

Quaker Action on Alcohol & Drugs



“Not fit for purpose...”

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Alcohol

• In August, the National Record of Scotland (NRS) confirmed that Scotland's 2020 alcohol-specific deaths were 17% higher than in 2019 and the highest since 2008 (alcohol-related deaths i.e. where alcohol was a contributory factor, are not included in these data). A 10% fall in 2019 had been interpreted as an early sign of success of Minimum Unit Pricing. The majority of deaths were of older men and those living in deprived areas; Glasgow and Inverclyde have recorded the highest totals over the past five years.

Drugs

• Drug poisoning deaths in 2020 England and Wales increased by 3.8% since 2019 and were the highest since records began. Two thirds (4,561) were due to drug misuse and the majority of deaths were amongst men aged 40 – 49 years. Growing numbers died after using cocaine and opiates (including prescription medication) and the 158 female cocaine fatalities represent an 800% increase over the past 10 years.

• NRS has confirmed that there were 1,339 recorded drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2020, a 5% increase on the previous year and the largest total since records began in 1996. Two thirds were users aged 35-54 years, and those living in the most deprived areas were 18 times as likely to die as those in the least deprived.

Talking things through

We understand that this may have been a stressful and very difficult time for some of our readers. Although we do not offer a counselling service, please call or email our Director, Alison Mather, if it would help to talk things through with someone who understands and can provide details of specialist sources of support. All contact is held in strict confidence.

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Gambling

• **Review of the 2005 Gambling Act:** John Whittingdale MP (Minister for Media and Data) has confirmed that he will table a White Paper 'later this year' in response to the 2005 Gambling Act review consultation, which attracted 16,000 responses. Speaking in a recent parliamentary debate, he said: *'We already have a public health approach to gambling regulation...However...we are taking a very close look at whether further measures are needed...to protect people in proportionate but robust ways.'*

• **Advertising on public transport:** In July, QAAD was a signatory to a letter sent to London mayor, Sadiq Khan, by the Gambling Harm Alliance. This sought his recommitment to his manifesto pledge to ban gambling advertisements from the Transport for London network. Bristol City Council approved a ban earlier this year and it is hoped that further mayors may now consider similar action.

'Not fit for purpose' – the independent review of illegal drugs calls for urgent action

In July, the report on Phase Two of Dame Carol Black's independent review of illegal drugs in England and Wales was published¹. Commissioned in 2019 by Sajid Javid when he was Home Secretary, the review aimed to analyse the current picture in England and Wales and provide recommendations for policy solutions. Black's wide-ranging consultation included current and recovering drug users who *'kept [her] feet firmly to the fire and on the ground'*. She concludes: *'The public provision we currently have for prevention, treatment and recovery is not fit for purpose, and urgently needs repair.'*

The Phase One report (2020)² provided a thorough analysis of the illegal drugs market, including supply routes, retail models and patterns of consumption for different substances. It highlighted the geographical and socio-economic inequalities leading to areas in the north of England and the most deprived areas experiencing the greatest levels of harm. It also described the development and impact of county lines networks; specific issues relating to offenders in custody and post-release; the vulnerability of rough sleepers; and concerns about young people's drug use and its impact.

The Phase Two report includes 32 recommendations for a robust public health approach to reducing the demand for drugs and addressing harm. Black does not mince her words: *'Government faces an unavoidable choice: invest in tackling the problem or keep paying for the consequences...'* The report argues for fundamental, systemic change – from national and local funding and service provision, to an holistic response to the multiple and complex needs of users and a major overhaul of staff recruitment, training and support.

'The problem can only be solved through coordinated action by multiple departments... [who] must work together to invest in and improve treatment, employment, housing support and the way that people with addictions are treated in the criminal justice system.'

Black's view is that addiction must be viewed as a chronic health condition, requiring long-term follow up in the same way as diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis. She suggests that trauma and mental ill-health are frequently both the drivers and co-morbidities of addiction and not separate problems needing 'dual diagnosis'. She adds that the physical and mental health needs of users have been neglected and require greater investment and focus.

In Phase One, Black observed that although the annual cost to society is around £20bn, only £60m is spent currently on treatment and prevention - despite the growth of unmet need, the depletion of treatment and recovery services, and the decline in the number and quality of treatment workers. She recommends substantial, sustained multi-million pound investments by the government to achieve real change. For every £1 invested, however, she states that an estimated £4 would be saved on health, criminal justice and wider costs to society.

The government has pledged to respond to the review over the coming months. QAAD will monitor progress and give further details of the review's many recommendations in future issues of QAADRANT.

1. www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-illegal-drugs-phase-two-report

2. www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-illegal-drugs-phase-one-report

QAADNET meeting: How does our faith help us to understand and respond to addiction?

We held our first online QAADNET meeting as part of Britain Yearly Gathering in August. One of our trustees acted as scribe for the meeting and has contributed this summary of the session. We were pleased to welcome Andrew Misell (Director, Alcohol Change UK and Cardiff LM) as our opening speaker.

Can faith play a role in recovery from addiction? Or, as Andrew Misell put it: “*what’s faith got to do with it?*” Andrew began by noting that his involvement with QAAD is where his professional role and his Quakerism come together. He said that although his Quakerism - firmly rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition - runs through him “*like letters in a stick of seaside rock*”, he does not talk about his faith to the people he works with, be they colleagues or clients. He simply lets his faith speak through his service to others, an approach that supports his belief in the humanity of all people and the value of every individual. He likened the words in Genesis, that people are made in ‘*the image of God*’, to the Quaker belief in ‘*that of God in everyone*’.

He then turned to comparing healing and curing and how he sees these approaches to recovery from addictions. He rejects the idea of an easy, instant cure, informed both from his experience of working with street drinkers in Cardiff and from his reading that healing is a lengthy and tortuous path with different levels of success. The outcome is not always what is hoped for, but the best the professional worker or a close other can do is to stay alongside the

sufferer in their addiction and - I would add – keep faith in the hope inherent in the addict’s humanity.

Andrew recognised that the position of the professional working with addicts is a privileged one, in that it is not the lived experience of the addict themselves or of their close others, so that the problems and pain can be left behind in the work place. I would add that a working life of service to others who are in extremely dark places could not be conducted year in, year out without a certain amount of dispassion and self-protection.

Participants, who attended from around the UK and abroad, then had the opportunity to join one of two ‘break-out’ groups where they shared their personal experiences and concerns. Time was limited by the session being within BYG’s schedule and, while there were many interesting points of view raised, I felt that these thoughts and ideas could have been developed in greater depth if it had been possible to hold a longer event.

With this in mind, QAAD plans to run another QAADNET meeting on zoom in the Autumn. Friends placed on the waiting list (numbers were limited to ensure ease of participation), participants who are interested in continuing the discussion, and those who would like to join the meeting are all encouraged to contact our Director for further details:

alison@qaad.org

Book Review: Drink – The deadly relationship between women and alcohol*

Ann Dowsett Johnston, Fourth Estate, 2013 ISBN 978-0-00-750358-2

Ann Dowsett Johnston, an award-winning Canadian journalist and recovering alcoholic, has written a powerful and thought-provoking book which explores the many facets of women’s drinking. She combines her personal narrative with excerpts from interviews with many women in recovery, academics and practitioners. What emerges is a complex picture of the particularity of women’s experiences and vulnerability: women’s bodies process alcohol differently (and less efficiently); fluctuating hormones influence their responses to it; binge drinking increases risks of assault, unplanned pregnancy and disease.

Time and again, Johnston’s interviewees tell stories of how early trauma, including sexual and physical abuse, and the impact of parental drinking, had led to early experimentation and dependency. Women, especially mothers, can feel more stigma and shame and tend to be more harshly judged by their families and communities – a major barrier to talking about their problems and seeking help.

One researcher characterises women’s strongest motivations to drink as the need to escape or numb pain, whilst men more typically drink to boost social confidence and have fun. Several others confirm higher overall levels of depression and anxiety than for men, and that the majority of women in treatment have a history of trauma. Only by addressing both, they suggest, can recovery be sustained.

In one of the most interesting chapters, Johnston focuses on spirituality and its role in personal recovery, describing her own faith as crucial but

still ‘under construction’. She interviews four women, each of whom describes the challenge of developing a concept of God and trust: ‘*I didn’t believe that God would come down and fix me so I didn’t look up*’. All say that faith has been fundamental to their recovery - ‘*the concept of a loving creator has replaced alcohol as a solution*’.

Johnston’s interviews reveal the pain, isolation and anger many daughters feel, particularly when it was their mother who drank, as in her own case. Some assumed quasi-paternal roles, whilst most wrestled with shame, stigma and embarrassment. One woman mourns the loss of an ‘essential role model’ (‘*it’s a huge struggle to teach yourself things you should have learned at home... [like] self-care.*’); another likens her grief to a tattoo – ‘*it never goes away*’. Mothers reflect with deep regret the pain and damage they inflicted on their children.

Later, Johnston looks at the confusing messages about drinking given to pregnant women - and the potential consequences of drinking whilst pregnant and breastfeeding, including Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs). She also points to research which confirms that it is older, more affluent women who are more likely to continue drinking whilst pregnant.

There is a stinging assessment of the alcohol industry’s cynical targeting of the female market to ‘feminise drinking’, using strategies borrowed directly from Big Tobacco. Johnston shows how it has persuaded women to associate alcohol with attractiveness, sophistication and reward, and highlights the emergence of ‘drunkorexia’

(avoidance of food calories in favour of drinking) with its increased risks to mental and physical health. Later, she calls for alcohol strategies rooted in public health principles and recommends measures which could help to turn the tide.

As a high profile professional, Johnston admits it was very difficult to ‘out herself’ by writing this illuminating, honest and ultimately hopeful book. From fragile adolescence and bingeing students to high-functioning alcoholism masquerading as public success to crumbling, damaged families,

she shows that women’s relationship with drink has become more visible, complicated, and deadly. She poses as many important questions as offering solutions, but she does highlight many examples of fresh approaches which are responding specifically to women’s needs. She concludes that sobriety has restored her own sense of possibility and hope: *‘Stop drinking and there’s no telling what will happen...you can begin the process of loving yourself back into being.’*

** Earlier editions of this book are titled ‘Drink – the intimate relationship between women and alcohol’*

Director’s Report for 2020

Each year, QAAD’s Director produces a report for our trustees, summarising the work that has been completed, and suggesting a focus for the year ahead. Here is a summary of the most recent report.

Our Director’s work has continued to focus on education, prevention and support activities that address the problems of substance and gambling addiction. These activities work for the public benefit within the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and also outside it.

Friends and Meetings

Supporting Friends is an important element of our work. We provide both individual support and opportunities for Friends to engage with each other through our biennial Woodbrooke conference, QAADNET meetings, and facilitated gatherings at Local or Area meetings and other Quaker events. Our Woodbrooke conference was cancelled this year due to COVID-19 and we decided instead to plan an online event, to be run in early 2021.

This year, QAAD has continued to offer personal support and information to Friends

with current or past experience of substance and/or gambling problems and family members or friends (‘close others’). We provide advice about sources of further support, and sometimes arrange confidential contact with willing and informed Friends.

Work with young Friends

As a member of the Quaker Youth Work Network, our Director has continued to attend the Network’s online meetings and events to share our concerns whilst learning about colleagues’ work with young Friends around the country. In May, our Director joined Kirsty Philbrick (Bristol/South West Youth Development Worker) to contribute to an online session of the West Young Friends Action Network (WYFAN) youth group. Due to COVID-19, it was not possible to run workshops planned for students and parents/carers at Sidcot School. We hope it will be possible to return to this opportunity, and to engage with other Quaker schools in future.

Public issues

QAAD continued to research and raise awareness of preventative and treatment measures that

would work for the public benefit in terms of promoting health and well-being. The increased availability of online events during lockdown has enabled our Director to attend a wider range of meetings and seminars than in previous years, including those held in Scotland and Wales.

Gambling

There was further, welcome progress in regulatory reform including changes to online gambling products e.g. reduced spin speeds, and the banning of credit card transactions. QAAD responded to the Gambling Commission’s consultations on society lotteries and on High Value (or VIP) customer accounts. Our Director represented QAAD at regular meetings of the Gambling Health Alliance and Peers for Gambling Reform, and continued to meet with the Faith Action on Gambling Harm ecumenical group to share our concerns and the progress of our work.

Substance Use and Misuse

Our Director attended several online seminars on substance use and related harm this year, including the specific challenges for women drug users during COVID; problematic substance use in later life; and alcohol, mental health and complex needs.

In February, QAAD responded to the Commission on Alcohol Harm’s inquiry into the effects of alcohol on society, focussing on the impact on close others, including children and young people; the need to restrict promotions and advertising; and co-morbidities with other addictions. In April, QAAD contributed an article to The Friend (‘Four short words’) which talked about the potential impact of the Spring lockdown on people with alcohol-related problems and close others.

We continue to monitor UK and international evidence regarding the use and impact of illegal and prescribed drugs, in particular the legalisation of medicinal and recreational cannabis. Developing a robust understanding of the risks and the lived experiences of drug users and close others enables QAAD to inform and support Friends and to engage in ongoing discussions about the potential impact of future changes to drug policy.

The full report is available on our website; if you would like a printed copy, please contact Alison Mather who will be happy to post one to you.

QAAD Membership

From time to time, Friends ask us about QAAD ‘membership’ and how they might join. QAAD is not a membership or subscription body. Our support, events and resources are free and accessible to all those who wish to use them.



We would like to hear from you

We would welcome your reflections about living under lockdown if you or a close other live with addiction or are in recovery. What has helped you at this time? What has changed – for the better or otherwise?

Please send contributions for our next issue to our Director by **25th October**: Alison Mather, PO Box 34, Bristol BS6 5AS Email: alison@qaad.org

Have you looked at the QAAD website recently?

Please visit **www.qaad.org** for information about QAAD, news of events for Friends, and details of our public issues work.

Thank you for your support

We have felt cheered and supported by the generous donations we have continued to receive from individuals, Meetings and Trusts during this difficult year. Donations are significant in two ways – they make us feel that our work is valued, and they give QAAD a longer-term future. In order to continue our work, we need to continue to draw down from our reserves which, of course, are not unlimited. Please send your donation to: Ron Barden, Treasurer, 33 Booth Lane North, Northampton, NN3 6JQ. Alternatively, if you would prefer to donate using a BACS transfer, our banks details are:

Account Name: Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs

A/C No: 31452673 Sort code: 400327.

If you can Gift Aid your donation, it will be enhanced by 25p for each £. Please complete the form below and return it with your donation.

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