

RESEARCH ROUND-UP

Alcohol
Dependence

An Australian Perspective with a South Pacific Private Response

By Ron Blanchard, Research Coordinator, South Pacific Private

The following article examines recent published peer-reviewed journal articles and our own research.

This article looks specifically at research related to alcohol abuse in Australia and the work of South Pacific Private in offering treatment in recovery from alcohol dependence.



RESEARCH ABOUT ALCOHOL IN AUSTRALIA

The statistics regarding alcohol abuse in Australia are readily available:

- 86.2% of Australians aged 14 years and over have drunk alcohol one or more times in their lives
- 37.3% of Australians aged 14 years and over consume alcohol on a weekly basis.
- The age group with the greatest number of Australians who drink daily is 70+ years
- Around 1 in 5 (18.2%) Australians over 14 drink at levels that put them at risk of alcohol-related harm over their lifetime
- Around 1 in 6 (15.6%) people aged 12 years or older had consumed 11 or more standard drinks on a single drinking occasion in the past 12 months
- \$7b is generated by alcohol-related tax. But alcohol costs society \$15.3b annually
- Alcohol caused more than twice as many deaths (3,494) than road accidents (1,600) in 2005
- 1 in 10 workers say they have experienced the negative effects of a co-worker's use of alcohol

<http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/topics/quick-statistics#alcohol>

<http://starts60.com/health/new-research-shows-the-older-generation-are-drinking-more-than-ever>

RESEARCH ABOUT THE PROBLEM

In the recently published abstract of an article entitled "Alcohol Dependence and the Harmful Use of Alcohol" (Batra, A; Müller, C A; Mann, K; Heinz, A, Dtsch Arztebl Int 2016; 113(17): 301-10; DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2016.0301)(<http://www.aerzteblatt.de/int/archive/article?id=177663>), a study on alcohol abuse in Germany is conducted and described in which the conclusion states:

What is needed in routine medical practice is practical diagnostic evaluation followed by individually tailored treatment, based on the severity of the condition.

A concise article "Alcohol Dependence – Neurobiology and Treatment" (Michalak A, Biala G. Acta Pol Pharm. 2016 Jan-Feb;73(1):3-12.) gives a clear overview of the effects of alcohol abuse on the neurotransmitters (GABA, Glycine, Adenosine, Glutamate, Serotonin, Dopamine, nAChRs, Cannabinoids and Opioids). This article, recommended for reading for all healthcare workers wanting to understand the effects of Alcohol, explains alcohol dependence, withdrawal syndrome as well as pharmacotherapy.

It concludes:

Current approach to adequate treatment of alcohol abuse and dependence heads towards individualisation, which requires full knowledge about all co-occurring aspects accompanying alcohol addiction. Therefore, therapy supported by antidepressant or anxiolytic agents may help achieve better therapeutic effects in alcoholic patients, who battle against depression and anxiety disorders.

RESEARCH ABOUT RECOVERY

In The Australian Life in Recovery Survey published in May 2015 by Turning Point (<http://www.southpacificprivate.com.au/Australian-National-Recovery-Survey-Turning-Point-and-South-Pacific-Private>) South Pacific Private, 573 surveys from individuals in addiction recovery were collected. The results of this study gave us an understanding of the profile of individuals in recovery:

- 35% of respondents were Alcohol only abusers
- 89% of respondents were Alcohol and Drugs abusers
- 11% of respondents were Drugs only abusers

Of the 53% of respondents who were in recovery for coexisting addictions, 66% said that their primary addiction was alcohol. Also significant to this study was the length of addiction careers of recovering addicts averaging 18 years of use with 12 years of active addiction. Further, 91% reported mental health challenges during their lifetime and 56% reporting that they currently involved in mental health treatment.

The results of our own Post Discharge Questionnaire (at 7 days post discharge, April 2016) indicate the following about those clients who present to SPP for Alcohol Abuse.

- 100% identify treatment at SPP as having a positive impact on their lives with 87% rating this impact as 'significant'
- 85% leave SPP attending Alcoholics Anonymous (only 9% don't attend a 12 step)
- 31% leave SPP with the intent of attending 12 step meetings daily
- 86% are abstaining from all alcohol
- 50% of the smokers have given up during their treatment
- Safe and individually tailored detox strategy using an Alcohol Withdrawal Scale, short term sedation such as benzodiazepam or oxazepam at one of three levels. Delivery of vitamin B1 orally or intermuscularly over the treatment period.
- Therapeutic and psychiatric intervention regarding the alcohol addiction and causes.
- Consultation with a drug and alcohol specialist who will make recommendations regarding treatment of the alcohol addiction.
- Preventative medical strategies for use during treatment and after discharge.
- A carefully designed client-appropriate after care plan that the client is able to implement after discharge and that will provide the resources for a life of abstinence.

RESEARCH BASED, BEST PRACTICE, ALCOHOL DETOX

At SPP we support a safe, best practice, research-based detox which typically follows the following stages:

- Pre-admission interview to develop an understanding of the client's needs for detoxification
- Evaluation by the nursing, general practitioner, psychiatric and therapeutic teams of the clients prevention at admission.

BOOK REVIEW

“In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts – Close Encounters with Addiction” Dr. Gabor Maté

Review by Gael Seymore, Day Program Manager, South Pacific Private

“In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts takes a panoramic yet highly intimate look at this widespread and perplexing human ailment. Countering prevailing notions of addiction as either a genetic disease or an individual moral failure, Dr. Gabor Mate presents an eloquent case that addiction – all addiction – is in fact a case of human development gone askew.”

This was a book I couldn't put down.

Whether it's the intimate case studies, the scientific evidence relative to trauma, stress and the biology of addictions, the vulnerability and authenticity shared by the author relative to his own addictions, or the conclusions with which he sums up a life time of his own professional observations, this book is a compassionate must-read for anyone interested in understanding the impact of childhood trauma and how it relates to addictive behaviours as an adult.

Mate writes descriptively, with a beautiful combination of grace, empathy and hope, on a huge topic that spans generations. Whilst offering no quick or easy solutions, Dr. Mate concludes:

“The prevention of substance abuse needs to begin in the crib, and even before then, in the social recognition that nothing is more important for the future of our culture than the way children develop. Children who are emotionally well nurtured and brought up in stable communities do not need to become addicts.” However Mate goes on to say...

“Trauma in the strict sense is not required for a young human being to suffer the loss of essence, the sense of oneness with all that is. Infants come into the world fully present and alive to every possibility, but they soon begin to shut down parts of themselves that their environment is unable to recognise or accept with love. As a consequence of that defensive shutdown, one or more essential qualities such as love, joy, strength, courage or confidence may be suppressed. In its place we experience a hole that then formulates unconscious beliefs.”

And it's from there, from that hole, from which our patterns of behaviour emerge...

This powerful, moving and humbling book is highly recommended to anyone interested in learning more about where/ how addiction begins, how to view addiction with the empathy it so deserves, and how/ why addiction is a family disease and not isolated to one member of the family alone. The personal life stories shared by Dr. Gabor Mate reach right into his heart and mind and will stay with me – and I hope you too - for a long time to come.

