NAD

Who is an expert on the COVID-19 crisis?

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Has the COVID-19 crisis made people drink and take drugs in new ways? Are people in home isolation more bound to start gambling on the internet? This spring, many research groups have applied for funding for COVID-19-related initiatives, and addiction journals are announcing Calls for Papers for special issues on topics that arise from the coronavirus crisis. Also, many research funding agencies seem to work from the premise that we need to produce knowledge about how the crisis has affected mental health and lifestyle-related behaviours. This entails an enormous opening for new research and further discussions.

A big question concerns something that in the substance research field has traditionally been referred to as "control policies". While this concept has lately disappeared from the social scientific mainstream, now is an excellent time to dust it off and start figuring out its meaning and usefulness in 2020.

Expertise

Can alcohol and drug researchers be experts in COVID-19? Virology and the epidemiology of pandemics are highly specialised fields, but I would argue that addiction and lifestyle research has some expertise that can be useful. The principles underpinning the implementation of collective interventions and the orienting of populations towards better health and futures have been a major concern in the seminal works of social scientists working on addiction, substance use, health, and lifestyles. Here, we already have a terminology and frameworks for discussing the premises and structural conditions in which countries now try to orientate people to act in a certain way. Frameworks and terminologies are similarly available to discuss how to deal with new substance patterns and drug "epidemics".

Strategies for handling the COVID-19 crisis are of course unique, and need to be drawn up

and revised as we move along. They have been justified by the burden upon healthcare, by the controlled acceleration of the spread of the virus in the name of herd immunity, and in view of the mortality among less resilient groups and in societies at large. All the Nordic countries, except for Sweden, have chosen to impede the spread of the virus by partly closing down society. At the time of my writing this editorial, some European countries have started to implement exit plans, which involve the protection of the vulnerable through caution and control policies for the whole population. Does this have a familiar ring? Is it not a balancing act that we commonly encounter in alcohol control policies: how many deaths and what kind of service system burden can be tolerated to sustain the national economy and to protect the freedom of those who are not at risk?

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a demand for an updated overview of the nature, functions, and limitations of social control policies in the 2020s. What types of frameworks and communication systems are available for orientating societies towards better futures, given that mortality should be lowered and harm decreased from pandemics, unhealthy lifestyles, or environmental crises? In order to gather expertise on such questions, this journal is participating in a book project that unfolds governance- and system-based control policies from a social scientific and cultural perspective. The Call for Papers (https://blogs.helsinki.fi/hu-ceacg/) welcomes contributions from a broad set of perspectives pertaining to systems, structures, power, constructs, concepts, and different types of governance models. We hope that researchers from these fields, too, will acknowledge their own possible contributions to the current social scientific discussions.

In this issue

Three larger thematic entities in this issue of *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* give insights, yet again, into the generalisability of the research field's contribution to understanding current social and societal phenomena. First, three articles provide experience perspectives of great value not only for the ambitions of tuning practices in the welfare state system, but also for understanding human activity more generally. Together, the articles demonstrate the ways in which experiences are generalisable by tying them into the general praxis of dealing with them.

Johannessen, Nordfjærn, and Geirdal (2020) discuss the expectations and fears that people with substance use disorder (SUD) express in view of transitioning from inpatient treatment to everyday life at home. Most people know what it is like to have a yearning to belong and to be normal. The great pressure to perform to fit in is a common situation for most. But the social support networks and the well-grounded view on the transition that addiction problems add to such life path changes can be compared to all sorts of service transition situations. This knowledge is valuable for coherently developing transition questions in social work and social policy.

Another experience of great value for social work and social policy is that of Harms to Others. We know that the substance use of one person creates circles in the water and affects many people in the user's closest sphere. Often, researchers have tried to map and measure the different dimensions. In a study on the experience of a partner's substance use, Weimand, Birkeland, Ruud, and Høie (2020) show that it affects *every* aspect of the participants' lives. Everything in the interviewees' lives starts to centre around the partner's ups and downs. The interviewees can be seen as themselves needing help to deal with the "lack of safety, security, and support" and in "searching for hope and meaning" in their lives. Substance use is a social work subject and phenomenon that comes in packages that grow and grow and spread over time.

This is also the main finding of the study by Kalsås, Selbekk, and Ness (2020). They have analysed the experience of professionals working with alcohol and drug problems, and find that family-oriented practice helps reveal the

bigger picture. Arguing that the family-integrated and -oriented approach needs to be well structured, the authors also conclude that this involves a whole new setup of questions, challenges, and dilemmas. All three experience-based articles both identify the complexity of the problems and acknowledge that new problems arise around the core questions, the closer we come to them. The general nature of social work and social policy in the Nordic welfare states is a way of justifying and emphasising the importance of these kinds of "problem scrutiny/new problem nexus" endeavours, when they arise as social questions in our research on the experiences of substance use.

This issue also contains two more thematic entities: The first is about gambling as a risk among occupational groups (Binde & Romild, 2020) and as a sociocultural stigmatisation mechanism (Dąbrowska & Wieczorek, 2020). Last but not least, the comparison of different drug policy practices and systems is discussed in a study by Handal and colleagues (2020) on opioid maintenance treatment in three Scandinavian countries, and in a review of Tom Decorte's book on non-profit regulation of cannabis (Lerkkanen, 2020). Both of these efforts zoom out of the experience and risk perspective, seeing the subjects of interventions as the system in which citizens are protected in a way that serves the society as a whole.

We have also launched a new Call for Papers for a special issue on cannabis policies. You can find our call at nordicwelfare.org/nad.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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