

Strong cannabis causes one in four cases of psychosis: Users three times more likely to have an episode than those who have never tried it

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- Scientists at King's College London say youngsters must be told of risks
- Study will add weight to calls for a tougher stance on cannabis users
- More than 1 million 16-24-year-olds in England and Wales smoke the drug
- Those who use weaker 'hash' over potent 'skunk' less affected by episodes

As many as a quarter of new cases of psychotic mental illness can be blamed on super-strength strains of cannabis, scientists will warn this week.

The potent form of the drug – known as 'skunk' – is so powerful that users are three times more likely to have a psychotic episode than those who have never tried it.

The study, leaked to The Mail on Sunday, will reignite debate around Britain's drug laws – and will add weight to calls for a tougher stance towards those caught dealing or in possession of cannabis.

According to Crime Survey figures for England and Wales, more than a million youngsters aged 16 to 24 smoke cannabis.

Regular users are most at risk of a psychotic episode, prompting experts to warn that youngsters need to be aware of the dangers of skunk, which has been cultivated to be four times as strong as cannabis smoked by previous generations.

The researchers, led by a team at the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, conclude there is an **'urgent need... to inform young people about the risks of high-potency cannabis', despite a worldwide trend towards relaxing drug laws.**

They will reveal there is a key difference between potent skunk strains and ordinary 'hash'. Those who used these 'weaker' forms did not seem to suffer the same increase in risks.

Psychosis is defined as a form of mental illness where people experience delusions, hallucinations, or both at the same time.

Associated with conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, some victims are so badly affected that they end up committing suicide or seriously harming others because they believe they are being ordered to do so by voices in their heads.

The findings will add substance to a 2012 report by the Schizophrenia Commission, which recommended the need for 'warnings about the risks of cannabis' to mental health.

That report was chaired by schizophrenia expert Professor Sir Robin Murray, who also played a key role in the new study. ■

Michael Ellis, a Tory member of the Home Affairs Select Committee, said: 'This powerful new study illustrates that those in government and the police must be careful to send out the right message. 'Cannabis isn't a harmless drug: it can ruin lives.'

Rest of article here: <http://goo.gl/ftHu35>

————— **OPPOSE the Decriminalization of Marijuana SB 753 & HB 218** —————

