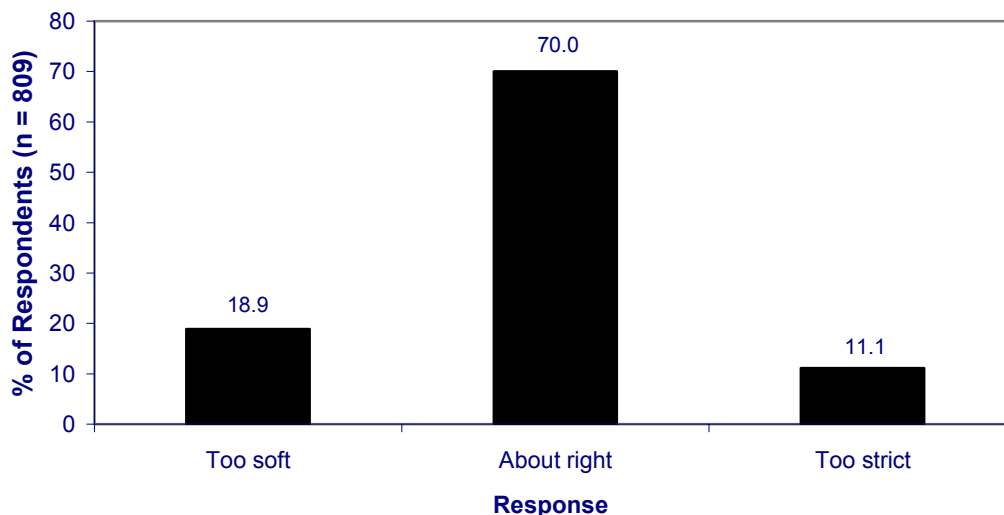


Figure 29: Overall ratings of severity of the proposed model once explained – Percent of respondents

Perceived severity by experience of cannabis use

The perception that the severity or ‘strictness’ of the proposed model was considered to be ‘*about right*’ remained the view of the majority when compared with respondents’ cannabis use status. It was revealed that regardless of whether respondents had *never used* cannabis, *ever used* cannabis, or *used cannabis in the last 12 months*, over two thirds of the sample indicated that they felt the proposed legislative model to be ‘*about right*’. However, significant differences were nevertheless identified in the more extreme points of view with 28.6% (n=106) of respondents who had never used cannabis believing the proposed laws to be ‘*too soft*’ and 4.3% (n=16) of them viewing them as ‘*too harsh*’. This was significantly different from those who had ever used cannabis with 10.8% (n=47) believing the new laws to be ‘*too soft*’ and 16.9% (n=74) viewing them as ‘*too hard*’ ($\chi^2=63.201$, $df=2$, $p=.000$). Likewise, these differences were also observed between those who had used the drug, but not in the last 12 months, and those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months. Accordingly, of the first group, 13.9% (n=40) believe the proposed laws to be ‘*too soft*’ and 11.8% (n=34) saw them as too harsh, as opposed to those from the recent use group with just 4.7% (n=7) viewing the new laws as ‘*too soft*’ and 26.7% (n=40) seeing them as ‘*too harsh*’ ($\chi^2=21.069$, $df=2$, $p=.000$). Also worthy of consideration is the fact that while 28.6% (n=106) of those who had never used cannabis believed the proposed new laws to be ‘*too soft*’, 26.7% (n=40) of those who had recently used cannabis who felt the new laws to be ‘*too harsh*’. This distribution of opinion is displayed in Figure 30.

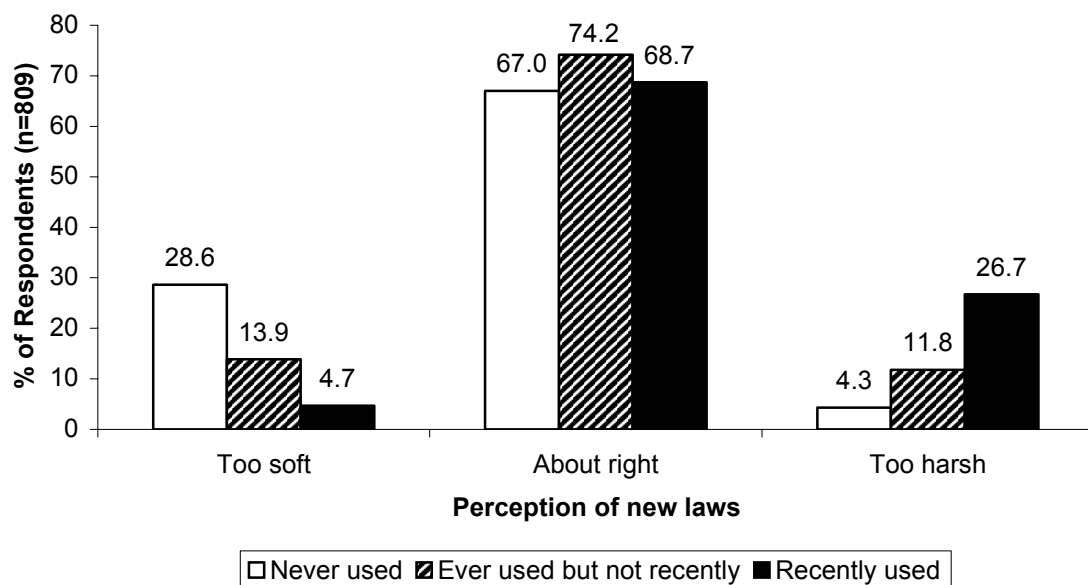


Figure 30: Perceived strictness of proposed cannabis laws by respondents' cannabis use status

Perceived severity by age

That the new laws were ‘about right’ in their degree of strictness was largely a view shared by the majority across all age groups with the exception of respondents under 17 years. However, even with data from respondents of 17 years or younger excluded from the analysis, these differences between age groups were revealed to be significant ($\chi^2=27.177$, $df=12$, $p=.007$). This is shown in Figure 31.

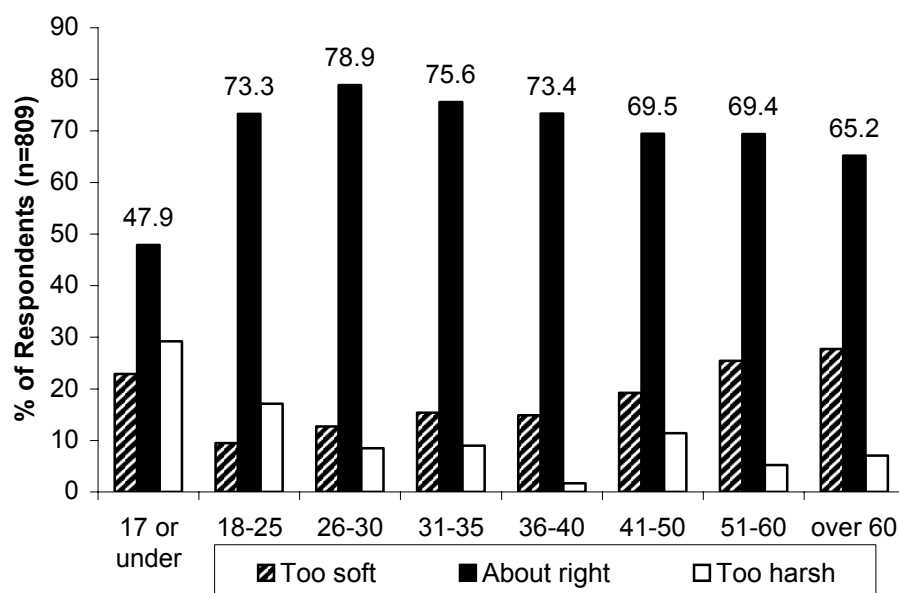


Figure 31: Perceptions of severity of proposed cannabis laws by age

Perceived severity by parenthood

Whether or not respondents had children was found to significantly affect their perceptions of how harsh the proposed laws were ($\chi^2=27.887$, $df=2$, $p=.000$). Those respondents who were parents were found to be more likely to view the new laws as ‘too soft’ (21.9%, $n=115$) compared to those with no offspring (13.6%, $n=38$). Breaking this down further revealed that clear majorities of respondents regarded the severity of the new laws as being ‘about right’ regardless of the ages of their offspring. This view of acceptability was most commonly found amongst parents with children who were six or under (81.0%, $n=98$) and least amongst those with children 19 to 21 years old (59.5%, $n=22$). The laws were most likely to be regarded as ‘too soft’ by those with children aged 13 to 15 years (30.2%, $n=13$) and least likely to be viewed as such by respondents who were six or under (11.6%, $n=14$). The view that the new laws were ‘too harsh’ was most likely to be taken by respondents with no children (18.6%, $n=52$) and least likely by those with children 22 and over (5.4%, $n=12$). These results are displayed in detail in Figure 32. It is likely that these results are not only a function of the ages of respondents’ offspring, but also of the ages of the respondents themselves. To test this, age was dichotomised into those 40 or under and those over 40. the number of children of various ages was dichotomised such that if respondents had children aged 13 or over they received a score of 1 on a variable ‘at risk for cannabis use’. If they had no children, or all were under the age of 13, they received a score of 0. Attitude to the proposed law was dichotomised into those who thought it ‘too soft’ and those who did not (i.e. a combination of ‘about right’ and ‘too

harsh'). A 2 x 2 x 2 cross tabulation revealed an interaction between age and the number of children. Thus there was no difference between those with or without children in the 'at risk' ages among the 'over 40' respondents ($\chi^2_{\text{continuity}}=0.346$, $df=1$, N.S.). Overall 23.5% of the over 40 group thought the proposed penalties were 'too soft'. However, for those under 40, 40.6% of those with children in the 'at risk' ages thought the proposed penalties were 'too soft', compared to 11.8% of those with no children in the 'at risk' ages ($\chi^2_{\text{continuity}}=17.807$, $df=1$, $p=.000$). Further analysis is thus warranted to determine the extent to which age of respondent and whether they have children in 'at risk' ages influence perceptions of the new law's degree of severity.

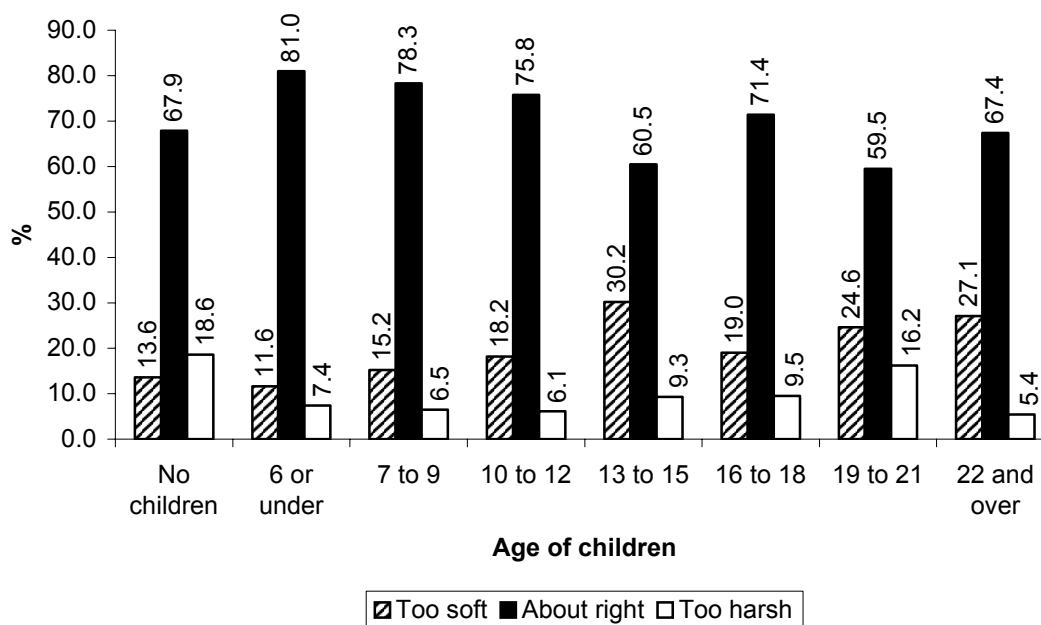


Figure 32: Perception of laws' harshness by ages of offspring

Perceived severity by religiosity

Those respondents who reported their religious beliefs as being 'very important' were the most likely respondents to indicate that they considered the new laws to be 'too soft' with 31.3% ($n=42$) adhering to this point of view. Even given this fact however, nearly 60% (59.7%, $n=80$) of these highly religious respondents reported that they felt the strictness of the new laws was 'about right'. In the case of those respondents who placed a lesser degree of value on their religious beliefs, this perception that the proposed laws were about right was much higher, ranging between 70.9% and 75.9%. The spread of frequencies in this case was such that chi square analysis was not appropriate. These results are displayed in Figure 33.

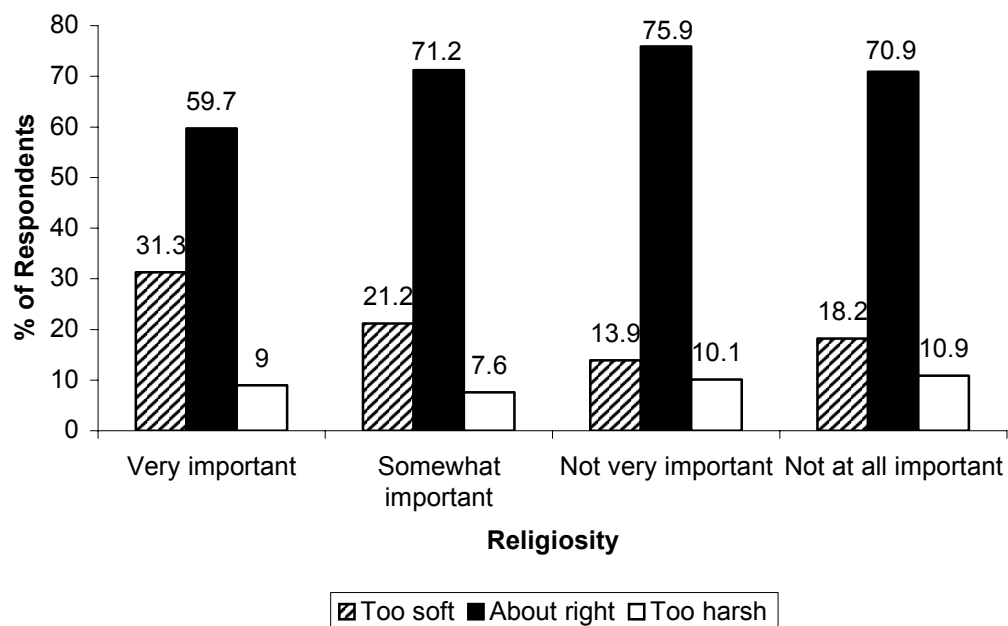


Figure 33: Perception of severity of proposed cannabis laws by respondent's religiosity

Perceived severity by political affiliation

Similarly, the perception that the severity of the new laws was 'about right' was widely held by respondents from across the political spectrum, a view held by 75.2% (n=224) of those who voted for 'left wing' parties in the lower house at the last State election, and by 67.6% (n=171) of those who voted for 'right wing' parties. It should be noted, however, that 'right wing' voting respondents were more than twice as likely (26.1%, n=66) than 'left wing' voters (12.1%, n=36) to regard the new laws as 'too soft'. Conversely, 'left wing' respondents were found to be more than twice as likely than supporters of the political right to view the new laws as 'too harsh' (12.8%, n=38 vs 6.3%, n=16). These differences were found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2=21.365, df=1, p=.000$). These results can be seen in Figure 34.

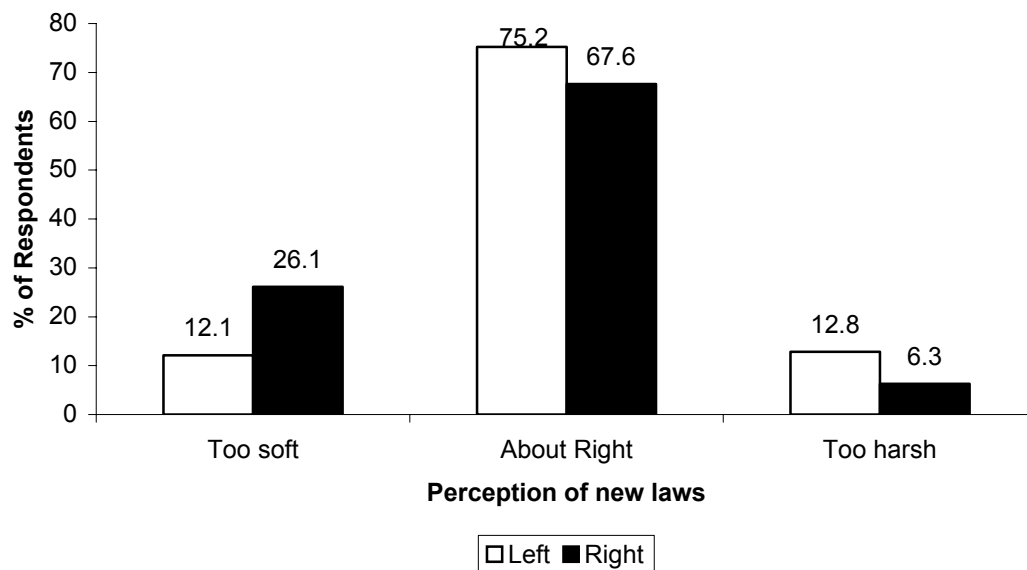


Figure 34: Perceptions of severity of proposed laws by respondents' political affiliation.

Support by exposure to media regarding cannabis laws

It was hypothesised that respondents' perceptions of the proposed legislative model might be affected by their level of exposure to the cannabis debate in the media. This possibility was examined by cross tabulating both respondents' indicated perception of the new law's favourability and its perceived levels of harshness with whether respondents agreed with the statement '*there has been a lot in the media recently about cannabis law*'. Testing this by chi square analysis revealed no differences of statistical significance between those agreeing with and those disagreeing with the proposed model's favourability ($\chi^2=.311$, $df=4$, $p=.989$) or the appropriateness of its level of harshness ($\chi^2=4.780$, $df=4$, $p=.781$)

Expected impact of the proposed laws

A number of questions were put to all respondents about what they thought the some of the effects of the legislative change would be.

Anticipated impact on cannabis-related behaviour of population in general

Table 29 shows 70.5% of the overall sample did not believe that the new laws would have any effect on the number of people choosing to use cannabis, and 9.3% said it would decrease. Similarly the prevailing opinion was also that no changes would occur to the costs of purchasing cannabis or to the ease of obtaining it, although these effects were less pronounced. Some 50.7% of all respondents indicated that they thought that the new laws would result in an increased number of people cultivating their own cannabis, and while 38.6% thought users level of contact with criminal elements would not change, 38.6% of people believed the changes would result in decreased user contact with criminal elements in the course of obtaining their drugs. These two findings are likely to be complementary to each other in that users of cannabis who are cultivating their own personal supply at an increased frequency

would experience a declining need to purchase cannabis from commercial dealers of the drug. Further, it is also likely that a proportion of users would not start cultivating cannabis themselves but would shift to purchasing the drug from small-time user-growers, rather than buying it from larger-scale drug dealers with criminal affiliations.

Table 29: Respondents' anticipated impacts of legislative change to cannabis law (n=809)

	% of Respondents			
	Increase	No Change	Decrease	Unsure
Number of people using cannabis	19.3	70.5	9.3	1.0
Cost of purchasing cannabis	24.8	36.8	32.5	5.8
Ease of obtaining cannabis	26.2	58.6	12.9	2.3
Number of people growing their cannabis	50.7	41.0	6.6	1.7
User's level of contact with criminals when buying cannabis	14.6	43.8	38.6	3.1

Anticipated impact on respondent's own cannabis-related behaviour

While the above table relates to the opinions of the sample as a whole as to what impact they believed the proposed legislative change would have on the cannabis-related behaviour of others. Similar questions were also put to respondents with specific regard to how they thought their own cannabis and other drug related behaviour would change after the impending legal changes for cannabis came into effect.

Table 30 shows that the overwhelming majority (93.4%, n=756) of the sample reported that the quantity of cannabis they would use after the changes came into effect would remain about the same. Only 2.1% (n=17) of the sample thought the amount they smoked would increase.

When these results were compared with respondents' exposure to cannabis use, even among those who had used the drug in the last 12 months 86.0% (n=129) said the new laws would not change the amount of the drug they consumed. However, significant differences were observed between the responses of those who had ever used cannabis, but not recently, and those who had used the drug within the last year. ($\chi^2=11.974$, $df=2$, $p=.003$). Curiously, these recent users of cannabis were not only more likely to suggest that their used of the drug would increase following legislative change than those who had ever but not recently used the drug (5.3% vs. 1.0), but also more likely to indicate that their level of use would decrease (7.3% vs 3.1). These results are displayed in Table 30.

Table 30: Anticipated change in amount of cannabis respondents would use after proposed legal changes for cannabis

	% of Respondents					Sig
	n	Increase	No change	Decrease	Don't know	
Total Sample	809	2.1	93.4	3.3	1.1	
Never used cannabis	370	1.6	95.1	1.9	0.7	
Ever used cannabis	437	2.5	92.2	4.6	0.7	N.S.
Used, but not in last 12 months	287	1.0	95.5	3.1	0.3	
Used in last 12 months	150	5.3	86.0	7.3	1.3	.003
Refused to answer	2	0.0	50.0	0.0	50.0	

Similarly, 94.7% (n=766) of the total sample reported that the changes would have no impact on how often they consumed cannabis and just 2.0% (n=16) thought that this would result in an increase. As can be seen in Table 31, this view was also adhered to by 90% (n=135) of recent cannabis users. While no significant differences were detected between respondents who had never used cannabis and those who had, significant differences were found between those who had ever used the drug but not recently and those who had used it in the last twelve months. Again, those who had recently used the drug were not only more likely to indicate that after the legislative change they would use it more frequently, (3.3% vs 1.4%), but also that they would be more likely to use it less frequently (6.0% vs 2.1%) ($\chi^2=6.590$, $df=2$, $p=.037$).

Table 31: Anticipated change in respondents' frequency of smoking cannabis after proposed legal changes for cannabis

	% of Respondents					Sig
	n	Increase	No change	Decrease	Don't know	
Never used cannabis	370	1.9	95.4	2.4	0.3	
Ever used cannabis	437	2.1	94.1	3.4	0.5	N.S.
Used, but not in last 12 months	287	1.4	96.2	2.1	0.3	
Used in last 12 months	150	3.3	90.0	6.0	0.7	.037
Refused to answer	2	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	
Total Sample	809	2.0	94.7	3.0	0.4	

When asked how the amount of cannabis they would grow would change after the proposed legal changes came into effect, 91.6% (n=741) of the total sample felt that no change would occur, and only 4.6% (n=37) indicated that they would be likely to grow more. This inclination to cultivate more cannabis was somewhat more pronounced among respondents who had ever used cannabis (7.1%, n=31) over those

who never had (1.6%, n=6) ($\chi^2=17.873$, df=2, p=.000). It was also more pronounced those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months (16.7%, n=25) compared to those who had ever used it, but not recently (2.1%, n=6) ($\chi^2=34.150$, df=2, p=.000). These results are displayed in Table 32.

Table 32: Anticipated changes to amount of cannabis respondents would grow after legislative change

	n	% of Respondents				Sig
		Increase	No change	Decrease	Don't know	
Never used cannabis	370	1.6	96.5	1.6	0.3	
Ever used cannabis	437	7.1	87.4	3.7	1.8	.000
Used, but not in last 12 months	287	2.1	93.7	3.1	1.0	
Used cannabis in last 12 months	150	16.7	75.3	4.7	3.3	.000
Refused to answer	2	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	
Total Sample	809	4.6	91.6	2.7	1.1	

Of those 124 recent cannabis users who at the time of survey were not cultivating any of their own cannabis, 75.0% (n=93) indicated that this situation would remain unchanged, however, 17.7% (n=22) did state that they would grow more (i.e. commence growing) cannabis after the legislative changes took effect as compared to just 12.5% (n=2) of those 16 who were already cultivating the plant. However, of those already cultivating cannabis, 75.0% (n=12) said that they amount they grow would not change, and 12.5% (n=2) said that they would actually be inclined to grow less. However, the small numbers of respondents currently engaged in the cultivation of cannabis renders chi square analysis of these results unfeasible and as such they should be treated with caution.

Those who had used cannabis in the last 12 months were also asked if they thought these changes would impact on their use of alcohol and other drugs, with the prevailing opinion held by 94.6% (n=765) being that this too would remain unchanged and just 2.1% (n=17) suggesting that it would increase. Respondent's exposure to cannabis was examined in this context, but no differences of significance were identified.

Table 33: Anticipated changes to respondents' use of other drugs and alcohol following legislative change

	% of Respondents					Sig
	n	Increase	No change	Decrease	Don't know	
Never used cannabis	370	1.6	95.9	2.2	0.3	
Ever used cannabis	437	2.5	93.4	3.7	0.5	N.S.
Used, but not in last 12 months	287	2.1	94.1	3.8	0.0	
Used in last 12 months	150	3.3	92.0	3.3	1.3	N.S.
Refused to answer	2	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	
Total Sample	809	2.1	94.6	3.0	0.4	

It was explained to the respondents that under the proposed model hydroponically cultivated cannabis would fall outside the new laws, that is, that cultivation of one or two hydroponic plants would continue to attract criminal sanctions. Although 47.7% (n=386) *agreed* with the way hydroponic cultivation of cannabis was to be treated under the proposed laws either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*', opinion was highly polarised with nearly as many (44.1%, n=357) who *disagreed* either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*'. It is curious that such a high proportion of the sample agreed with the way hydroponic cultivation was to be treated, despite the finding that 75.0% (n=607) indicated that they also *agreed* either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*' that the exclusion of hydroponically grown cannabis would result in users continuing to obtain their cannabis from growers with criminal associations. More than three quarters (76.7%, n=621) either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*' agreed that the police should have the power to act against people who sell hydroponic equipment who police have evidence are engaging in criminal activities such as commercial cannabis production. A complete breakdown of this data is displayed in Table 34.

Table 34: Respondents' opinions on the proposed model's approach to hydroponic cannabis (n=809)

Attitude	% of Respondents					
	Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Hydroponic plants should be excluded from the new laws	31.3	16.4	3.6	18.8	25.3	4.6
Exclusion of hydroponic plants will result in many users obtaining it from suppliers with criminal associations	45.5	29.5	2.8	9.1	7.7	5.3
The law should allow police powers to act against suppliers of hydroponic equipment who are engaging in criminal activity	52.5	24.2	4.0	6.3	8.7	4.3

Another area where opinion proved highly polarised was the exclusion of juveniles from the proposed model. Equal proportions of respondents (34.0%, n=275) '*strongly agreed*' and '*strongly disagreed*' on this point. However, the argument was weighted towards those who wished juveniles excluded with an additional 16.4% (n=133) who '*somewhat disagreed*' with their inclusion compared to 11.0% (n=89) who '*somewhat agreed*'. This data is presented in Table 35. It was noted, more than half (58.4%, n=28) of juvenile respondents did not concur with this policy of exclusion of minors from the scheme.

As regards the effects of the proposed legislation on the number of people receiving criminal records, Table 35 demonstrates that 49.8% (n=403) of the entire sample either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat agreed*' that it would have an effect, although the direction of this effect was not specified. There was a sizeable body of the sample however (41.9%, n=339) who '*disagreed*' either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*' that the legislative changes would have an impact on this domain.

Table 35 shows that a much clearer picture emerged when respondents were asked if they agreed that it was more appropriate to use education than to give people criminal records for the use of cannabis. More than three quarters (78.0%, n=631) agreed either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*' that education was indeed more appropriate, with 56.1% (n=454) indicating that they '*strongly agree(d)*' with the statement. Just 17.7% (n=143) either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*' felt that education was not the more appropriate option.

With further respect to the role of the police within the new laws, it was either '*strongly*' or '*somewhat agreed*' by 69.7% (n=566) of the sample that police should have the option to exercise their discretion to assist in apprehending people who appear to be flouting the intention of the proposed scheme by exploiting loopholes in the new laws (e.g. like setting up syndicates for the purposes of growing commercial quantities of cannabis). Just 19.4% (n=157) '*disagreed*' with this idea. These data are also presented in Table 35.

Table 35: Respondents' opinions on the proposed model's approach to juveniles, criminal records, education (n=809)

Attitude	% of Respondents					
	Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
Juveniles should be included in the new system.	34.0	11.0	2.0	16.4	34.0	2.6
The proposed new laws will not affect the number of people receiving criminal records for a cannabis related offence.	18.9	23.0	3.7	25.0	24.8	4.6
It is more appropriate to use education to reduce the rate of cannabis use in the community than giving people a criminal record for using the drug	56.1	21.9	3.6	7.4	10.3	0.7
Police should be allowed to exercise their discretion to apprehend people exploiting loopholes	37.9	31.8	6.6	7.5	11.9	4.3

Where respondents would go if they wanted more information about cannabis

In addition to information regarding their own experiences and attitudes towards cannabis, respondents were also asked where they would go if they wanted more information about cannabis. From the entire sample, 1189 responses were received. Overwhelmingly, the most common answers were from an *'alcohol and drug organization or clinic'* given by 27.4% of respondents (n=222) and from the *'internet'* which was nominated by 24.6% (n=199), followed by from a *'doctor or General Practitioner'* mentioned by 16.1% of respondents (n=130) and from a *'hospital or other health organization'* given by 12.4% of respondents (n=100). The next most common response was *'don't know'* offered by 11.6% (n=94). Other responses were seen to be relatively uncommon and are displayed in Table 36.

Interestingly, only 6.8% (n=55) of respondents indicated that they would approach the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) or another drug help line, suggesting that awareness of these services amongst the general public is relatively poor. Although this low level of response may possibly be modified to some extent the relatively ambiguous response of *'phone book'* given by 6.3% of respondents (n=51), the fact remains that only 0.6% (n=5) of respondents mentioned the Alcohol & Drug Information Service by name.

Table 36: Sources of further information on cannabis nominated by respondents

	n	% of responses	% of respondents
Alcohol & drug organization / clinic	222	18.7	27.4
Internet	199	16.7	24.6
Doctor / GP	130	10.9	16.1
Hospital or other health organization	100	8.4	12.4
Book or library	89	7.5	11.0
Police	84	7.1	10.4
Phone book	51	4.3	6.3
Drug help line (not ADIS)	50	4.2	6.2
Friend or relative	49	4.1	6.1
Teacher / school etc.	48	4.0	5.9
ADIS	5	0.4	0.6
Other	68	5.7	8.4
Don't know	94	7.9	11.6
Total	1189	100.0	147.0*

* percentages may exceed 100% due to multiple responses being allowed

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The study was undertaken in a political environment of impending legislative change that sought to alter the criminal status of small quantities of cannabis by the introduction of a system of civil penalties in place of existing criminal sanctions.

With a view to evaluating the impact of these changes, the study was designed according to a pre-post test model. This report deals with the first phase prior to the enacting of the proposed legislation. A randomised phone survey using Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI) was conducted to examine public attitudes and opinions towards cannabis, the laws currently relating to it and the proposed changes to legislation.

A sample of 809 Western Australians between 14 and 70 years of age was interviewed. The response rate was 38%. As far as possible, attempts were made to maintain an even gender split and to reflect the relative proportions of respondents living in the metropolitan and country regions. Comparisons made of the demographic characteristics of the sample with the findings from the most recent population census of WA (ABS, 2002) revealed that in most respects the sample constituted an accurate reflection of the contemporary WA population. One significant difference noted however was that the age of the sample was somewhat older than that of the overall WA population with a degree of overrepresentation of subjects in the 61-70 years old age bracket. It was hypothesised that this was likely to be due to these older respondents having increased disposable leisure time and thus being more amicable to the idea of participation in a relatively lengthy survey. In keeping with earlier findings concerning the opinions of older respondents on cannabis (CDHFS, 1996) it is likely that any effect this overrepresentation may have had upon this study's outcomes would be unlikely to favour any softening of cannabis legislation.

PATTERNS OF CANNABIS USE IN THE SAMPLE

Consumption

It was found that 54% of the sample had tried cannabis at least once during their lifetimes. Although this figure was found to be significantly higher than lifetime cannabis use figures in WA in 2001 (39%) (Drug and Alcohol Office, 2003) and 1998 (45%) (Fitzsimmons & Cooper-Stanbury, 2000) it is considered likely that this may be attributable to those potential respondents with some experience of the drug viewing the survey as having greater salience to them and thus being more inclined towards agreeing to participate. However, the finding that 18% reported having used cannabis in the last 12 months, not significantly different from the rate reported in the most recent WA Drug Strategy Household Survey (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2002b) suggests that the sample was not biased in favour of recent users of the drug.

Small but significant gender differences were found to exist in terms of lifetime experience of cannabis, but these differences were vastly more manifest in terms of recent use of cannabis with males more than twice as likely as female subjects to have

consumed the drug within the previous twelve months. Similarly, age of respondents was also seen to have an effect on rates of cannabis use. In terms of recent use of the drug, rates were seen to noticeably decline after reaching a peak of 45% at 25 years of age. With regards to lifetime use, this was seen to reach a peak of 80% amongst the 26-30 year olds before declining, likely to be a reflection of both the effects of increased opportunities for exposure to cannabis as individuals enter early adulthood, but also generational differences in attitudes and ability to access illicit drugs.

Of those respondents who had used cannabis in the last 12 months, the most common frequency of use was at least once a week, but not on a daily basis. It was found that the most common method was to smoke through a cannabis cigarette or 'joint'. However, amongst younger respondents use of a water pipe or 'bong' appeared to be more popular.

Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents who had recently used cannabis indicated that they would most commonly use the flowering heads of the female cannabis plant. Only two individuals mentioned the common use of hashish in its oil or resin forms. While this likely reflects the relative scarcity of this form of the drug in Western Australia (e.g. Fetherston & Lenton, 2004), the possibility can not be discounted that this may in fact be an under representation stemming from questionnaire instructions to the effect that the term 'cannabis' referred specifically to 'the dried leaves and female flower heads of cannabis'. Although use of naturally grown cannabis was found to be slightly more common, no significant difference was found between the numbers of respondents reporting the use of hydroponic and naturally grown cannabis. Despite the reputation of hydroponically grown cannabis to possess greater potency, only a sizable minority of the overall sample indicated that they would always or mostly prefer to use the hydroponically produced variety of the drug. However, significant differences were found in this regard with younger respondents (i.e. 25 and under) being significantly more likely to report both more common use of hydroponically cultivated cannabis and a preference for the use of cannabis grown by this method. This fact combined with the exclusion of both hydroponic cannabis and minors from the proposed new legislation would make it appear unlikely that young users of cannabis and especially those under 18 years of age will experience any great incentives to discontinue the practice of acquiring hydroponic cannabis from black market sources.

Reasons given for not consuming or ceasing to consume

A lack of desire to use cannabis was, by a large margin, the most common reason given both for never having used cannabis (54% of respondents, n=199) and also for having stopped use of cannabis (54% of respondents, n=155). In the case of those who had never used the drug, other common reasons for not having done so were associated with health effects (27%, n=99) and psychological effects (17%, n=62). This was followed by the illegal nature of cannabis, accounting for just 15% (n=54) of respondents. With regards to those respondents who had ceased using cannabis, the second most common answer given by 27% (n=76) of respondents was that they had become '*too old*' or '*grown out of it*'. This combined with the very common 'no desire to use' type of response may be argued to be strongly indicative of a natural tendency for interest in cannabis use to wane as individuals mature. Once again, other common responses featured concern over health effects (17%, n=48) and concern over psychological effects (11%, n=31). It is interesting to note the obvious scarcity

of respondents citing education as a reason for never having used (3%, n=10). In the case of respondents who had ceased using cannabis, there were no examples of respondents who cited education as a reason behind this, a fact that may carry important implications for architects of educational campaigns and public health awareness strategies.

Cultivation

The vast majority (89%, n=124) of those respondents who had used cannabis in the last twelve months had not been involved in any level of cannabis cultivation for their own use. Of the small number who had grown plants (11%, n=16), the most common (6%, n=8) amount that they grew was to supply 75-100% of their personal cannabis supply. This would seem to imply that while the actual cultivation of cannabis for the growers' own use is a relatively uncommon phenomenon, most of those who do, do so with a view to being able to be self sufficient in their supply of cannabis without having to resort to purchasing it from acquaintances or black market sources. This observation however, does not preclude the possibility that some of these individuals may also pass on or sell some portion of what they have cultivated. However, these results need to be treated with caution because of the small numbers and, in this regard, more weight should be based on the results of the regular users sub-study in this research project. It was also noted that younger respondents (ie those under 26) were significantly less likely to attempt to grow cannabis. It is probable that this is in part a function of older respondents no longer residing with older relatives or guardians. Given the result discussed earlier where younger respondents expressed a preference for hydroponically grown cannabis combined with the exclusion of hydroponic cannabis cultivation under the new legislative model, there is a question regarding the extent to which the CIN scheme will produce a noticeable decline in contact with black market sources of cannabis for these younger respondents. The post- phase of this project should provide useful data to determine the extent to which such effects have occurred as a result of the legislative changes for cannabis.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS CANNABIS

Respondents' estimates of the prevalence of both lifetime and recent cannabis use amongst the WA adult community were found to be significantly higher than either the actual rates of use reported in recent Drug Use Household Surveys (AIHW, 1999; 2002) or those amongst the sample interviewed in this study. This may suggest a common misconception that cannabis use is far more widespread than is actually the case or may be a function of the very high numbers of respondents with a history of cannabis use who agreed to participate in the study. That these estimates of use were found to be significantly higher still amongst those respondents who had ever tried cannabis than amongst the rest of the sample may be viewed as indicative of how normalised the practise is seen to be amongst those large sections of the community who have been exposed to use of the drug.

The results from a series of Likert scale format questions revealed that overall opinions of cannabis throughout the sample were overwhelmingly negative. Despite a majority of respondents agreeing that *'people generally have a good time when they use cannabis'*, there was also widespread agreement with a number of statements including *'cannabis was a dangerous drug'*, *'cannabis use was a problem'*, *'use by friends or family would be cause for concern'*, *'cannabis use may result in mental*

health problems, *cannabis use may result in dependence*, *people who use cannabis will go on to use more dangerous drugs* and that *use of cannabis can lead to people becoming socially isolated*. Closer examination of these responses revealed a consistent pattern however, with the majority of those responses that were negative towards cannabis originating from those respondents who had not used the drug. Those respondents who had ever tried cannabis were generally seen to return more moderate responses, and those who had recently used cannabis (i.e. within the previous twelve months) were yet more positive towards the drug. These findings are consistent with earlier research which found that users of cannabis generally had more positive attitudes to the drug (Makkai & McAllister, 1993, 1998) and liberalisation of cannabis laws (e.g. Bowman & Sanson-Fisher, 1994).

That said however, there was seen to be a clear understanding that cannabis was not an intoxicant perceived even by its regular users as being totally benign. This pattern of opinion was perhaps best epitomised by the statement *the benefits of cannabis outweigh the harms and risks associated with its use* which was disagreed with by 64% of respondents who had ever used the drug and by 44% of those who had recently used it. Similarly, it was observed that over three quarters (76%) of recent users of cannabis concurred that driving a vehicle while under the influence of cannabis should remain a criminal offence which, while lower than the 89% of the total sample in agreement, nevertheless remains a very substantial figure. The apparent negativity of these results, however, should be considered in the light of the widespread acceptance throughout the sample of the potential medicinal value of cannabis, a proposition that even 76% of respondents who had never used the drug agreed with as opposed to 84% of the entire sample who agreed with the statement.

The level of disagreement between those who had never used the drug and those who had was seen to become particularly marked when considering questions of the drugs' appropriate legal status. Although it was widely accepted, even by recent users of the drug (69%) that *people under the age of 18 should not use cannabis*, other statements such as *It should be legal for people over the age of 18 to use cannabis* agreed with by 42% of the overall sample, saw vast disparities of opinion with agreement by 62% of respondents who had ever used cannabis, but from only 24% of those who had never used it. Similarly, the statement *the sale of a small amount of cannabis from one adult to another should be a criminal offence* while agreed with by just over half of the sample, was agreed with by 70% of those who had never used the drug, but by only 41% of those who had ever tried it and by just 27% of those respondents who had used the drug within the last twelve months. This pattern was again seen to emerge with the statement *It should not be illegal for a person to give another a small quantity of cannabis* which, while agreed with by 49% of the sample, was agreed with by just 34% of those who had never used the drug, but by substantial majorities amongst those with personal experience of cannabis use. Interestingly, regardless of respondents' exposure to cannabis or opinions towards the idea of legalising cannabis, there was no majority found in any group of respondents who agreed that *many people who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility of getting a criminal conviction*.

The post-phase of this research should document the extent to which such attitudes are modified by the legislative changes and accompanying community education and other initiatives and may well depend at least in part on the community's perception of the impact of the legislation on a wide range of cannabis related cultural phenomena.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE LAW AND POLICE

Despite the inherent illicit nature of cannabis use, more than 90% saw themselves as being law abiding, supportive of the police and to view most laws as worth obeying. This was even the case among those respondents who had used the drug within the previous twelve months. This tends to suggest that whilst aware that their cannabis use was illegal, many users did not perceive their cannabis use as a 'real' crime. This was reflected in the agreement by 77% of the sample that *'police time could be better spent than on investigating minor cannabis offences'*. There was, however, considerable polarisation of views held with regards to the relationship between law enforcement and drug use. While 49% of the sample agreed that *'strict laws deter drug use'*, nearly half were seen to disagree. This was also observed with regards to the question of whether police treat cannabis users with respect, an issue with approximately 35% agreeing and a similar figure in dispute. It was noted, however, that those respondents who had recently used cannabis were significantly more likely to disagree with that statement. The question of whether *'police should be given more powers to address cannabis laws in the community'* was agreed with by a narrow majority (56%) of respondents, but again saw considerable differences of opinion based upon exposure to cannabis, with those respondents who had recently used the drug being significantly less likely to concur.

It is to be expected that some of these attitudes may change following the implementation of the new cannabis laws. The post-phase of this research will document these. The degree to which attitudinal changes occur in the community will be affected by the public perception of the extent to which the new legislation is embraced and implemented by law enforcement officials.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF EXISTING LEGISLATION RELATING TO CANNABIS

There was found to be little consistency in the awareness of cannabis laws as they currently exist in WA. While 72% appreciated that possession of more than 100 grams of cannabis was in itself illegal and constituted a dealing offence, and 75% of the sample were aware of the police option of issuing cautions for possession of small amounts of cannabis, other areas of the current laws were considerably less well understood. It was for example, wrongly believed by 80% of respondents that police required a warrant to search a house where they believed cannabis to be present. Also poorly recognised was that minor cannabis offences such as possessing less than 100 grams of the drug or smoking implements could incur substantial fines or relatively lengthy prison sentences. Data from a series of true and false questions further confirmed that the public awareness that serious legal sanctions such as gaol terms could be applied to minor cannabis offences such as possession or cultivation was relatively poor. While these findings may in part be due to the fact that the maximum sentences are rarely applied, it may also be a reflection of a public attitude that such penalties for these type of minor offences are extreme and out of step with community attitudes and expectations.

This state of relatively poor knowledge makes a strong argument for accompanying the impending legislative changes with a comprehensive campaign of public education with a view to maximising understanding of exactly what the new cannabis

legislation does and does not entail. It is likely that a failure to address this area adequately could have the potential to see not only a continuation of poor understanding of cannabis law in the community, but more seriously, the unintentional effect of seeing more people arrested and charged for cannabis related offences that they had mistakenly believed to be legal under the new legislative model.

ATTITUDES TO LEGISLATIVE CHANGE

The majority of the sample (61%) believed that possession of less than 100 grams of cannabis for personal use should be legal and slightly over half (53%) thought that growing cannabis for an adult's personal use should be legal. Although support for these ideas was low amongst members of the sample who had never used cannabis, amongst those who had ever done so, both ideas were supported by large absolute majorities. This support was strongest among respondents who had used cannabis in the last twelve months (91% and 87% respectively) but even among respondents who had used cannabis at some point, but not recently, these levels of support remained extremely high (74% and 66% respectively). It was noted that these levels of support were significantly affected by other factors, with lower levels of agreement found amongst respondents who were highly religious, inclined towards the right wing of the political spectrum or dwelling in rural WA.

A higher level of support (59%) was found with respect to the idea that '*growing up to two cannabis plants should not be a criminal offence*' (i.e. decriminalisation). Again, opinions on this subject were seen to be significantly affected by respondent's experience of cannabis use with 43% of those who had never used the drug in favour of decriminalisation, a figure which rose to 66% amongst those who had ever used the drug but not recently, and unsurprisingly, higher still (86%) amongst recent cannabis users. Although significant differences were found to exist between left and right voting respondents, with left voters more likely to be in favour, nevertheless, there was seen to be majority support from both ends of the political spectrum on this issue. Significant differences were also seen to arise from the importance respondents placed upon their religious beliefs, but it was only those who rated their beliefs as '*very important*' who had a majority (53%) in favour of maintaining criminal sanctions.

Considerable diversity of opinion was found with regards to respondents' perceptions of WA's existing cannabis laws on possession and cultivation with similar proportions believing them to be '*too harsh*' (31%), '*about right*' (30%) and '*too lenient*' (27%). Predictably, this result was again found to be significantly affected by respondents' own experience of cannabis use with those who had never tried the drug being most likely (46%) to view the current laws as '*too lenient*' as opposed to just 16% of those who had ever used it. There was more agreement on laws applying to dealing with just 14% of the entire sample viewing these as '*too harsh*' and the most sizable body of opinion (38%) stating that they were '*too lenient*'. Although the usual effects of exposure to cannabis again came into play, in all cases, the most common response was that the existing legislation was '*about right*'. Even amongst the most permissive group (i.e. recent users of cannabis) only 29% saw this legislation as '*too harsh*', as opposed to just 6% of those who had never used it. These results would appear to provide a clear indication that the practice of dealing cannabis (and presumably other illicit drugs) remains unacceptable throughout most of the community.

Despite this apparent approval for at least some of the existing legislation, there was a general acknowledgement that under the current legislative arrangement, apprehension for breaches of these laws was unlikely. In the case of possession only 11% of the sample saw the prospect of apprehension as being either 'very' or 'quite' likely. In the case of cultivation still only 15% of the sample saw a genuine likelihood of being caught. Dealing or selling of the drug was viewed as being more likely to result in being caught, but even here this view was held by only 35% of the sample.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE PROPOSED MODEL FOR CANNABIS LAW REFORM

When unaccompanied by an explanation, understanding of what was meant by the phrase *prohibition with civil penalties* was shown to be relatively poor with only 57% correctly interpreting its meaning, 30% thinking criminal penalties would apply and 8% thinking it would be legal. Following a detailed explanation of the proposed model, however, opinion across the entire sample was seen to be overwhelmingly positive with 79% stating that *prohibition with civil penalties* appeared to be a 'good idea'. While significant differences were found between respondents with differing political affiliations, levels of religiosity, age groups, ages of children and levels of experience of cannabis, even within these subgroups opinions of the proposed cannabis reforms was almost invariably viewed positively an absolute majority stating that the changes appeared to be a 'good idea'.

Additionally, the level of strictness of the proposed model was viewed by 70% of the sample as being 'about right' with only relatively small numbers perceiving it as being 'too soft' or 'too hard'. Once again, significant differences were observed across various subgroups of the sample, but the only identified group that did not have an absolute majority perceiving the level of strictness of the proposed legislative model to be 'about right' was among respondents of 17 years or younger.

Respondents were also asked about what they thought the likely effects of the new legislation would be. On the whole the sample did not foresee that any dramatic change would be likely to occur to the numbers of people using cannabis use in WA, and predominant opinions held that neither the cost of the drug or the ease of obtaining it would be likely to be greatly affected. Slightly over half of the sample felt that more people would probably grow cannabis.

However, the view that the new legislation would result in more people growing cannabis did not appear to carry over to respondents perceived likelihood of growing cannabis themselves. It was in fact relatively rare that respondents saw changes to their behaviour in regard to cannabis cultivation as being likely with 92% of the sample indicating that they did not anticipate any change to occur. Even amongst respondents who had used cannabis in the previous twelve months, the most likely group to say they would grow more plants, only 17% indicated that they would do so. This would seem to suggest that despite provisions in the new laws to apply civil, rather than criminal sanctions to the cultivation of up to two non-hydroponic cannabis plants, relatively few cannabis users in this general public sample said that they were likely to avail themselves of the opportunity to take advantage of this and will continue to obtain their cannabis from black market sources. Reflecting this, it was also the prevalent opinion that users' level of contact with criminals when buying cannabis would be unlikely to change.

When respondents were asked about what effect the legislative changes would be likely to have on both the amount of cannabis they would personally smoke and the frequency with which they would do so, over 90% of the sample indicated that this would not change. While respondents who had recently used cannabis were the most likely to say that their level and frequency of use would increase, these numbers were in fact very small with 5% saying they would smoke more and 3% indicating that they would smoke more often. Similarly 95% of the sample stated that the new legislation would not result in any shifts in their use of other drugs or alcohol.

The question of the exclusion of hydroponic cannabis from the proposed model saw 48% of respondents agreeing that the laws should not cover hydroponic cultivation of cannabis, while 44% thought that it should be included. Despite almost half the sample agreeing with the exclusion of hydroponic cultivation from the infringement notice scheme, 75% of the sample believed that excluding hydroponic cultivation of cannabis would likely result in many users seeking to obtain their cannabis from suppliers with criminal associations. It is always difficult to interpret meaning in apparently contradictory results. However, there had been considerable discussion in the public debate about the potency and yield of hydroponic cannabis (eg. Tickner, 2002). This may have had more salience for many respondents than the possible impact that excluding hydroponic cultivation of cannabis would have on those users who would go to the illicit market to buy their cannabis because they were unable, or unwilling to grow cannabis by non-hydroponic means under the CIN scheme .

The Ministerial Working Party on Drug Law Reform (Prior, Swensen, Migro et al., 2002) had noted that in South Australia concerns had been raised that some hydroponic equipment retailers may have been involved in co-ordinating large-scale cannabis supply collectives in that state. The working party wanted provisions included in the proposed reforms to deter such activities in WA. These provisions were supported by a majority of the sample. It was agreed by 77% of respondents that police should be equipped with discretionary powers to prevent suppliers of hydroponic equipment from exploiting loopholes under the new laws that would otherwise permit commercial cannabis production.

There appeared to be little consensus on the question of the exclusion of juveniles, although a slight majority favoured this exclusion (a view that unsurprisingly was not shared by a majority of juvenile respondents).

Overwhelmingly it was agreed by 78% of the sample that education would be a more appropriate response to minor cannabis offences in the community than the use of legal sanctions which resulted in the offender receiving a criminal record.

CONCLUSION

Across the interviewed sample, views held of cannabis were not particularly positive. Nevertheless, there was widespread understanding that the drug was widely used throughout the community and despite the favourable view in which respondents held the law and police efforts to uphold it, considerable support was observed for the removal of criminal sanctions associated with minor cannabis offences, which were not seen as particularly effective.

Reactions of the sample towards the concept of 'prohibition with civil penalties' was found to be overwhelmingly positive once the concept had been explained to respondents in detail, with strong levels of approval for both the concept itself and the proposed model's perceived level of strictness which was generally viewed as appropriate. Overall, it was believed that these legislative modifications were unlikely to result in any changes of note in patterns of cannabis use throughout the WA community. On the other hand, there was widespread agreement that the new model would generally result in more appropriate and equitable approaches to those members of the community who chose to use or cultivate small quantities of cannabis.

These high levels of public support for the proposed model should be of interest to the public generally and to the policy makers and legislators on both sides of the political spectrum. The levels of knowledge about cannabis, health and the law, and rates of cannabis use in the sample will provide a good baseline for comparing with the post change evaluation results. The results will likely also be of use to those developing public education campaigns on these issues.

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APPENDIX A: THE CANNABIS TELEPHONE SURVEY

CANNABIS COMMUNITY OPINION PHONE SURVEY

‘Good evening. My name is (...) from (...) Research, a national market research company. We are conducting a survey for the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University of Technology about certain health and legal issues.

I would like to talk to a resident in the household who is aged 14 years or over who is usually a resident of WA and whose birthday is closest to today.’

If not home / unavailable

Appointment Day/Date: ___/___/2002

Time: _____

Phone No. _____

‘In this survey we are wanting to ask your opinion on a number of cannabis and drug issues. You don’t need to have a special knowledge of these issues as it is very important for us to know what a range of Western Australians like yourself think. The National Drug Research Institute is a nationally funded body and is not a part of the government. All the information provided by you will be confidential and no information that could identify you like your name or phone number will be passed on to Curtin University. Could you please spare around twenty minutes to participate in this survey?’

If ‘no’ then discontinue interview.

If ‘yes’ then proceed.

Throughout this questionnaire, it is important that you understand that when we refer to ‘cannabis’ we mean the dried leaves and female flower heads of cannabis or ‘marijuana’ plants.

Also, when we use the term ‘illegal’ we do not only mean activities that may result in a criminal record, but also those that can result in civil penalties similar to a speeding fine.

SECTION A – ATTITUDES TOWARDS CANNABIS

A1 What percent of the adult Western Australian population do you think has ever tried cannabis?

A2 What percentage of the adult Western Australian population do you think has used cannabis in the last 12 months?

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

Ask respondent if they agree or disagree with each of the statements, then if appropriate, ask if they (dis)agree 'strongly' or 'somewhat'. Do not read out the 'Don't know' option. These questions should be asked in a random order.

		Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree not disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
A3	People usually have a good time when they use cannabis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A4	Cannabis is a dangerous drug	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A5	Cannabis use is a problem in our community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A6	You would be concerned if friends or family were using cannabis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A7	You would use cannabis if a friend offered it to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A8	You would use cannabis if someone you didn't know offered it to you at a party	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A9	Using cannabis once a month is not dangerous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A10	People under 18 years old should not use cannabis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A11	Cannabis use may result in dependence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A12	There is a clear link between cannabis and mental health problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

OK, that's great. Now I'd just like to ask a few more similar types of questions. Once again please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree Somewhat	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree	Don't know
A13 Cannabis can be beneficial for people with certain medical conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A14 Most people who use cannabis will go on to use more dangerous drugs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A15 The benefits of using cannabis outweigh the harms and risks associated with its use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A16 Use of cannabis can lead to people becoming socially isolated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A17 It should be legal for people over 18 to use cannabis. (Use vs. availability)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A18 Many people who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility getting a criminal conviction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A19 The sale of a small amount of cannabis from one adult to another should be a criminal offence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A20 It should not be illegal for a person to give another a small quantity of cannabis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A21 Driving a car while affected by cannabis should be a criminal offence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A22 There has been a lot in the media recently about cannabis law.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION B Knowledge of cannabis laws

For the following questions, please state whether you think the answer is 'TRUE' or 'FALSE' under current Western Australian law.

Read these items out in a random order. Do not read out the 'Don't Know' option

- | | True | False | Don't
Know |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| B1 Anyone caught with 100 grams or more of cannabis will be considered a dealer | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B2 The maximum penalty for possession of a smoking implement such as bong or a pipe containing traces of cannabis is three years gaol and / or a fine of \$3000 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B3 The maximum penalty for possession of less than 100 grams of cannabis is 2 years jail and / or a fine of \$2000 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B4 Police require a search warrant to search a house where they have reason to believe cannabis may be present | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B5 People found guilty of minor cannabis offences and who fail to pay their fines face suspension of their driving /vehicle licenses or gaol. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B6 Police have the option of issuing a caution to adults, instead of arresting them, if found in possession of small amounts of cannabis. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

For the following questions, please answer 'yes' or 'No'.

Read these next three scenarios in a random order

According to the current law, which of the following possible consequences could occur to an adult found in possession of cannabis for the first time? **Firstly read out then repeat wording of the question, going through possible consequences one at a time. Ask these items in random order. Respondents may choose more than one.**

	Yes	No	Don't know
B7 Formal caution by a police officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B8 Must attend a cannabis education session	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B9 Criminal conviction recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B10 Summons to appear in court	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B11 Six months jail sentence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B12 A fine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B13 Receive an infringement notice similar to a speeding ticket	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B14 Must appear at drug court	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B15 No penalty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B16 Compulsory drug treatment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

According to the current law, which of the following possible consequences could occur to an adult found growing a cannabis plant (may choose more than one).

Firstly read out then repeat wording of the question, going through possible consequences one at a time. Ask these items in random order. Respondents may choose more than one.

	Yes	No	Don't know
B17 Formal caution by a police officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B18 Attendance at a cannabis education session	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B19 Criminal conviction recorded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B20 Summons to appear in court	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B21 Six months jail sentence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B22 A fine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B23 Receive an infringement notice similar to a speeding ticket	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B24 Appearance at drug court	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B25 No penalty	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
B26 Compulsory drug treatment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION C – Attitudes to the current laws & their proposed changes

The next few questions are about what you think about the current cannabis laws and their proposed changes. Please keep in mind that the word ‘LEGAL’ means an activity that has no sort of penalty attached to it. ‘ILLEGAL’ activities carry a penalty although they are not necessarily a criminal offence.

Ask these questions in a random order. Do not read out the ‘don’t know’ options

- C1 In your opinion should it be legal or illegal for an adult to grow cannabis for personal use? Legal
Illegal
Don’t know
- C2 In your opinion should it be legal or illegal for an adult to possess a small amount (less than 100g) of cannabis for personal use? Legal
Illegal
Don’t Know
- C3 Do you think growing 2 cannabis plants should or should not be a criminal offence? This means, if convicted, the person will have a criminal record. Criminal
Not criminal
Don’t know
- C4 Do you think the current laws concerning possession and growing of cannabis are: Too harsh
About right
Too lenient
Don’t know

For the items related to likelihood, first ask how likely the respondent thinks the scenario is and then, if necessary, go deeper by asking if they think it is ‘Quite’ or ‘Very’ (un)likely. Do not read out the ‘don’t know option’

- C5 How likely do you think it is that someone in possession of cannabis for personal use will be caught? Very likely
Quite likely
Possibly
Quite unlikely
Very unlikely
Don’t know

- C6 If someone was growing cannabis for personal use, how likely do you think it is that they will be caught?
- Very likely
 Quite likely
 Possibly
 Quite unlikely
 Very unlikely
 Don't know
- C7 If someone was breaking the law regarding dealing or selling of cannabis, how likely do you think it is that they will be caught?
- Very likely
 Quite likely
 Possibly
 Quite unlikely
 Very unlikely
 Don't know
- C8 Do you think people are less likely to reuse cannabis if given education rather than a criminal record?
- Very likely
 Quite likely
 Possibly
 Quite unlikely
 Very unlikely
 Don't know
- C9 Do you think the current law concerning the dealing or selling of cannabis are:
- Too harsh
 About right
 Too lenient
 Don't know

The next question is a bit complicated, so please listen carefully and I'll repeat the question if necessary.

- C10 What would it mean if the law regarding cannabis was prohibition with civil penalties? Would it mean that:
- It would be legal and no penalties would apply
 It would be illegal and a fine would apply, but no criminal conviction
 It would be illegal and a criminal conviction would be recorded
 Unsure
- Read out options. Do not read out the 'unsure' option.
 May need to repeat this question if necessary

Now, before we continue, I'd like to tell you a little bit about the new laws:

When the proposed scheme including changes to the laws regarding cannabis comes into effect the laws will be based on a system of *prohibition with civil penalties*.

Under the proposed laws possession of any amount of cannabis WILL REMAIN ILLEGAL. However, adults found in possession of up to 30 grams of cannabis, or growing up to two (non-hydroponic) plants, will be given an infringement notice and receive a fine of up to \$300., but no criminal conviction will be recorded against their name. In this regard the laws will be much like those that apply to being caught speeding in a motor vehicle. That is still illegal, not condoned, but does not usually result in a criminal conviction.

The introduction of the new laws will be accompanied by community education about the harms associated with cannabis and about the laws which apply to its use.

Those under 18 years of age will be excluded from the new system, but will be dealt with under existing juvenile justice provisions.

- C11 In general, do you think the proposed cannabis laws seem
- A good idea
A bad idea
Unsure

I'd just like to explain a little more detail about the new system: Under the proposed scheme for cannabis, offenders will have to pay their fine within 28 days or attend a specified cannabis education session within the same period.

Possession of amounts of cannabis above these limits (30g or 2 plants) or involvement in dealing in cannabis will remain subject to STRICT CRIMINAL PENALTIES. Under the proposed new scheme, the threshold for dealing is tougher, down from 100 grams or 25 plants to 100 grams or 10 plants.

- C12 In general, do you think the proposed laws for minor cannabis offenders seem
- Too soft
About right
Too harsh

After the proposed new laws come into effect, do you think that

Ask these questions in a random order. Do not read out the 'Unsure' options.

- C13 the number of people using cannabis will:
- Increase
Remain about the same
Decrease
Unsure

- C14 the cost of purchasing cannabis will:
- Increase
Remain about the same
Decrease
Unsure

- C15 obtaining cannabis will be: Easier
Remain about the same
Harder
Unsure
- C16 the number of people growing their own cannabis will: Increase
Remain about the same
Decrease
Unsure
- C17 Under the proposed changes to the cannabis laws the amount of contact cannabis users will have with criminals when obtaining cannabis will: Increase
Remain about the same
Decrease
Unsure

The next few questions are about hydroponic plants which are excluded from this proposed scheme. That is, growing even 1 or 2 cannabis plants hydroponically will still result in criminal penalties. Do you agree or disagree with these statements regarding hydroponic cannabis?

Ask these questions in a random order. Do not read out the 'Don't know' options.

- C18 The cultivation of even 1 or 2 cannabis plants hydroponically should be excluded from the new scheme and result in criminal penalties. Strongly agree
Agree somewhat
Neither
Disagree somewhat
Strongly disagree
Don't know
- C19 If hydroponically grown cannabis was excluded from the new laws many people would continue to obtain it from suppliers with criminal associations. Strongly agree
Agree somewhat
Neither
Disagree somewhat
Strongly disagree
Don't know

- C20 The proposed cannabis laws should have the power to act against people who sell hydroponic equipment who police have evidence are engaging in criminal activities such as commercial cannabis production.
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

As I said earlier, the proposed new scheme will only apply to adults. Those under 18 years of age will be excluded from the new system and dealt with under the existing juvenile justice system.

- C21 Do you agree or disagree that juveniles should be included in the new system?
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

Ask these questions in a random order. Do not read out the 'Don't know' options.

As before, please tell us the degree to which you agree or disagree with these statements.

- C22 The proposed new laws will not affect the number of people receiving criminal records for a cannabis related offence.
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- C23 It is more appropriate to use education to reduce the rate of cannabis use in the community than giving people a criminal record for using the drug.
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- C24 Allowing police the option to exercise their discretion will assist in apprehending people attempting to exploit loopholes the new rules.
If clarification requested provide example: 'like people setting up syndicates to grow and distribute large quantities of cannabis'
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

SECTION D – General attitudes to laws and the police

Ask these questions in a random order. Begin by asking if they 'agree' or 'disagree', then if necessary go deeper by asking if they (dis)agree 'Somewhat' or 'Strongly'. Do not read out the 'Don't know' option.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following

- D1 You are a law abiding citizen
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- D2 Most laws are worth obeying
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- D3 People should break laws they disagree with
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- D4 Strict laws deter illicit drug use
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- D5 Police deserve respect for their role in maintaining law and order
- Strongly agree
- Agree somewhat
- Neither
- Disagree somewhat
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

- D6 Police generally treat cannabis users with respect
- Strongly agree
Agree somewhat
Neither
Disagree somewhat
Strongly disagree
Don't know
- D7 Police should be given more power to address cannabis in the community
- Strongly agree
Agree somewhat
Neither
Disagree somewhat
Strongly disagree
Don't know
- D8 Police time could be better spent than on investigating minor cannabis offenders
- Strongly agree
Agree somewhat
Neither
Disagree somewhat
Strongly disagree
Don't know

SECTION E – Personal Cannabis Use

The following questions relate to your personal experience with cannabis. You can refuse to answer any question you wish, although the researchers would like you to answer as many questions as possible. Remember that this survey is anonymous and confidential and no attempt will be made to identify you from the information you give us.

- E1 Have you ever used cannabis? Yes
 No
 Refused to answer
 (if no, skip to E3)
- E2 Have you used cannabis in the last 12 months? Yes
 If 'yes' then skip to E4 No
- E3 Why have you not used cannabis in the last year? It's illegal
 OR (if never used cannabis) No desire to use
 What factors influenced your decision never to try cannabis? My friends don't use it
 (tick as many which apply) Grew out of it, too old
 DO NOT PROMPT Record responses to this question in rank order Concerned my parents might find out
 Concerned about health effects
 Concerned about psychological effects
 Can have a good time without it
 Concern about becoming addicted to it
 Prefer to use alcohol
 Prefer to use other drugs
 Concern about being caught
 Cost/Can't afford it
 Can't obtain it
 Lack of opportunity
 Never been offered it
 Don't need it
 Concerned about moving on to more dangerous drugs
 Other
 (Specify_____)
- Now skip to E10

- E4 How often would you generally use cannabis now?
 Read out
 (If no longer uses cannabis, go to (E9) otherwise continue)
- Everyday
 Once a week or more often, but not every day
 2 or 3 times a month
 About once a month
 Every 2 or 3 months
 Every 4 or 5 months
 Once or twice a year
 Less often
 No longer use
- E5 How would you most commonly use cannabis? prompt if necessary
- Smoke it in joints
 Smoke it from a pipe
 Smoke it from a bong
 Smoke it from a bucket bong
 Eat it
 Other
 (Specify) _____
- E6 Is the cannabis you use typically grown hydroponically?
- Yes
 No
 Don't know
- E7 Given the option, would you prefer to use cannabis that had been grown hydroponically?
- Always
 Mostly
 Don't care
 Not usually
 Never
 Don't know
- E8 What type of cannabis do you most commonly use? (May choose more than one)
- Leaf
 Heads
 Resin (including hash)
 Oil (including hash oil)
 Skunk
 Other
 (Specify _____)

- E9 What proportion of the cannabis you smoke now have you grown yourself? none
 up to 25%
 26 to 50%
 51 to 75%
 76 to 100%
- E10 After the proposed changes to the law are implemented, do you think the amount of cannabis you use will: Increase
 Remain the same
 Decrease
 Don't know
- E11 After the proposed changes to the law are implemented, do you think how often you use cannabis will: Increase
 Remain the same
 Decrease
 Don't know
- E12 After the proposed changes to the law are implemented, do you think your use of other drugs and alcohol will: Increase
 Remain the same
 Decrease
 Don't know
- E13 After the proposed changes to the law are implemented do you think the amount of cannabis plants you would grow will: Increase
 Remain the same
 Decrease
 Don't know
- E14 Have you or a member of your immediate family ever been charged with a cannabis offence? Yes No
- E15 Have you or a member of your immediate family ever sought or had help for problems associated with cannabis use? Yes Respondent
 Family member
 No
- E16 Where would you go if you wanted more information on cannabis? _____

Part F – Demographic Information

Now I would like to ask you some brief questions about yourself. Please remember that all the information you provide is completely confidential.

F1) How old are you? 17 or under
 18-25
 26-30
 31-35
 36-40
 41-50
 51-60
 61 or over
 Refused to answer

F2) What sex are you? Male
 Female
 Refused to answer

F3) What is the postcode of the area in which you live?
 Refused to answer

F4) What is your current marital status? Never married
 Divorced or separated
 Married or defacto relationship
 Widowed
 Refused to answer

F5) Do you have any children? yes If 'no' skip to (F7)
 no
 Refused to answer

- F6 How many children do you have in each of the following age groups? (In total – not just at home)
- 6 or under
- 7 to 9
- 10 to 12
- 13 to 15
- 16 to 18
- 19 to 21
- 22 or over
- Refused to answer
- F7 What is the main language spoken in your home?
- English
- Other (If specify _____ ‘other’)
- Refused to answer
- F8 Do you consider yourself to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?
- yes
- no
- Refused to answer
- F9 In which Country were you born?
- Australia
- Other (if specify _____ other)
- Refused to answer
- F10 What is the highest level of education you have attained to date?
- Primary school only
- Secondary school 1-2 years
- Secondary school 3-4 years
- Secondary school 5-6 years
- Trade qualifications
- Tertiary qualifications other than university (e.g. tech college)
- University undergraduate degree
- Post-graduate university qualifications
- Refused to answer

- F11 What is your current employment situation?
- Multiple responses possible to this item
- Full-time work
- Part-time work
- Casual work
- Unemployed
- Benefits or Pension
- Student
- Home duties
- Refused to answer
- Other (Please specify) _____

F12 Would you mind telling us if you practise any religion and if so, what? (If they ask 'why do you want to know that?' Say 'The researchers are interested in whether peoples' responses to the issues raised in this interview are related to their religious affiliations. But please, only answer this question if you are happy to.'

- No religion (Skip to end)
- Christian
- Christian (unspecified)
- Anglican
- Baptist
- Catholic
- Church of Christ
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Lutheran
- Pentecostal
- Presbyterian
- Salvation Army
- Uniting Church
- Other Christian
- Non-Christian
- Buddhist
- Islam
- Judaism
- Other non-Christian
- Refused to answer

F13 How important are religious beliefs in your everyday life?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not at all important
- Refused to say
- Don't know / unsure

F14 If you voted in the last state election would you mind telling us which party did you vote for in the Lower House (Legislative Assembly) (if they ask 'why do you want to know that?' Say 'The researchers are interested in whether peoples' responses to the issues raised in this interview are related to their political affiliations. But please, only answer this question if you are happy to.')

- ALP
- Liberal
- National
- Democrat
- Greens
- One Nation
- Christian Democrats
- Liberals for Forests
- Independent
- Can't remember
- Refused to say
- Didn't vote

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

**APPENDIX B: SUMMARY: ATTITUDINAL AGREEMENT BY
CANNABIS USE STATUS**

**Table 37: Summary: Attitudinal agreement by cannabis use status
Percentage of respondents**

Overall Attitudes	% Respondents in agreement			% Respondents in agreement		
	Never Used	Ever Used	Sig	Used but not recently	Recently used	Sig
People usually have a good time when they use cannabis	69.9 (195)	69.8 (263)	N.S.	62.6 (152)	82.8 (111)	0.000
Cannabis is a dangerous drug	85.3 (236)	54.0 (211)	.000	66.7 (172)	29.3 (39)	.000
Cannabis use is a problem in our community	89.4 (319)	58.5 (237)	.000	70.3 (185)	36.6 (52)	.000
You would be concerned if friends or family were using cannabis	92.7 (331)	53.8 (212)	.000	69.0 (176)	25.9 (36)	.000
You would use cannabis if a friend offered it to you	2.2 (8)	33.7 (142)	.000	10.1 (28)	79.2 (114)	.000
You would use cannabis if someone you didn't know offered it to you at a party	1.6 (6)	14.8 (63)	.000	2.8 (8)	39.0 (55)	.000
Health Attitudes	Never Used	Ever Used	Sig	Used but not recently	Recently used	Sig
Using cannabis once a month is not dangerous	23.4 (79)	62.5 (245)	.000	55.3 (141)	75.9 (104)	.000
People under 18 years old should not use cannabis	93.6 (338)	82.2 (337)	.000	89.0 (243)	68.6 (94)	.000
Cannabis use may result in dependence	88.8 (309)	76.8 (308)	.000	83.1 (222)	64.2 (86)	.000
There is a clear link between cannabis and mental health problems	88.4 (289)	72.0 (267)	.000	80.0 (196)	56.3 (71)	.000
Cannabis can be beneficial for people with certain medical conditions	86.7 (281)	96.6 (399)	.000	95.8 (253)	98.0 (146)	N.S.
Most people who use cannabis will go on to use more dangerous drugs	68.6 (223)	36.1 (145)	.000	42.0 (111)	24.6 (34)	.001
The benefits of using cannabis outweigh the harms and risks associated with its use	16.0 (52)	30.6 (110)	.000	23.7 (57)	44.5 (53)	.000
Use of cannabis can lead to people becoming socially isolated	82.0 (274)	69.2 (286)	.000	72.1 (194)	63.9 (92)	N.S.

Table 37 cont: Summary: Attitudinal agreement by cannabis use status - Percentage of respondents

Legal Attitudes	% Respondents in agreement			% Respondents in agreement		
	Never Used	Ever Used	Sig	Used but not recently	Recently used	Sig
It should be legal for people over 18 to use cannabis.	23.8 (82)	62.0 (256)	.000	50.6 (135)	82.9 (121)	.000
Many people who might use cannabis are deterred by the possibility getting a criminal conviction	40.7 (142)	42.2 (176)	N.S.	40.4 (111)	45.8 (65)	N.S.
The sale of a small amount of cannabis from one adult to another should be a criminal offence	69.9 (239)	41.1 (171)	.000	48.4 (132)	27.3 (39)	.000
It should not be illegal for a person to give another a small quantity of cannabis	34.2 (118)	65.3 (275)	.000	56.3 (157)	83.1 (118)	.000
Driving a car while affected by cannabis should be a criminal offence	95.6 (344)	89.5 (375)	.002	94.2 (261)	80.3 (114)	.000

Agreement was calculated by the recoding of the original Likert scale into a dichotomous variable of strongly agree / somewhat agree vs strongly disagree / somewhat disagree. Neutral and 'don't know' answers were excluded from the analysis.