

by basing it on epidemiological data, the treatment of each specific disorder can be improved by using a case-by-case approach in developing a care plan and by encouraging multidisciplinary teamwork, which is essential for treating these complex needs of population.

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This study is based on the assumption that drug addiction is a psychiatric disorder and chronic disease. The study was designed to compare the approach of different European countries to drugs in two main areas: their legal status and how they deal with drug-addicted offenders.

Restrictive vs permissive systems

The study compares Austria and Poland, designated as restrictive systems which criminalise both the supply and use of illegal drugs; and Spain, defined as a permissive system, which only criminalises drug supply. In all three countries, a treatment-oriented response seeks to help drug-addicted offenders move away from addiction and a criminal lifestyle.

Evidence vs conviction

It is clear from the onset that the editors favour a permissive approach which they argue should lead to a more effective treatment response since there is likely to be more agreement and therefore better coordination between health and criminal justice professionals. They marshal the evidence accordingly and sometimes conflate evidence with personal beliefs, although most of these beliefs are widely shared within the drugs field.

To give a couple of examples, there is a wealth of evidence about the effectiveness of

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compulsory or quasi-compulsory treatment (QCT) – when drug-addicted offenders are ordered by a court to participate in drug treatment, typically as an alternative to imprisonment. The form of this (quasi-) compulsory treatment varies from country to country. In England and Wales drug-addicted offenders may be placed on a community order with a “drug rehabilitation requirement” which is underpinned by regular drug testing.

However, rather than analyse this research literature, the authors prefer to compare the attitudes of drug treatment and criminal justice professionals: “it has been argued, mostly by legal professionals, and rarely by physicians, that the threat of criminal sanction may contribute to compliance with QCT”.

The authors argue that criminalisation and law enforcement should focus on drug trafficking rather than drug consumption. Very few people from either the criminal justice or drug treatment sectors would quibble with this. However, the real challenge is how to tackle drug-related crime – the large volume of, typically minor, criminal offences committed to fund drug addiction.

Conclusion

Although full of interesting details about the different approaches in these three countries, the study is not an easy read for people whose first language is English. Inevitably, with contributors from different countries all writing in a second language or being translated, the vocabulary and writing style tend towards the technical and academic which does not make for a fluent read – at least in this reviewer’s experience. Nevertheless, the themes covered are becoming increasingly important and topical with many European states (and indeed countries all over the world) engaged in

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passionate debate about whether cannabis in particular, or all drugs in general should be depenalised, decriminalised or even legalised.

Many in the drugs field will agree with the authors' conclusions and five main recommendations:

1. drug addiction and drug-related criminal behaviour demand interdisciplinary cooperation and understanding between the judicial and treatment sector;
2. it is important to distinguish between addiction and criminal behaviour;
3. depenalisation of drug consumption will contribute to making drug-related law enforcement more effective – or efficient, as the authors have it;

4. as in many other chronic diseases, relapses are an integral part of the disorder; and

5. it is important to strengthen the social environment of drug addicts.

However, this study provides few cogent arguments which drug professionals can use with their criminal justice counterparts and, even more importantly, with the politicians who pass laws and develop policies.

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