

Is cannabis the answer to Booze Britain's problems?

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Substituting cannabis in place of more harmful drugs may be a winning strategy in the fight against substance misuse. Research published in BioMed Central' open access *Harm Reduction Journal* features a poll of 350 cannabis users, finding that 40% used cannabis to control their alcohol cravings, 66% as a replacement for prescription drugs and 26% for other, more potent, illegal drugs.

Amanda Reiman, from the University of California, Berkeley, USA, carried out the study at Berkeley Patient's Group, a medical cannabis dispensary. She said, "Substituting cannabis for [alcohol](#) has been described as a radical alcohol treatment protocol. This approach could be used to address heavy alcohol use in the British Isles - people might substitute cannabis, a potentially safer drug than alcohol with less negative side-effects, if it were socially acceptable and available".

Reiman found that 65% of people reported using cannabis as a substitute because it has less adverse side effects than alcohol, illicit or [prescription drugs](#), 34% because it has less withdrawal potential and 57.4% because cannabis provides better symptom management. She said, "This brings up two important points. First, self-determination, the right of an individual to decide which treatment or substance is most effective and least harmful for them. Secondly, the recognition that substitution might be a viable alternative to abstinence for those who can't or won't completely stop using psychoactive substances".

Speaking about legalization of cannabis, Reiman added, "The economic hardship of The [Great Depression](#) helped bring about the end of alcohol prohibition. Now, as we are again faced with economic struggles, the US is looking to marijuana as a potential revenue generator. Public support is rising for the legalization of recreational use and remains high for the use of marijuana as a medicine. The hope is that this interest will

translate into increased research support and the removal of current barriers to conducting such research, such as the Schedule I/Class B status of [marijuana](#)".

More information: [Cannabis](#) as a Substitute for Alcohol and Other Drugs, Amanda Reiman, *Harm Reduction Journal* (In Press), www.harmreductionjournal.com/

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