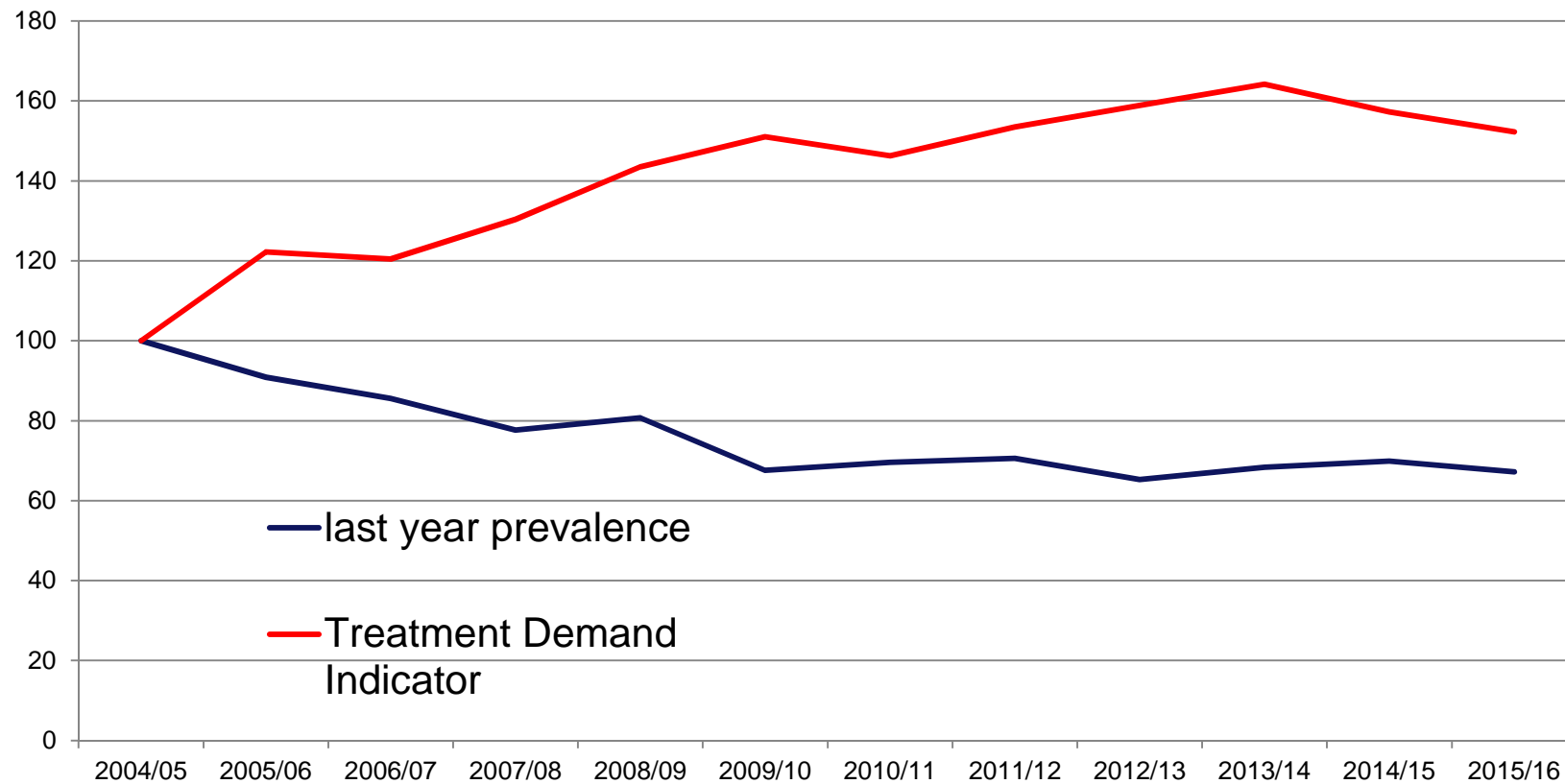Public Health England

Protecting and improving the nation's health

The changing UK cannabis market and the impact on users

Craig Wright – 6/6/17

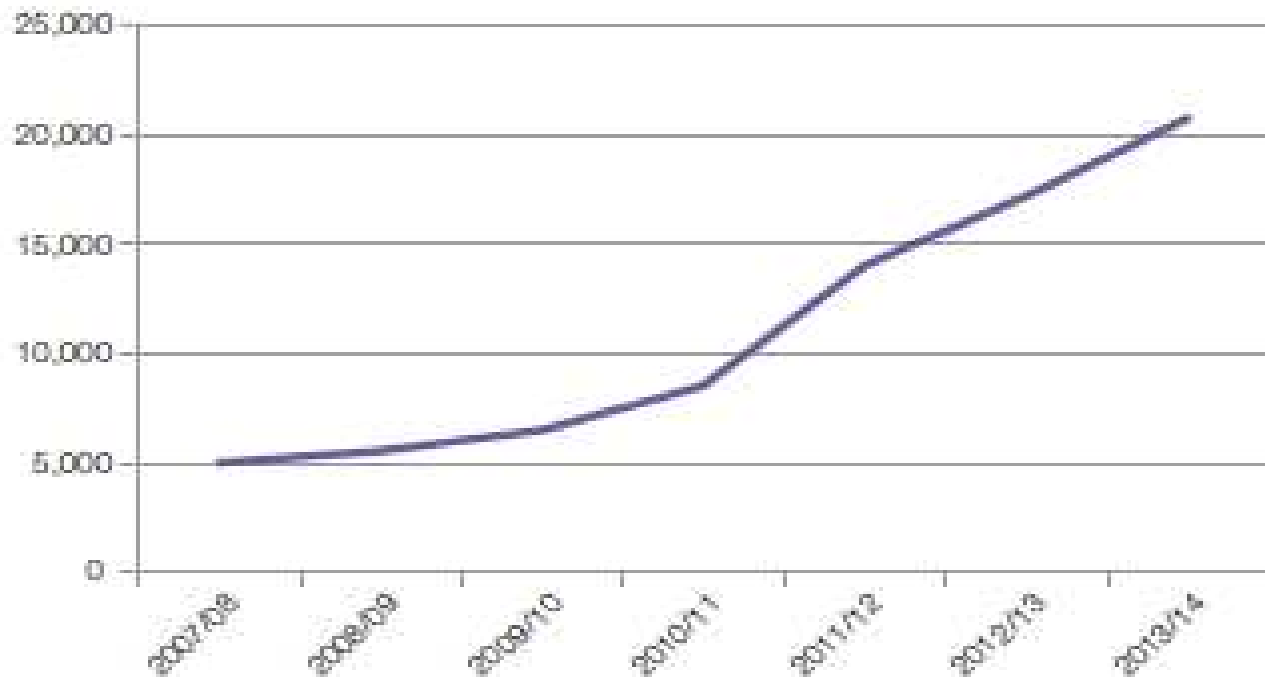# Divergent cannabis trends (indexed to 2004/05)

Two main theories for the divergence

- Treatment services have got better at meeting the treatment demand for cannabis (e.g. improved referral routes or increased capacity)

- There is increased need for treatment among users (i.e. greater harm experienced)
  - Perhaps more negative effects has driving down prevalence

Inpatient discharges for mental and behavioural disorders (cannabinoid use as any diagnoses)
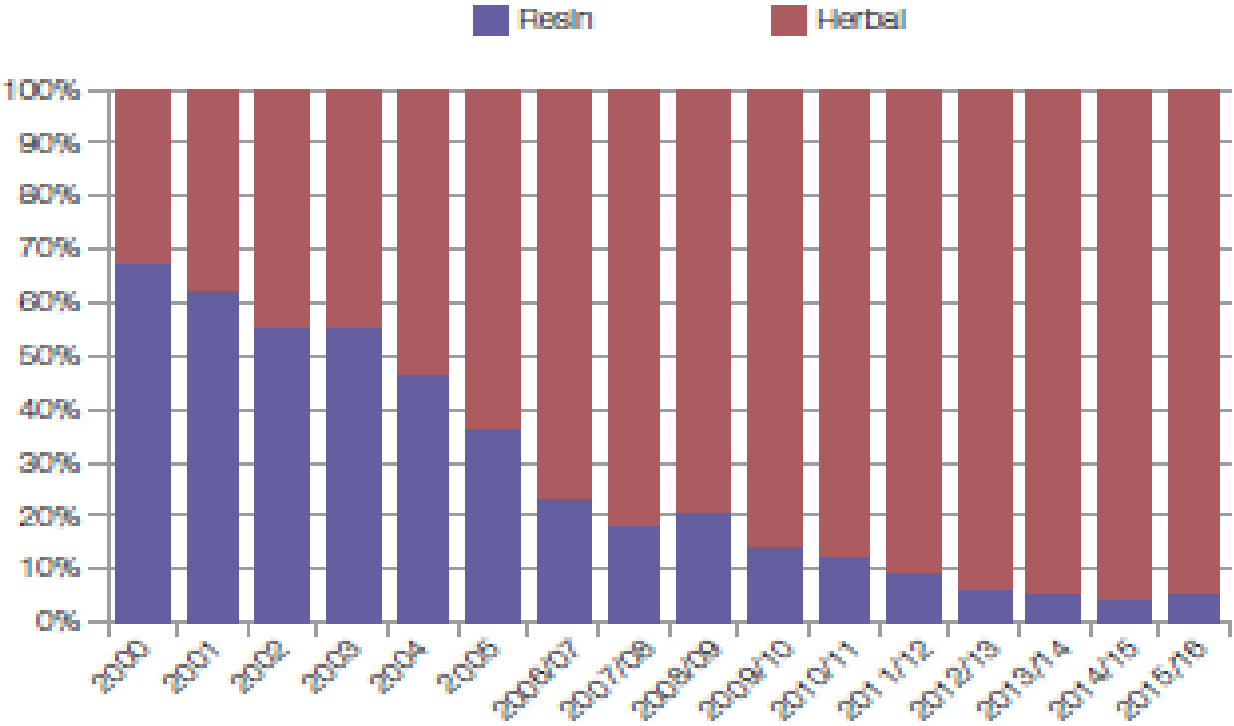
Figure 1.3: Hospital inpatient discharges across the United Kingdom for mental and behavioural disorders with cannabinoids as one of the diagnoses, 2007/08 to 2013/14

Source: Personal communication – Public Health England, NHS Wales Informatics Service, NHS National Services Scotland, Department of Health Northern Ireland
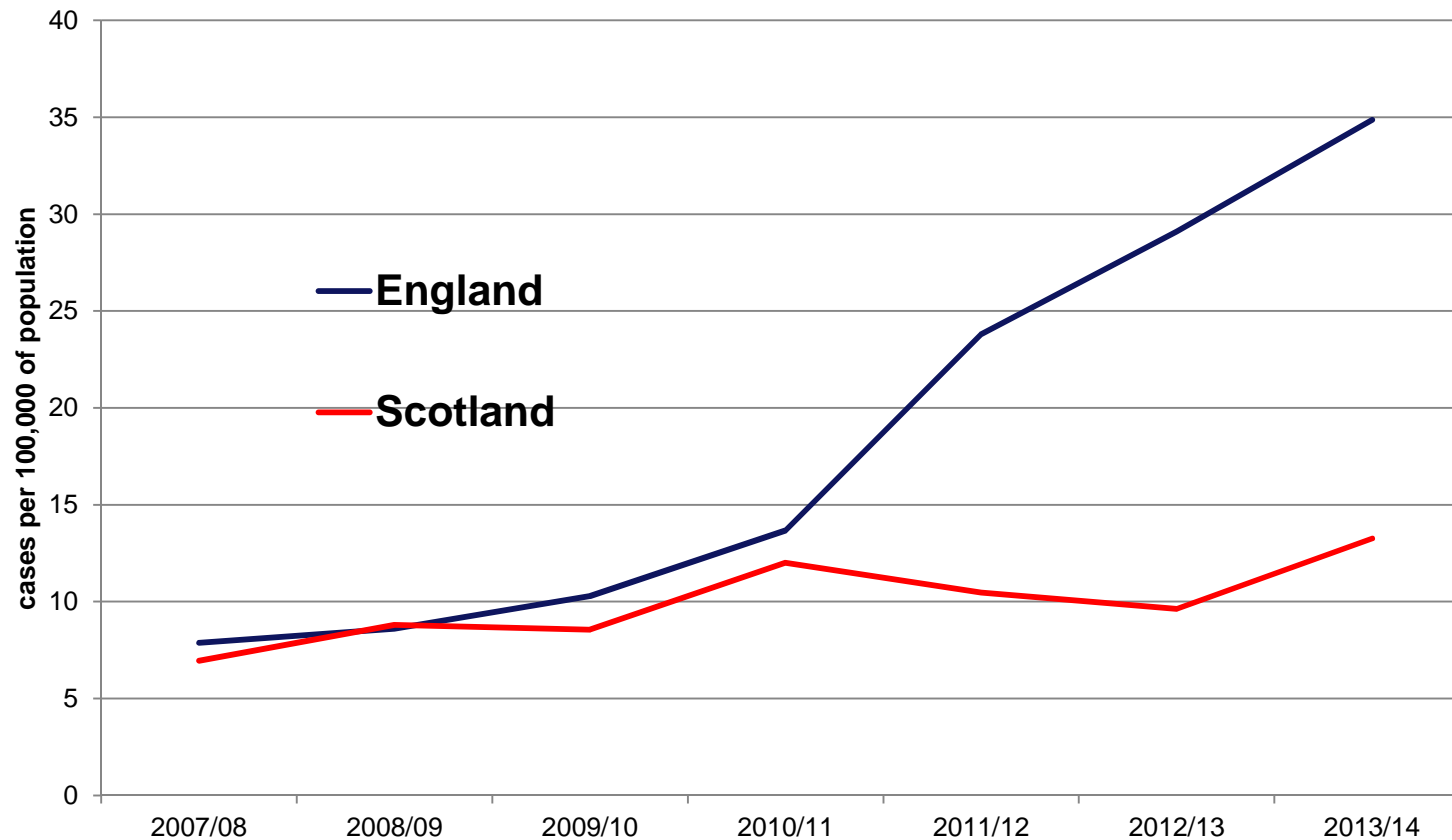
Increasing dominance of herbal cannabis in the UK market – England & Wales police seizure

Figure 1.2: Percentage cannabis seizures made by police forces in England and Wales by type of cannabis (excluding plants), 2000 to 2015/16
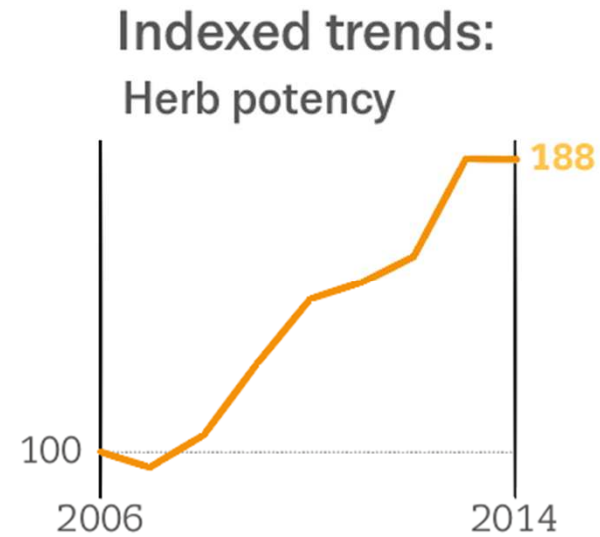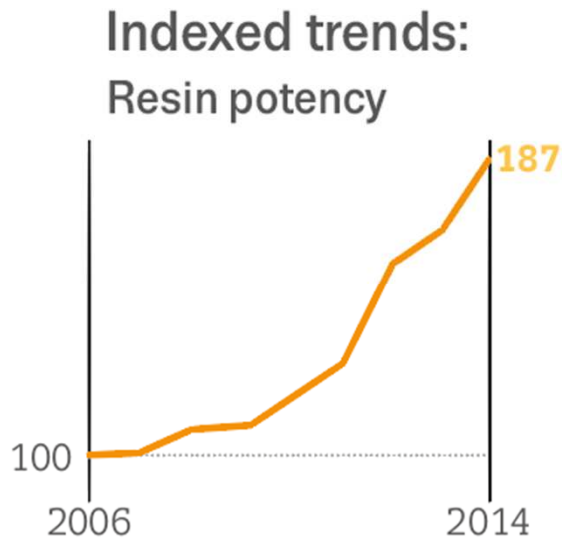
Source: (Home Office, 2010b, 2016g)

Cannabinoid inpatient discharges by country (rate of population)

Presentation title - edit in Header and Footer

Increasing strength of cannabis in Europe (EDR 2016)

Indexed trends:
Resin potency

187

100

2006   2014

Indexed trends:
Herb potency

188

100

2006   2014

Skunk use linked to first episode psychosis (Di Forti et al, 2015)

- invited all patients aged 18–65 with first-episode psychosis in Inpatient Units in SLAM NHS trust between 2005 and 2011 to participate - recruited 410 (76%).

- control group recruited by adverts not mentioning illicit drugs - recruited 370

- Odds ratios for most used type of cannabis compared with never used were:
    - Hash-like 0·83 (0·52–1·77) 0·903
    - Skunk-like 2·91 (1·52–3·60) 0·001
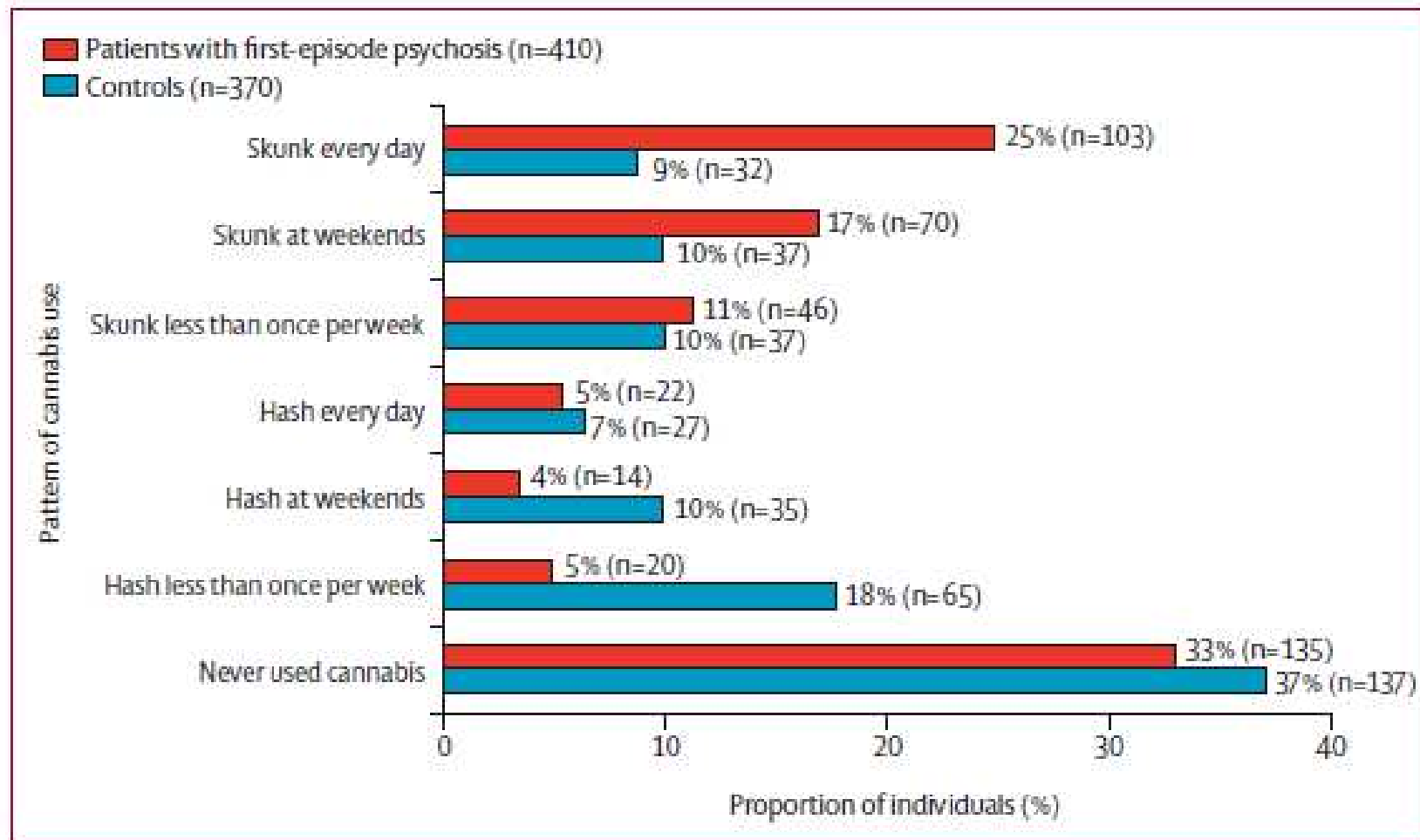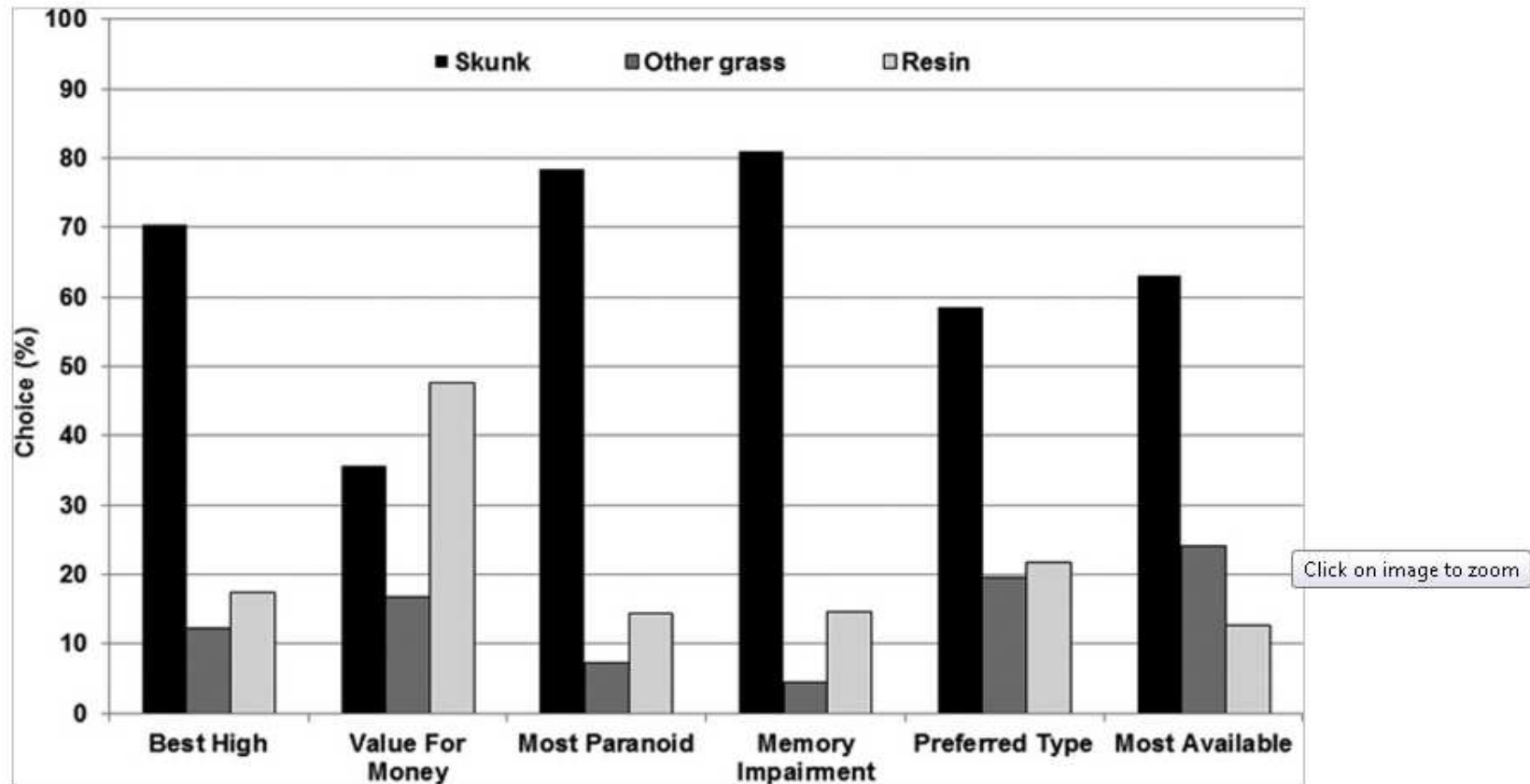
Proportions of each group by drug use

Figure 1: Patterns of cannabis use between patients with first-episode psychosis and population controls

Freeman and Winstock, 2016

- Analysis performed on data from UK respondents to the Global Drugs Survey in 2009

- Days of skunk use, but not other types, predicted higher Severity of Dependence Scale scores.

- Skunk users used more frequently than other types of cannabis (14 days in last month for skunk versus 9 for resin)

Freeman and Winstock, 2016

Characteristics of three cannabis types. Skunk was the predominant choice for all attributes apart from value for money.

Conclusions

- There is data to suggest increased harm from cannabis in the UK - the changing market seems a likely contributing factor

- This may also exert a downward pressure on prevalence but not data as yet

- Other countries may see similar patterns if not already seeing them

- EMCDDA web survey may improve our understanding in this area

Questions