

# ru-ok? Briefing – April 2021

## Newsflash (health warnings and other news):

- **Criminal Exploitation:** Harry lost his life and Brandon, 17 at the time, will not be released from prison until he is 37. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-56566033>
- WiSE have made a video with YMCA and University of Brighton about how cannabis use in Brighton & Hove is involved in **exploitation**. <https://www.ymcadlg.org/wise-up-to-exploitation/>
- **Drug Alert:** A 'Red Alert' drug warning from the Netherlands. Pink Tesla tablets which were bought as 2C-B were found to contain a different, longer lasting psychedelic drug.
- **Magic Mushrooms:** Psilocybin used in research looks promising for depression. See Drug of the month for more. [https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-56745139?fbclid=IwAR2kLBZ27RxBlS4iwazrcmk\\_7kH1tsGkne1VwOCHI-1k3woQhbivrgPkQhQ](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-56745139?fbclid=IwAR2kLBZ27RxBlS4iwazrcmk_7kH1tsGkne1VwOCHI-1k3woQhbivrgPkQhQ)
- **Cannabis:** 420 (April 20<sup>th</sup>) is internationally hailed as Cannabis Day, where smokers join together in celebration of their drug of choice. Crew2000 have a great info booklet on cannabis. [https://www.crew.scot/drug/cannabis/?fbclid=IwAR3\\_xSrnlKwJx-Ch-xQCGfZbDdl4OZ85VY3bLO2Be6F2NYhrqkxknTmZa2Y](https://www.crew.scot/drug/cannabis/?fbclid=IwAR3_xSrnlKwJx-Ch-xQCGfZbDdl4OZ85VY3bLO2Be6F2NYhrqkxknTmZa2Y)
- **GHB:** Date Rape Drug and Club Drug to be made Class B after high profile case. [https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/30/ghb-to-become-class-b-drug-in-uk-after-use-in-high-profile-cases?fbclid=IwAR1HM5mf6hXO2haPWJjJ4E-8MH-mpCf9fN7LVGpw4-1wj\\_fajlkYKFWbs](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/mar/30/ghb-to-become-class-b-drug-in-uk-after-use-in-high-profile-cases?fbclid=IwAR1HM5mf6hXO2haPWJjJ4E-8MH-mpCf9fN7LVGpw4-1wj_fajlkYKFWbs)

## Current Trends:

**420** – ru-ok? worked with the youth service to be present in parks this year, supporting young people to have drugs education and awareness of services available. 420 is 20<sup>th</sup> April, the day celebrated globally by cannabis users. The legend is that a group of American students in the 70s coined the term 420, as 4.20pm was the time they got out of school and smoked their first joint of the day. It has grown into something mythological and held onto by enthusiasts and activists who promote use of cannabis. There is very limited, if any, harm reduction discussed around this date. There is a myth in Brighton amongst some young people that the police will not intervene on 20<sup>th</sup> April – which of course is not true.

It is also a date upon which some young people choose to have their first cannabis experience. For others, it is a day to smoke more than usual.

When we were out on 420 this year, cannabis was prevalent in the parks, but the groups were largely maintaining social distancing. Many welcomed brief intervention from our services.

For more information on 420: <https://inews.co.uk/light-relief/offbeat/420-what-meaning-weed-day-2021-when-why-associated-cannabis-explained-963706>

For more information on harm reduction around cannabis: <https://www.drugsand.me/en/drugs/cannabis/>

**Cannabis and Exploitation:** This leads us on nicely to the excellent new campaign by YMCA DLG WiSE encouraging the public to consider the use of children in drug dealing in our city.

“Child Criminal exploitation is a type of abuse where children are coerced in to committing criminal acts. On the surface it may appear that children who are criminally exploited have made a freely given choice, however, among other tactics, intimidation, violence including sexual violence, debt bondage and weapons have been used to manipulate them to commit crimes.”

For more, read: <https://www.ymcadlg.org/wise-up-to-exploitation/?fbclid=IwAR2pXdxckKj1E17KxBrNQUsBoje38vdPiRXDTe5mDSTe6Vy8FCj3Im5CZzw>

## Children's Emergency Department and ru-ok? stats:

In March 2021, 10 patients aged 12 to 17 were reported to have attended A&E due to alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, magic mushrooms (psilocybin), Xanax (alprazolam) and unknown substances. Each was offered an appointment with ru-ok? for support and advice on how to stay safer in the future.

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## Theme of the Month: Psilocybin as medicine

Scientific research has been going on for decades on various psychedelic drugs with a view to finding ways to improve mental ill health. This has been limited by the illegality of these substances in this country, but a few licenses for research use have been given in recent years. Dr Ben Sessa is one of the leading lights on this topic. Recent headlines from national newspapers could give the impression that Magic Mushrooms (containing Psilocybin) can cure depression. Whilst there is potentially an element of truth in that (research has not yet come to a conclusive outcome), the medical use of psilocybin is wildly different to dosing oneself in the woods and getting trippy:

“Following the oral dose, volunteers would spend 6 hours reclining on a bed, surrounded by pillows and a curated selection of music and supported by two "guides" or therapists. The guides were on-hand to support patients through their psychedelic experience but did not chat or otherwise interfere.

The next day, patients attended a session with their two therapists to talk through their experiences.”

<https://www.webmd.com/depression/news/20210415/study-magic-mushrooms-may-best-drug-for-depression>

As with any medication, it must go through a strict procedure to demonstrate it is safe for human consumption, must be of pure quality and dosage must be titrated for the individual. The psilocybin is extracted and produced to develop the optimum effects for the purpose (reducing depression). It is important to note that the evidence remains inconclusive but is looking hopeful. Some articles in the mainstream papers are comparing Magic Mushrooms to SSRI's, suggesting the former may be more efficacious. It is important to note that this is not scientifically evidenced.

Whilst excited by the idea of new medication being available to help reduce harm from mental ill health, we feel it important to emphasise that self-medicating with mushrooms or any other drug, is highly risky and can result in increased mental ill health, particularly for young people. Furthermore, stopping prescribed medication to try illegal substances heightens the risks exponentially.

Risks and harm reduction of using magic mushrooms:

- Many mushrooms look similar & it can be tricky to identify the different types– not all are edible. Users should do their research.
- Mixing with other drugs may have unintended or unpredictable effects including anxiety.
- Some people can have a difficult experience or find themselves focusing on negative thoughts. These feelings may linger the following day but will eventually pass
- Users should avoid taking magic mushrooms if experiencing anxiety or they don't feel completely comfortable, as it might heighten these feelings.
- Planning the 'trip' in advance, carefully choosing location and company creates a safer, more comfortable experience.
- Taking drugs alone can increase risks. We encourage having a straight mate (sober person) to look after the tripper if needed.
- Psychedelics can cause a profound shift in perceptions of the world. Users are advised to leave at least 3 months between taking them to allow a full process and recovery from the experience.

For more details, please read <https://www.crew.scot/drug/magic-mushrooms/>

*If you have any concerns about a young person's drug or alcohol use, contact Brighton & Hove's U18s substance use and sexual health service (ru-ok? inc DASH) which provides confidential support, advice and guidance to young people, their families, carers, friends and professionals, alongside treatment programmes for young people identifying problems arising from substance use and/or sexual health. A duty worker is available weekdays from 2 pm – 5 pm (4:30 on Fridays)*

**ru-ok? details:** ru-ok? is on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook sharing useful information around drugs, alcohol and sexual health. Please follow us. Contact us at ru-ok? Tel: 01273 293966 or 07795 336436 or email [Luci.Hammond@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:Luci.Hammond@brighton-hove.gov.uk) or [RUOKDB@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:RUOKDB@brighton-hove.gov.uk).

**We would love your feedback!**