

## In this issue

Our final issue for 2018 is a regular issue after three guest-edited special issues earlier in the year. The content reflects the continued presence of alcohol as a substance causing individual and social harms, and leading to dependency amongst some of its users.

The papers in this issue are also further witness to the complexity and multi-factoral nature of substance use and dependence, which in turn illustrates that simplistic analysis and one-size-fits-all responses are inadequate and unrealistic. There are lessons here for both researchers and policy makers.

The first paper, “The impact of employment on perceived recovery from opiate dependence”, looks at the impact of being employed on recovery from opiate dependency. It finds that those in employment have better mental and physical health, fewer problems and less severe dependence than a comparison group of those not in employment, despite reporting heroin use at a similar level.

The second paper, “Quality of life and better than well”, looks at the long-term effects of post-recovery groups on quality of life and suggests that participation in such groups results in better quality of life outcomes than for those who do not participate in or drop out of such groups.

Our third paper looks at the place of spirituality in those attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) recovery programmes. AA members have high levels of spirituality but the paper concludes that the impact of this on recovery seems inconclusive and requires further research before definite conclusions can be drawn.

Next, “Demand and supply of opiates in a unregulated market”, is a historical piece examining the supply of, and demand for, opiates in the USA at the time of an unregulated market. The findings demonstrate the responsiveness of demand to price, and the impact on demand which the establishment of medical schools could be seen to have.

Fifth, and also looking at markets, is a paper, “This place is like the jungle”, which examines the workings of online markets as they are developing, particularly around the trade in novel psycho-active substances. This confirms yet again the existence of markets in a conventional model for illegal drugs and other substances, with the added dimension of consumer conversations on the web which not only illustrate levels of trust – and mistrust – between buyers and sellers but also the potential for harm-reduction advice via online bulletins and fora.

Our sixth paper “Perceptions of alcohol use in UK 12 – 14 year olds”, is a study of young adolescents’ perceptions of alcohol use, set against a background of declining alcohol use in this age group. It provides detail on patterns of alcohol use in the age group and the inhibiting and encouraging factors, with social norms and friendship groups being major influences on those who decide to drink.

Finally, “Alcopops: a global perspective” looks at the history and impact of alcopops and their popularity amongst many young people, including under-age drinkers. This paper illustrates the limitations of regulation in influencing health-related behaviours and the well-resourced counter influence of the alcohol industry as it seeks to attract new consumers.

This selection and range of papers demonstrate some of the constants in the substance use field even as details – NPS, alcopops, on-line trading – change as technologies and inventiveness, of both product and marketing, advance. Such details should not stand in the way of policy makers recognising the continued presence of core issues and substances in the field, but are better understood as illustrations of what we already know, or should know, and the lengths to which suppliers of both legal and illegal substances will go to ensure protection of their financial interests.