

Tackling Drug Abuse in a Changing World: Challenges and Responses

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Because of its growing severity in the global context and high social costs involved, much research attention has been devoted to substance abuse research in Western countries across different disciplines. Using the search term “substance abuse”, computer search conducted in December 2005 showed that there were 17,976 citations in PsycINFO, 2,342 citations in Sociological Abstracts, 1,404 citations in Social Work Abstracts, 4,418 citations in ERIC, 53,468 citations in MEDLINE and 7,321 citations in CINAHL. However, despite the existence of Western research in substance abuse, there are still many puzzles and unresolved problems in the field of substance abuse. For example, relative to the abundance of research on substance abuse in the Western contexts, very few studies have been conducted in different Chinese contexts. Using the search terms of “substance abuse” and “Chinese”, identical search showed that there were 49, 32, 4, 7, 48, and 17 citations in PsycInfo, Sociological Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts, ERIC, MEDLINE and CINAHL, respectively. These figures clearly suggest that there is a strong need to exert additional effort to conduct Chinese substance abuse research. Actually, this observation is basically consistent with the picture regarding Chinese social science research in the literature (e.g. Shek, Chan & Lee, 2005).

We can use three “C’s” to describe the characteristics of substance abuse in the global context. The first “C” is that there are *changing patterns* of substance abuse. In different countries, the types of substances commonly abused have been changed from heroin to psychotropic substances, such as Ecstasy. In addition, abuse of synthetic drugs (e.g. tranquilizers) and drugs that can be



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bought over the counter (e.g. cough medicine) has become more popular. Regarding the second “C”, although the manifestations of substance abuse vary across countries, there are many *commonalities* involved. For example, the figures on substance abuse have increased in both urban and rural areas of both under-developed and developed countries, and such trends have attracted much public concern. In addition, there are increasing numbers of adolescents (particularly female adolescents) involving in substance abuse in different countries. Furthermore, substance abuse has been found to be associated with many other social problems, such as health hazards, family problems and crimes.

Finally, there are at least two *challenges* faced by the public in the area of substance abuse (third “C”). The first challenge is related to the change in the meaning of substance abuse. Traditionally, substance abuse closely related to heroin abuse has been seen as a social as well as individual pathology that should be eradicated. However, with the rise of postmodern thoughts in which it is maintained that the distinction between “right” and “wrong” is difficult, some people begin to argue that substance abuse is a “way of life” that does not bring much harm to the abusers. These ideas have much attraction for young people who usually challenge authority figures and views during their adolescent years. The second challenge relates to what effective preventive and treatment approaches could and should be developed. Generally speaking, relapse rates in substance abuse are high and success rates for treatment programmes (particularly psychotropic substance abuse) are low. Obviously, there is the challenge to develop effective substance abuse prevention and treatment programmes.

With reference to the above 3 “C’s”, it is argued that we should have 3 “E’s”. First, we should have *enhanced understanding* of substance abuse problem (first “E”). Although substance abuse is a growing global problem, we still do not adequately understand the related phenomena. For example, with reference to the popular belief that psychotropic substance is not addictive, empirical evidence regarding this issue is sparse. It is also unclear how biological and environmental factors and their combinations contribute to substance abuse and its treatment. In short, we have much to learn regarding the nature of psychotropic substance abuse.

The second “E” is that we need *evidence-based prevention and treatment programmes*. In view of the growing problem and high relapse rates of substance abuse, we need prevention and treatment programmes that can effectively target the problem. Although there are some successful examples

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of evidence-based prevention and treatment programmes in the West, such programmes are almost non-existent in the Asian contexts. Finally, the battle on substance abuse is not simply fought on a single front. As such, *enhanced collaboration between different sectors*, including policy makers, administrators, legislators, service providers, professionals in different fields (such as social workers, psychologists, medical doctors, psychiatrists, etc.), young people, parents, and the general public is important (third “E”).

With reference to enhanced collaboration among different sectors, it is important to have some vehicles to bring together people in different sectors to respond to the challenge of substance abuse. Obviously, organisation of international conferences is one important channel to perform this task. As such, the International Conference on Tackling Drug Abuse organised by the Narcotics Division, Security Bureau and the Action Committee against Narcotics, Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), People’s Republic of China, can be regarded as an excellent example of such an effort. Because this is the first international conference on substance abuse initiated by the Government of the HKSAR, it is important to have proper documentation of the papers presented in the conference. The written record can certainly enhance communication among people in different sectors and provide a valuable information database offering important pointers for the formulation of drug policies, provision of related service, and implementation of research. As pointed out by Shek (2002) and Shek, Lam and Tsoi (2004), one important step leading to evidence-based practice is the systematic documentation of research effort and practice experience. Against this background, it is indeed my honour to edit the Proceedings of the Conference in the capacity of the Chairman of the Organizing Committee.

There are several sections in this book. In **Part 1**, papers presented by the following speakers in the plenary sessions outline the substance abuse scene in the global context:

- Mr Liu Zhi-min, Deputy Secretary-General, National Narcotics Control Commission, People’s Republic of China
- Ms Karen P. Tandy, Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Department of Justice, USA
- Mr Akira Fujino, Representative, Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



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- Mr Georges Estievenart, Honorary Executive Director, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)

Part 2 of the Proceedings contains papers that outline the changing patterns of drug abuse in different parts of the world as well as the law enforcement strategies. The papers are as follows:

- “Reflections on community drug control work in super-large cities” (「關於特大型城市社區開展禁毒工作的思考」) by Hu Peng
- “Cough medicine abuse among young people in Hong Kong” by Daniel T.L. Shek, C M Lam, Steven Ngai, T L Yiu, Brenda Chung, Regina Kwong and Alexis Leung
- “A study of substance abuse in underground rave culture and other related settings” by Lam Chiu-wan and Annie Wong On-on
- “Social capital and normalisation of adolescent drug use in Hong Kong” by Nicole Cheung and Cheung Yuet-wah
- “Re-engineering drug treatment services to meet changes in drug use trend – Experience of Caritas Wong Yiu Nam Centre” (「調節戒毒服務以配合藥物濫用問題的轉變 - 明愛黃耀南中心的經驗」) by David Cheung
- “Understanding local synthetic drug trends in the global context and implications for treatment: The case of Hong Kong” by K. Joe Laidler and Joe Pianpiano
- “Innovative intervention mode for young recreational drug users in Hong Kong – Changing through acting” by Chan Wai-leung, Chu Fung, Wong Pui-ling, and Yu Kai-ming
- “Tackling drug ‘ab/use’ among adolescents: The third way – ‘just say know’ approach” by Ho Wing-yin and Bert Liu
- “A review of attitude of medical professionals toward substance abuse” by Grace Au
- “Against drug threat – International law enforcement agencies in concert” by Ben Leung

From a health promotion perspective, prevention of substance abuse is always more important than its treatment. In **Part 3** of the Proceedings, the following papers related to prevention of substance abuse are included:

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- “The contribution of methadone maintenance treatment to HIV prevention – The case of Hong Kong” by Lee Shui-shan
- “Preventing drug abuse among young people – Community-based programmes in Hong Kong” by Ng Ting-kwong, Allan
- “Drug prevention education through the Internet” (「透過互聯網進行預防濫藥教育」) by Toh Ping-fung and Fung Ka-yin
- “Life Education Activity Programme – An early start to drug prevention” by Constance Ching

As relapse rates in substance abuse are high, there is much need to determine how different modalities of treatment are related to treatment outcomes. In **Part 4** of the Proceedings, the following papers concerning treatment and rehabilitation for drug addiction are included:

- “Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT): An effective treatment for adolescent substance abuse” by Howard Liddle, Rosemarie Rodriguez, and Francoise Marvel
- “Progress of drug treatment work in Shanghai” (「上海地區戒毒工作進展」) by Xue Li-yan
- “The establishment of the ‘transitional social work approach’ – Shanghai’s experience in anti-drug social work and what it reveals” (「過渡社會工作模式的建構 - 上海禁毒社會工作經驗及其反思」) by Fan Zhi-hai
- “The principles and development direction of drug treatment services in Macao” (「澳門戒毒服務之理念與發展方向」) by Hon Wai
- “Counselling services in methadone clinics – A Hong Kong model” by Peter Pi
- “Drug rehabilitation: Transformation through a reparenting approach” by Jacqueline Pullinger
- “The outlet for family members of drug abusers” by Joyce Chang and T.C. Lai
- “Key considerations in psychological interventions for offenders with substance abuse problems” by Lu Chan Ching-chuen and Charles Pau Wai-ho

As development of anti-drug policies and services depends very much on our understanding of the substance abuse problem, research plays an indispensable role in anti-drug initiatives. In the **final part** of the Proceedings, papers on advances in drug abuse research are included. They are listed below:



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- “The efficacy of a relapse prevention programme in the treatment of heroin dependence in China” by Zhao Min, Li Xu, Wang Zhu-cheng, Xu Ding, Zhang Yi, and Zhang Ming-yuang
- “Retrospective study on characteristics of 104 zopiclone abusers in a substance abuse clinic in Hong Kong” by Lam Ming
- “Research on histopathological changes and ultra-structure pathological changes of nervous, endocrine and immune system in heroin addicts” (「海洛因成癮者神經、內分泌及免疫系統組織病理變化及超微病理變化研究」) by Li Li-hua, Feng Zhong-tang, Yao Hong, and Zhao Yong-he
- “Research on changes of adenylate cyclase in cerebral regions related to morphine dependence in rats” (「嗎啡依賴鼠成癮相關腦區腺苷酸環化酶的變化研究」) by Hong Shi-jun, Li Jun-lin, Li Li-hua, Qu Yong-qiang, and Zhao Yong-he
- “Between abstinence and relapse: The role of ‘pre-relapse abstinence’ in drug rehabilitation in Hong Kong” by Cheung Yuet-wah
- “Meta-analysis on Chinese herbal therapy for heroin withdrawal syndrome” by Xu Min, Dominic Lee, and Wendy Wong
- “A database on traditional Chinese medicine treatment for drug addiction” by Xu Min, Dominic Lee, Xie Jin-hua, Dai Wen-jun, Chen Li, To Wing-Chee, Lam Wing-Ho, Tian Xiao-ying, and Zhang Xiao-hui.
- “Problematizing the drug researches on young people in Hong Kong” (「成問題化：香港青年濫用藥物研究再研究」) by Shiu Ka-chun

There are several unique characteristics of this collection of papers. First, papers covering different aspects of substance abuse, including substance abuse situation in different parts of the world, prevention programmes, treatment and rehabilitation modalities, substance abuse, and law enforcement strategies are included. This can help readers to have a broad view of the field. Second, the papers in this book represent a mixture of papers with academic focus (e.g. papers on substance abuse research) and practical emphases (e.g. papers on drug policies and services). Obviously, an amalgamation of papers can enable researchers to understand the practical implications of research findings and service providers to appreciate the conceptual and theoretical backbone of services. This echoes the appeal for enhanced understanding of substance abuse.

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Third, in view of the fact that empirical studies of substance abuse are rare in the Chinese context, the papers covering substance abuse in Hong Kong, Macau and Mainland China can be regarded as a unique feature of this book. This collection of Chinese papers can be regarded as pioneering as far as the Chinese literature on substance abuse is concerned. The World Population Clock (2005) showed that the population of China was 1,298,847,624 in 2004, which was roughly one-fifth of the world's population in 2004. The implication of these figures is that if any theory or treatment modality is claimed to be universally applicable, relevant data from Chinese people must be collected.

The final unique characteristic of this collection is that papers written by policy makers, government officials, service providers, educators, and researchers from different disciplines in different parts of the world are included. This echoes the emphasis made earlier that enhanced collaboration between different sectors is indispensable in anti-drug work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank those speakers who have contributed papers to the Proceedings. In particular, my warmest thanks should be extended to Winnie Chui, Muller Tang, and Lisa Chan of the Narcotics Division, Government of the HKSAR, P.R.C., who have provided excellent administrative and secretarial support that makes the publication of this book possible. Finally, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Britta Lee for her assistance in the editorial process.

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