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The logo for The Centre for Social Justice, featuring the text "THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE" in white, uppercase letters on a dark red background.

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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Postmen are “unwitting drug mules” in deadly trade of ‘legal highs’

UK labelled addiction capital of Europe in new CSJ report

- UK is a hub for ‘legal high’ websites
- Other websites give people the chance to mail order class A drugs like heroin and crack cocaine
- More than 40,000 addicts abandoned on state-supplied heroin substitutes like methadone for more than four years
- Alcohol costs society £21 billion and drugs cost £15 billion
- Drug and alcohol crisis fuelling social breakdown

Postal services are acting as couriers in the deadly trade in ‘legal highs’ and illicit drugs, warns a major new report that labels the UK the “addicted man of Europe”.

The report says the UK has become a hub for websites peddling dangerous ‘legal highs’, or ‘club drugs’, such as Salvia and Green Rolex, which are being ordered online and delivered across the country by mainstream postal services.

It also found that websites, like the Silk Road, give people the chance to buy class A drugs like heroin and crack cocaine on mail order.

The report, *No Quick Fix*, from the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), also criticises an inadequate response to heroin addiction – saying that more than 40,000 drug addicts in England have been stranded on substitutes like methadone for more than four years.

The CSJ attacks a failure to offer heroin addicts effective treatment and through new Freedom of Information data reveals that 55 per of councils in England have cut funding from residential treatment since the Coalition took power. This despite the

Prime Minister arguing in favour of more residential programmes and against the continual use of methadone.

The study of addictions says alcohol-related hospital admissions in England have doubled in a decade. It also uncovers that in some areas alcohol-related readmissions have increased by between 16 to 40 per cent since 2010.

Christian Guy, Director of the CSJ, said: "While our addiction problem damages the economy, it is the human consequences that present the real tragedy.

"Drug and alcohol abuse fuels poverty and deprivation, leading to family breakdown and child neglect, homelessness, crime, debt, and long-term worklessness. From its impact on children to its consequences for pensioners, dependency destroys lives, wrecks families and blights communities."

The report is published the same week new figures showed deaths involving 'legal highs' in England and Wales increased from 29 in 2011 to 52 last year. It also claims the response to the growing crisis of 'legal highs', or New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), is bureaucratic and inadequate. It says that since 2010 the Government has used its temporary banning orders three times to control approximately 15 substances – but during this time more than 150 new substances have emerged and are available online and in high street shops.

It found that one in 12 young people (15-24-year-olds) in the UK, over 670,000, reported that they had taken NPS drugs – the highest figure in Europe. In England, 6,486 people were treated in 2011/12 for abusing these types of drugs, an increase of 39 per cent since 2005/06.

The CSJ warns that unless urgent action is taken the number of young people taking these drugs will continue to rise, along with the lethal consequences.

And in a highly critical section of the report, the CSJ says nearly a third of the people in England in substitute prescribing treatment (most commonly methadone) have been on it for four years or more. More than one in 25 of those have been on a continuous substitute prescription programme for more than 10 years – a 40 per cent rise since the Coalition entered office. This comes despite a pledge in its drugs strategy to get more addicts into recovery.

"Methadone can be a way of stabilising chaotic drug users, but we found evidence that it is being used to keep a lid on problems," Mr Guy added. "Large numbers of addicts are stranded on this state-supplied substitute and forgotten. This broken system is no different to taxpayers supporting an alcoholic by prescribing them vodka instead of them drinking gin.

"Whilst NHS funding for open-ended methadone programmes in England is largely protected, support to residential programmes which get people clean is being slashed."

The report welcomes the shift in the debate around alcohol, with the Government recognising the dangers of excessive drinking, but is critical of its failure to tackle cheap alcohol by either minimum unit pricing, or the CSJ's preferred option of a "treatment tax", with additional revenue ploughed in to the treatment of addicts.

It says that Britain is facing an epidemic of drink-related conditions, finding that one in four adults in England drink to harmful levels and one in 20 are 'dependent drinkers'. Alcohol-related deaths have doubled since 1991 across the UK and liver disease is now one of the 'big five killers' alongside heart and lung disease, strokes and cancer. The overall estimate of the cost to society of alcohol is £21 billion.

The report found that the problem of alcohol abuse was not spread evenly across the UK, "the North/South divide is stark", it says.

Of the 30 local authorities with the highest rate of alcohol-related admissions, 26 are in the north.

The CSJ argues that the last thing people in the most disadvantaged communities need to see is the white flag being waved over the spread of drugs. Regarding cannabis, the report says: "Cannabis cannot be dismissed simplistically as a soft drug. The drug that many of its appeasers grew up with is very different from the 'skunk' which has come to dominate the market today. More people are suffering harm and a growing body of evidence points to the dangers for developing brains."

The report adds that the majority of cannabis sold on our streets is now 'skunk' which can be up to seven times stronger than the cannabis of the 1960s and causing increasing harm, particularly to young people.

Noreen Oliver MBE, Chairwoman of the CSJ review, said: "This report lays bare the stark reality of drug and alcohol addiction, and abuse, in the UK today. Despite some slow progress in this last three years, much more needs to be done to tackle the root causes of addiction so that people have a better chance of breaking free.

"Alcohol is taking an increasing toll across all services in the UK and new emerging drugs are causing more harm - all the while funding to rehabilitation centres is being dramatically cut and methadone prescribing is being protected."

The report found that the UK has the highest rate of opiate (heroin etc) addiction in Europe and highest lifetime-use of amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy. More young people have used 'legal highs' in the UK than anywhere in Europe – representing one quarter of the European total.

Alcohol dependence amongst British men is second in western Europe and seventh overall. Amongst women, alcohol dependence is higher in Britain than anywhere in Europe.

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Copies of the full report are available on the Centre for Social Justice website: <http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/> or, alternatively, by contacting one of the individuals above.

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think tank established in 2004 to put social justice at the heart of British politics. In June, the CSJ was awarded UK Social Policy Think Tank of the Year 2013 at Prospect magazine's Think Tank Awards.

In 2007 the CSJ published its landmark report, Breakthrough Britain. This publication, which set out 190 evidence-based policy recommendations to tackle poverty in Britain, transformed the social policy and political landscape and was awarded Publication of the Year by Prospect Magazine in 2008.

Since Breakthrough Britain the CSJ has published over 40 reports which have shaped government policy and influenced opposition parties. These have included the seminal papers Dying to Belong and Dynamic Benefits, which has led the Coalition Government's welfare reforms.

Further to this, the CSJ manages an Alliance of over 300 of the most effective grass roots, poverty-fighting organisations. The CSJ is able to draw upon the expertise and experience of Alliance charities for research work and media inquiries. Journalists wishing to conduct grass-roots research into social problems can be put in touch with front-line charity directors and staff.