

**PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CANNABIS TOUGHEN
BUT LITTLE SUPPORT FOR HIGHER TAXES ON ALCOHOL**

The latest British Social Attitudes report, published today by NatCen, finds that public concern about the effects of cannabis has grown over the last decade, and a majority think cannabis should remain illegal. But there is little enthusiasm for the idea of taxing alcohol more heavily to encourage people to drink less.

Cannabis

- Nearly three in five (58%) people in Britain think cannabis should be illegal. Just 4% think it should be legalised without restriction, and 34% believe it should be legalised but only made available from licensed shops.
- Views about the legalisation of cannabis are more liberal now than they were in 1993, when two thirds (67%) thought it should be illegal. But there has been a hardening of attitudes over the last decade; in 2001 46% thought cannabis should be illegal, rising to 58% now.
- This reflects increased concern since 2001 about the dangers of cannabis. A quarter (24%) agree with the view that cannabis “isn't as damaging as some people think”, down from nearly a half (46%) in 2001.

Elizabeth Fuller, co-author, comments:

‘After 20 years, during which opinion has become more liberal, recent years have seen a return to a more restrictive view about cannabis. Its recent reclassification back to Class B appears to be in tune with this hardening of public attitudes, which seems to reflect growing concern about the impact cannabis can have on individuals and society as a whole.’

Alcohol

- A quarter (27%) of people in England in 2007 thought that the government should tax alcohol more heavily to encourage people to drink less; nearly double (50%) disagreed. Views in Scotland towards increasing the price of alcohol were similar.
- In England, the lowest levels of support for taxing alcohol more heavily were found among: the young (21% of 18-29 year olds, compared with 36% of those aged 65 and over); men (23% compared with 31% of women) and those who drink alcohol most days a week (14%, compared with 23% of people who drink once or twice a week and 33% of those who drink once or twice a month).
- Poorer people are no more likely than the better off to oppose increased taxes on alcohol.

Smoking

- Legislative change seems to influence public attitudes. The ban on smoking in public places came into effect in Scotland in 2006; support for a complete ban on smoking in pubs in Scotland more than doubled between 2004 and 2006, from 25% to 53%.

ENDS

This summarises ‘Smoking, drinking, drugs: reactions to reform’ by Rossy Bailey, Elizabeth Fuller and Rachel Ormston, in British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report, published by Sage for NatCen.

Notes to Editors

- 1 **British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report** is published on Tuesday 26th January, 2010 by SAGE, price £50.00. It is edited by Alison Park, John Curtice, Katarina Thomson, Miranda Phillips, Elizabeth Clery and Sarah Butt. SAGE is at <http://www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book234304&series=Series30&>.
- 2 The report includes two additional chapters not covered by this press release. Findings from these chapters, on religion, were released earlier in the year.
- 3 British findings are from the British Social Attitudes survey, with the exception of the chapter by Andy Ross and Amanda Sacker, which also uses data from the British Household Panel Study, and the chapter by Rossy Bailey, Elizabeth Fuller and Rachel Ormston, which also uses data from the Scottish Social Attitudes survey and the Health Survey for England. Findings that compare Britain with other countries are taken from the European Social Survey (www.europeansocialsurvey.org) or the International Social Survey Programme (www.issp.org).
- 4 The British Social Attitudes survey series has been conducted annually since 1983. The 2008 survey consisted of 4,486 interviews with a representative, random sample of people in Britain.
- 5 The survey is funded by charitable and government sources. The questions in the 2008 survey were funded by the following government Departments: Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (now Business, Innovation and Skills); Children, Schools and Families; Health; Transport; and Work and Pensions. Other funders came from: the Economic and Social Research Council; the Food Standards Agency; the Gatsby Charitable Foundation; the Hera Trust; the John Templeton Foundation; the Leverhulme Trust; and NORFACE.
- 6 NatCen, Britain's largest independent social research organisation, aims to promote a better-informed society through high quality social research (www.natcen.ac.uk).

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